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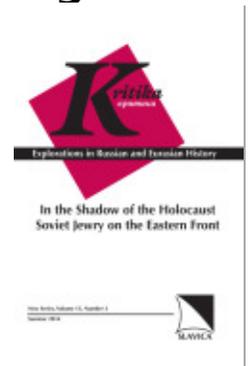
Territorial Colonization in Late Imperial Russia: Stages in the Development of a Concept

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Territorial Colonization in Late Imperial Russia

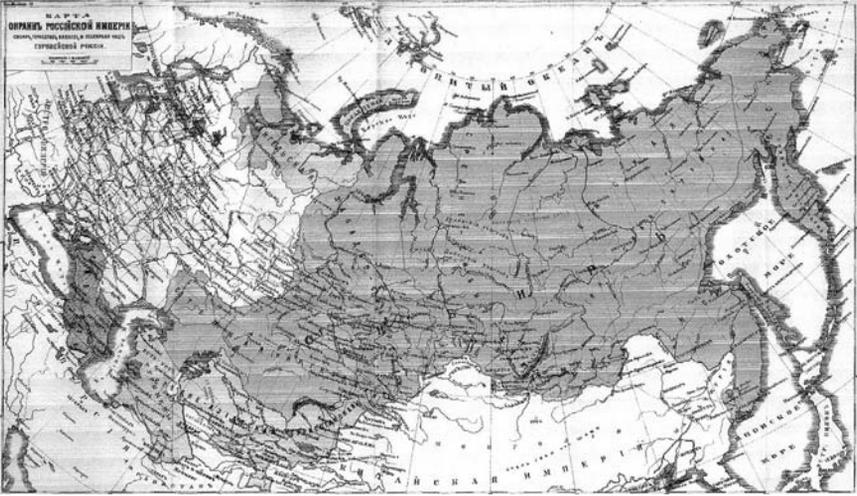
Stages in the Development of a Concept

ALBERTO MASOERO

At the Paris *Exposition universelle* of 1900, the tsarist pavilion included a section devoted to the empire's peripheries. The map prepared for the occasion traced an arc that stretched from the northernmost regions of European Russia to Siberia, the Steppe Region, Turkestan, and the Caucasus. The idea of the progressive "colonization" of these vast, sparsely populated territories became a political imperative in the last ten years of the empire. Prime Minister Petr Arkad'evich Stolypin assigned a central place to it in his program of reforms. By the eve of World War I, there was a sizable literature on "resettlement" (*pereselenie*) and "colonization" (*kolonizatsiia*), a body of knowledge built up over time through careful study of foreign models. It comprised theoretical treatises, manuals, and specialized periodicals such as *Voprosy kolonizatsii* (Questions of Colonization, 1907–17). In 1914, an authoritative semi-official publication proclaimed that the "lands of Asiatic Russia are an indivisible and inseparable part of our state and at the same time our only colony."¹ How did this terminology become part of the imperial

This article is part of a larger project on representations of resettlement and spatial transformation in late imperial Russia. I am indebted to many colleagues who commented on earlier versions of the manuscript or discussed the subject with me. I am grateful in particular to Mark Bassin, Jane Burbank, Marco Buttino, Alexander Etkind, Andrea Graziosi, Peter Holquist, Niccolò Pianciola, Ekaterina Pravilova, Paolo Sartori, Willard Sunderland, Natalia Suvorova, and Richard Wortman, as well as to the journal's anonymous referees. The greatest debt is, however, to the generous help of Anatolii Remnev, Siberian historian of the empire. This essay is dedicated to his memory.

¹ *Aziatskaia Rossiia: Izdanie Pereselencheskogo upravleniia glavnogo upravleniia zemleuстроitva i zemledeliia*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: A. F. Marks, 1914), 1:viii. The words "indivisible and inseparable part of our state" echoed article 1 of the Fundamental Laws of 1906. See Peter Holquist, "Dilemmas of a Progressive Administrator: Baron Boris Nolde," *Kritika* 7, 2 (2006): 248, 266.



Map of the Peripheries of the Russian Empire

Source: P. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii, ed., *Okrainy Rossii: Sibir', Turkestan, Kavkaz i poliarnaia chast' Evropeiskoi Rossii, s prilozheniem karty okrain Rossiiskoi imperii* (St. Petersburg: Brokgauz and Efron, 1900).

lexicon? What exactly did Russian authors mean by “colonization” and what nuances did the meaning of the word acquire in the decades before the revolution? This article explores the colonization discourse articulated by Russia’s intellectual and administrative elite, including unofficial and oppositionist components. It traces how a modern vision of resettlement emerged from older patterns of territorial transformation, careful study of the Western colonial experience, and the need to respond to the challenges created by the political and intellectual context of the postreform era.

“Colonization” is not understood here as a word describing centuries of spatial and demographic history. The subject of this analysis is not the socio-economic fact of peasant migration but the conceptualizations that accompanied it. The concept was adopted selectively from European literature around the middle of the 19th century. Here it is examined as it evolved through a discussion about populating and transforming the empire’s peripheral, mostly eastern regions—a discourse about organizing population transfers, establishing a human presence, and assigning resources. Like other European expansions, the reality of Russian settlement in the east was the outcome of “a messy convergence of private impertinence and the coercive might of the state.”² Government policy was merely one of the factors

² John C. Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650–1900* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 5.

affecting the borderlands' development, and the examination of theories of colonization should not be confused with the history of the colonized regions, which depended on many local dynamics not examined here.

The theme has drawn a good deal of attention in the historiography, from different viewpoints.³ Mark Bassin investigated the relationship between geographical representations and national identity. Willard Sunderland explored how the public at large viewed resettlement and how it was perceived by peasants. He has rescued the topic of territorial transformation from pre-revolutionary historiography and constructed the long-term periodization essential for assessing the discontinuity of the late imperial approach. A. V. Remnev considered colonization as a process of institutional and mental appropriation of Siberia, Central Asia, and the Far East, a discourse about empire and nation building. His and N. G. Suvorova's analysis of contemporaries' perceptions of settlers is unsurpassed in depth and subtlety, helping to explain the particular intensity of colonization policies in the years before the war. Alexander Etkind has offered a cultural interpretation of imperial history in the light of the concept of "internal colonization." His analysis leaves open the question of what political forms this broad cultural paradigm assumed at different times, especially when the term "colonization" was used explicitly to describe migration to the peripheries.⁴

³ Examples of classic studies are Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration: Government and Peasant in Resettlement from Emancipation to the War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); François-Xavier Coquin, *La Sibérie: Peuplement et immigration paysanne au XIX siècle* (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1969); and L. F. Skliarov, *Pereselenie i zemleustroistvo v Sibiri v gody stolypinskoi agrarnoi reformy* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1962). For overviews of the historiography on the theme, see Nicholas Breyfogle, Abby Schrader, and Willard Sunderland, eds., *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 1–18; Breyfogle, "Enduring Imperium: Russia/Soviet Union/Eurasia as Multiethnic, Multiconfessional Space," *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (2008): 108–16; and Willard Sunderland, "What Is Asia to Us? Scholarship on the Tsarist 'East' since the 1990s," *Kritika* 12, 4 (2011): 817–33.

⁴ Mark Bassin, *Visions of Empire: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Bassin, "Turner, Solov'ev, and the 'Frontier Hypothesis': The Nationalist Signification of Open Spaces," *Journal of Modern History* 65, 3 (1993): 473–511; Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Sunderland, "Empire without Imperialism? Ambiguities of Colonization in Tsarist Russia," *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2003): 101–14; Sunderland, "Peasant Pioneering: Russian Peasant Settlers Describe Colonisation and the Eastern Frontier, 1880–1910s," *Journal of Social History* 34, 1 (2001): 895–922; A. V. Remnev, "Vdvinut' Rossiui v Sibir': Imperiia i russkaia kolonizatsiia vtoroi poloviny XIX–nachala XX vv.," *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2003): 135–58; Remnev and N. G. Suvorova, "Upravliaemaia kolonizatsiia i stikhiinye migratsionnye protsessy na aziatskikh okrainakh Rossiiskoi imperii," *Politika*, nos. 3–4 (2010): 150–91; Remnev and Suvorova, "'Russkoe delo' na aziatskikh okrainakh: 'russkost' pod ugrozoi ili

Recent studies have examined the Resettlement Administration (Pereselencheskoe upravlenie), created in 1896 as part of the Ministry of the Interior to supervise peasant migration beyond the Urals. In 1905, it became part of the Main Administration of Land Management and Agriculture (GUZZ), the ministry in charge of rural modernization. This institution most forcefully embodied, in the tsarist period, the ideal of transforming the peripheral territory from above. It has been interpreted variously as a step toward the emergence of Russia as a modern colonial empire (Sunderland), as a reflection of the persistence of an assimilationist *Sonderweg*—discursive and institutional (Remnev)—and as the cradle of a new technocratic ideology of mass mobilization (Peter Holquist).⁵

This article offers a synthesis that emphasizes the novelty and diversity of the concept of colonization in the postreform period. It underscores change and plurality of purpose, rather than continuity and singleness of intent. While building on Remnev's foundational studies, it also seeks to disentangle the notion of an "imperial project" both chronologically and thematically.

The debate on colonization was framed not solely by efforts to build an expanding empire but also by political ideologies of socialism, nationalism, and liberalism, as well as the contest surrounding the development of the modern state, such as disagreements over regional development and the peasant question. In this sense, the debate on colonization was not an entirely imperial matter, and it did not take place solely in the ministerial chancelleries. The emergence of public opinion permitted the expression of multiple viewpoints, often articulated by authors who opposed the tsarist state or pursued its overthrow. As in other aspects of Russian history, the line between officialdom and intelligentsia was blurred. Radical reformers were often the most vocal advocates of a marvelous destiny in the east and projected onto this "cause" a set of purposes which did not necessarily coincide with official ideology. Imperial notions of spatial integration were affected by views that ranged between populist ideals, liberal patriotism, and varieties of nationalism and spanned realism to social or productive utopias.

'somnitel'nye kul'turtregery,'" *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2008): 157–222; Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011). See also David Moon, "Peasant Migration and the Settlement of Russia's Frontiers, 1550–1897," *Historical Journal* 40, 4 (1997): 859–93.

⁵ See the forum "Colonialism and Technocracy at the End of the Tsarist Era," *Slavic Review* 69, 1 (2010): 120–88, with contributions by Willard Sunderland, Peter Holquist, Robert Geraci, and David McDonald; and A. V. Remnev, "Rossiiskaia vlast' v Sibiri i na Dal'nem Vostoke: Kolonializm bez Ministerstva kolonii—russkii 'Sonderweg?'" in *Imperium inter pares: Rol' transferov v istorii Rossiiskoi imperii (1700–1917)*, ed. Martin Aust, Rikarda Vul'pius [Ricarda Vulpius], and Aleksei Miller (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010), 150–81.

This article traces a sequence of phases in the evolution of the meaning of colonization, an issue first addressed by Sunderland.⁶ It also explains how, at each stage, different motives interacted and reinforced each other in ways that crossed the political dividing line. I show that the prewar “urge to colonize”⁷ is best understood not merely as an attribute of Russia’s paradigmatic existence as an empire but as the product of a particular stage in its history: when the traditional political culture of an expanding dynastic state interacted with modern sensitivities that challenged its existence and prompted adaptation and reform.

Colonization without Colonies

In the first decades of the 19th century, the term “colony” was used to describe successful agricultural settlements and experiments in authoritarian social engineering. The latter were influenced by the ideas of Jeremy Bentham, such as “punitive colonization”—deportation as a means of re-educating prisoners and populating territory. Occasionally, “colony” was applied to the more remote and exotic imperial possessions, such as the Caucasus, Siberia, and “Russian America.” Even as late as 1869, *Nashi kolonii* (Our Colonies) was used as the title of a work on non-Russian settlements in the southern steppes, where “German” colonists had been invited to move in the hope that the industriousness of foreign farmers would improve Russian agriculture. This example in itself contradicts the idea of colonization as a civilizing mission, whether Russian or imperial, directed toward other peoples and territories. The word “resettlement,” later associated with the idea of a heroic national cause, also lacked a civilizing significance and was distinct from the notion of a Russian colonizing process.⁸

Peasant resettlement was originally viewed with suspicion, since the colonists were often fleeing serfs or religious dissidents.⁹ The experiments in supervised migration undertaken in the 1840s and 1850s by the Ministry of State Domains under Pavel Dmitrievich Kiselev, in charge of both state

⁶ Willard Sunderland, “The ‘Colonization Question’: Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48, 2 (2000): 210–32.

⁷ David McDonald, “Russian Statecraft after the Imperial Turn: The Urge to Colonize?” *Slavic Review* 69, 1 (2010): 185–88.

⁸ A. A. Klaus, *Nashi kolonii* (St. Petersburg: Nuskal’ t, 1869); Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field*, 89. For a discussion of this terminology, see Sunderland, “The ‘Colonization Question,’” 212–13. On Bentham, see Etkind, *Internal Colonisation*, 133–35; and Alessandro Stanziani, “The Traveling Panopticon: Labor Institutions and Labor Practices in Russia and Britain in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, 4 (2009): 715–41.

⁹ Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia’s Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

peasants and the public territories, were inspired by a productive logic (“so that there shall neither be unemployed hands nor uncultivated lands any longer”).¹⁰ Although this administration provided a reservoir of knowledge about moving people and shaping distant territories, the basis of its approach was the state’s decision to distribute the workforce over the land it held, rather than a vision of an imperial or national mission. These traditional policies of supervised migration were discussed in terms of future agrarian reforms and motivated by paternalistic social tutelage. They were conceived as a tsarist *Sozialpolitik* to alleviate the misery of the rural populace, reducing the need for land in villages of origin and promoting the growth of agriculture in “new places” farther from the center.¹¹

Starting in the 1840s and throughout the reign of Alexander II, the specific nature of the Russian colonial model and its form of “colonization,” seen as aspects of imperial identity, were increasingly debated by the tsarist elite. Reflections on Russia’s place in relation to Western civilization also prompted questions about the historical significance of the empire’s eastern regions. The historical–philosophical debate on the relationship between Russia and Europe developed in tandem with the increasingly national orientation of the monarchical ideology that characterized the era of Nicholas I. Both were influenced by a multiplicity of stimuli: from the rising cult of the exotic to the romantic image of Siberia depicted in the memoirs of the exiled Decembrists to the practical need to elaborate government practices suitable for such heterogeneous regions, the institutionalization of geographical knowledge, and the explorations under the purview of the Naval Ministry. Historians such as Sergei Mikhailovich Solov’ev, Afanasii Prokof’evich Shchapov and especially Stepan Vasil’evich Eshevskii began to see populating the boundless territories as a key factor in Russia’s national history. The terrain was thus prepared for the well-known dictum later articulated by Vasilii Osipovich Kliuchevskii: “the history of Russia is the history of a country that colonizes itself.”¹²

¹⁰ G. K. Gins, *Sel’skokhoziaistvennoe vedomostvo za 75 let ego deiatel’nosti (1837–1912)* (Petrograd: GUZZ, 1914), 57–60; *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, 1:447–48.

¹¹ The connection between poverty and resettlement can be seen in “O dopolnitel’nykh pravilakh pereseleniia malozemel’nykh gosudarstvennykh poselian v mnogozemel’nye mesta,” *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, ser. 2, 55 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia II otdeleniia Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskogo Velichestva kantseliarii, 1830–34), vol. 18, no. 16718 (1843), 236. For an analysis of Kiselev’s projects within the debate on peasant land use, see Igor’ Khristoforov, “Mezhdu chastnym i kazennym: Krest’ianskaia reforma v gosudarstvennoi derevne, liberal’naia doktrina, i spory o sobstvennosti,” *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, no. 2 (2011): 93–109; and Khristoforov, “Ot Speranskogo do Stolypina: Krest’ianskaia reforma i problema zemleustroistva,” *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, no. 4 (2011): 27–43.

¹² S. M. Solov’ev, “O vliianii prirody russkoi gosudarstvennoi oblasti na ee istoriiu,” *Otechestvennye zapiski*, no. 2 (1850): 229–44; S. V. Eshevskii, “Russkaia kolonizatsiia

While the defeat in the Crimean War appeared to underscore Russia's inferiority to the West, the conquest of Amur in 1857–60 fed hopes of greatness on its Pacific shores. A few years later, enterprising commanders brought vast tracts of Central Asia and Turkestan under the sovereignty of the tsar. Although these conquests were largely an extension of an autochthonous expansionistic pattern, the political context and the geographic location of the territories annexed or definitively brought under control (the regions beyond the Caucasus mountain chain, Central Asia beyond the Hungry Steppe, and the Pacific coast) made it plausible to compare these new tsarist possessions to European colonies.

In 1861, a few days after the emancipation of the serfs, the Imperial Geographic Society held a conference on the "colonization of the frontier regions" attended by dignitaries, young officials, and experts. The same patriotic and civic commitment that inspired the campaign against serfdom, a "scandalous" vestige that made it impossible for Russia to consider itself a modern European nation, also fed aspirations for a grand colonizing mission to the east. A few years earlier, Aleksandr Ivanovich Herzen had celebrated Sergei Timofeevich Aksakov's resettlement saga, *A Family Chronicle* (1856), as the harbinger of Russia's destiny to "spread in all directions ... like a wealthy settler who ploughs the virgin land of Wisconsin or Illinois. It is like a novel by [Fenimore] Cooper!"¹³ Mikhail Ivanovich Veniukov, a young military cartographer who later became one of the first theorists of a Russian geopolitical destiny in Asia, attended the conference. In the late 1860s, he was a correspondent for Herzen's journal *Kolokol*, where he caustically commented on the generals' ineptitude in Turkestan, criticizing the tsarist expansion's "lack of method," as opposed to the "conscious conquests" of a colonial policy, capable of generating "authentic awareness of our strengths and our powers."¹⁴

severovostochnogo kraia" (1857), *Vestnik Evropy*, no. 1 (1866): 211–57; A. P. Shchapov, "Zemstvo" (1862), in *Sochineniia A. P. Shchapova*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Pirozhkov, 1906), 1:753–59; K. N. Bestuzhev-Riumin, "O kolonizatsii Velikoruskogo plemeni," *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia*, no. 134 (1867): 776–84; V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Kurs russkoi istorii*, in *Sochineniia*, 9 vols. (Moscow: Mysl', 1987), 1:50; Bassin, "Turner, Solov'ev, and the 'Frontier Hypothesis,'" 473–511; Etkind, *Internal Colonisation*, 62–66.

¹³ A. I. Gertsen, "Pis'mo k Dzhuzeppe Matstsinii," in *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1954–65), 13:341; Bassin, *Visions of Empire*, 12; Alberto Masoero, "La funzione dell'esempio americano in Herzen e Černyševskij," in *Il pensiero sociale russo: Modelli stranieri e contesto nazionale*, ed. Masoero and Antonello Venturi (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2000), 48–49. The preparation of the peasant reform also stimulated the emergence of stronger nationalist attitudes toward the western peripheries. See M. D. Dolbilov and A. I. Miller, "Zapadnye okrainy v 1855–1862 gg.," in *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii*, ed. Dolbilov and Miller (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006), 139.

¹⁴ M. V. [Veniukov], "Primechaniia k budushchei istorii nashikh zavoevanii v Azii" (1867), *Kolokol*, no. 9 (repr. Moscow: Nauka, 1964): 6, 9; M. V. Veniukov, *Rossia i Vostok: Sobranie*

In this, as in other instances, a question linked to the specific nature of Russia's national history was examined through the lens of Western concepts. European treatises on the colonial theme—for example, *Kolonien, Kolonialpolitik und Auswanderung* (Colonies, Colonial Policy, and Emigration) by W. G. F. Roscher (1856) and *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes* (On Colonization among Modern Peoples) by P. P. Leroy-Beaulieu (1874)—provided Russians with a scholarly language for conceptualizing their recent territorial conquests, using terminology that was in many ways flattering and attractive. Roscher, a highly respected authority among Russian scholars of economic history, offered a classification of colonies. He saw the expanses of northern Eurasia as characterized by the gradual settlement of vast uninhabited spaces and likened Asiatic Russia to the “new lands” of Australia, Canada, and the United States, in this respect following the geographer Karl Ritter, one of the most influential sources of Russian knowledge on the East. Large parts of the tsarist peripheries were thus assigned to “agricultural” or “settlement colonies,” to a society which, according to Roscher, could develop more rapidly and freely than their country of origin. These colonies, one Russian interpreter claimed, offered the opportunity to “implement new ideas” and “create new social relations.”¹⁵ The idea resonated deeply among Russian intellectuals from Petr Iakovlevich Chaadaev to Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevskii, who were accustomed to seeing Russia's distance from European civilization as an advantage that could accelerate progress.

Leroy-Beaulieu—promptly translated into Russian—introduced a qualitative distinction between colonization and migration. He held that “the savage and the barbarian emigrate,” driven by poverty or the desire to plunder, while civilized nations could consciously mold peoples and territories, bringing their culture with them, assimilating the colonized into

geograficheskikh i politicheskikh statei (St. Petersburg: Bezobrazov, 1877), 68–134; M. V. [Veniukov], “Vopros o kolonizatsii,” *Vremia*, no. 10 (1861): 1–16. A. V. Remnev, “U istokov rossiiskoi imperskoi geopolitiki: Aziatskie ‘pogranichnye prostranstva’ v issledovaniakh M. I. Veniukova,” *Istoricheskie zapiski* 4 (2001): 344–69; V. A. Esakov, *Mikhail Ivanovich Veniukov, 1832–1901* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002).

¹⁵ D. Zavalishin, “Koloniia kak vazhnaia stupen' v razvitiu chelovechestva,” *Vostochnoe obozrenie*, no. 23 (23 June 1883), 8. W. G. F. Roscher, *Kolonien, Kolonialpolitik und Auswanderung*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Winter, 1885), 18, 54, 84, 116. Roscher's work was first presented in Russia by I. N. Berezin, “Metropoliia i koloniia,” *Otechestvennye zapiski*, no. 3 (1858): 84–115. See also “O evropeiskikh koloniiakh: O sochinenii Roshera ‘Kolonien und kolonialpolitik,’” in *Sibirskii sbornik* (St. Petersburg: n.p., 1887); K. Ritter, *Zemlevedenie Azii* (St. Petersburg: Bezobrazov, 1856), 1:89–90; and N. G. Sukhova, *Karl Ritter i geograficheskaiia nauka v Rossii* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1990).

a superior civilization.¹⁶ Contemporaries were intrigued by the vision of a newly reformed and emancipated Russia emerging from serfdom as a great empire (or as a great Slavic nation, depending on their viewpoint), intent on colonizing its own borderlands. After all, in the mid-19th century every European power worthy of this name had, or sought to acquire, colonies.

Yet the adoption of the colonial paradigm also met with deep-seated resistance. The desirability of territorial expansion was not questioned. On the contrary, the more or less voluntary incorporation of new peoples had profound ideological significance. It was a symbol of the ruler's reiterated legitimacy, a further proof of the tsar's majesty. Yet the history of European colonialism since the late 18th century—viewed in Russia as a mirror for its past and future expansion—comprised numerous secessionist movements which had met with varying degrees of success, from the increasing autonomy of the British dominions to independence movements in Latin America, not to mention the exemplary case of the North American anticolonial revolution. Scholarly literature at this time showed that colonies “tend to separate from the metropolis to form free and powerful states.”¹⁷

The tsarist government was aware of its limited ability to rule its remote territories (at that time it was easier to get from St. Petersburg to New York than to Vladivostok), and it also feared that a charismatic viceroy with a following of overly enthusiastic young colonizers might attempt secession (in the 1850s, such suspicions circulated about Nikolai Nikolaevich Murav'ev, the conqueror of the Amur).¹⁸ The Polish revolt of 1863, too, was seen as the betrayal of a national periphery at the height of the Russian reforms. It coincided with the appropriation of the colonial discourse by the “Siberian patriots,” a small but active group, which, inspired by Roscher, interpreted him to mean that Siberia was one day destined to become independent from the St. Petersburg “metropolis.”¹⁹

The definition of colony—a source of wealth and prestige but also a society potentially capable of future independent growth—raised suspicion in

¹⁶ P. Lerua-Bol'e (Pierre-Paul Leroy-Beaulieu), *Kolonizatsiia u noveishikh narodov* (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1877), iii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 459; Roscher, *Kolonien*, 84, 116.

¹⁸ A. V. Remnev, *Samoderzhavie i Sibir': Administrativnaia politika vtoroi poloviny XIX–nachala XX vekov* (Omsk: Omskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1997), 21; Bassin, *Visions of Empire*, 168.

¹⁹ For details on Siberian regionalists' reception of the European colonial literature, see Alberto Masoero, “Il regionalismo siberiano nel contesto imperiale russo, 1855–1907,” *Rivista storica italiana* 116, 3 (2004): 1044–58; A. V. Remnev, “Zapadnye istoki sibirskogo oblastnichestva,” in *Russkaia emigratsiia do 1917 goda—laboratoriia liberal'noi i revoliutsionnoi mysli* (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 1997), 142–56.

a political tradition centered on the principle of the singleness of power. The spatial configuration of the autocratic state could accommodate the survival of segmented administrative entities, from the Kingdom of Poland to the Emirate of Bukhara, from the districts governed by the Cossack atamans to the lands of His Majesty's Cabinet in Altai. The state admitted them, however, only as functional variations of sovereign power, the result of the historical-geographical stratification of a dynastic empire. The heterogeneous complexity of imperial society was accompanied by an almost obsessive concern for territorial integrity and centralization of authority. The autocratic principle inhibited the adoption of a spatial hierarchy that might foreshadow, albeit implicitly, future political fragmentation and the devolution of sovereignty.

For this reason it also appeared dangerous, no matter how appealing it might be, to attribute to the Caucasus or to the region of Amur the political-cultural status of a "Russian colony." Mikhail Nikiforovich Katkov's new style of postreform patriotism stressed the territorial integrity of the state and expressed fear of separatism. Nikolai Iakovlevich Danilevskii argued that calling the territories colonies meant implicitly admitting the existence of numerous "non-Russias within Russia," joined to the center by an artificial bond.²⁰ This danger was perceived with particular intensity by those closest to the reigning family and to the notion of state land as an indivisible dynastic heritage. At the 1861 conference on colonization, for example, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich strove to cool the patriotic enthusiasm and democratic ardor of some junior officials (radical opinions among them were by no means uncommon: young aristocrats and famous anarchists, such as Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin and Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin, collaborated with Murav'ev in the Far East). According to one participant, Konstantin stressed that "in our country there is no true colonization, but merely migration [*pereselenie*]" as a means "of enlarging the Russian state." Minister of the Interior Dmitri Andreevich Tolstoi would later respond more bluntly: "We have no colonies."²¹

These conflicting motives help explain the persistence of a lexical ambivalence surrounding the definition of colony and colonization. In the

²⁰ N. Ia. Danilevskii, *Rossiiia i Evropa* (Moscow: Kniga, 1991), 485. Andreas Renner, "Defining a Russian Nation: Mikhail Katkov and the 'Invention' of National Politics," *Slavonic and East European Review* 81, 4 (2003): 659–82. On the emergence of a more assertive national imagery in the period of Great Reforms, see Olga Maiorova, *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855–1870* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

²¹ "O kolonizatsii," *Vek*, no. 22 (7 July 1861) (proceedings of the Geographic Society conference on colonization). Tolstoi's statement on colonies is quoted in Remnev, *Samoderzhavie i Sibir*, 23.

following decades, a rich literature on Asia and the “question of colonization” coexisted with the tendency to avoid the identity-creating dichotomy metropolis-colony. More neutral terminology was used instead: “peripheries,” “our possessions in Asia,” “borderlands,” or simply “regions.” Yet the words “resettlement” and “colonization” took a firm hold in Russian discourse, used to mean a spontaneous “unconscious” occupation of space (*pereselenie*), on the one hand, and purposeful territorial transformation (*kolonizatsiia*), on the other.

Peasant Colonization as Imperial Reform

It was when colonization began to involve large-scale organization and investment of resources, during the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway between 1891 and 1903, that the term acquired an ambiguous reformist significance and a marked “agrarian” connotation.²² Renewed interest in the topic was related in part to the repercussions of the tsar’s assassination on 1 March 1881, the first revolutionary crisis in the history of the Russian monarchy. Plans for internal migration were considered with greater urgency because, as a high-ranking official who was dealing with the question noted on 26 March, it was “essential for the reign [of Alexander III] to begin with widespread economic reforms.” The purpose of a proactive response to the challenge of the populist movement was evident. But even five years earlier, in 1876, a well-known treatise on the agrarian question had noted the relationship between the peasant problem and migration to the borderlands. According to Aleksandr Illarionovich Vasil’chikov, who summarized his conclusions in a long chapter entitled “Colonization,” a systematic program of resettlement to the “free and uninhabited lands” on Russia’s outer edges represented the “necessary completion” of the serfs’ emancipation. He saw colonization as preventing the emergence of an “agricultural proletariat” and satisfying the peasants’ need for land. The Siberian regionalist Nikolai Mikhailovich Iadrintsev—hardly a proponent of imperial assimilation—formulated one of the earliest and most detailed plans for “conscious” and “organized” peasant colonization.²³

The relationship between borderland colonization, reform in the “Russian interior,” and the political stability of the empire appeared in the

²² Steven G. Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850–1917* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 154.

²³ Russkaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka, Otdel rukopisei (RGB OR) f. 178, M9803 (Vospominaniia A. N. Kulomzina), d. 5, l. 26; A. I. Vasil’chikov, *Zemlevladienie i zemledelie v Rossii i drugikh evropiskikh gosudarstvakh* (St. Petersburg: M.M. Stasiulevich, 1876), 1:xxxii, 2:859, 999; N. M. Iadrintsev, “Polozhenie pereselentsev v Sibiri,” *Vestnik Evropy*, no. 8 (1881): 617; Iadrintsev, “Nashi vyseleniia i kolonizatsiia,” *Vestnik Evropy*, no. 7 (1880): 448–86.

most authoritative form and with strategic breadth in the political testament of Nikolai Khristianovich Bunge, chairman of the Council of Ministers, who died in 1895. Bunge did not consider internal migration a panacea, nor was he motivated by Russifying frenzies; he envisioned the survival of local languages alongside Russian, used as the empire's unifying language. Yet Bunge played a direct role in drawing up resettlement legislation in the early 1890s and was involved in defining some specific procedures. A well-considered policy of peasant relocation beyond the Urals appeared to him an essential component in a complex strategy to prevent the "socialist danger" and the "detachment of the peripheries"—that is, nationalistic secession.²⁴

While one basis for resettlement was the perceived need for preemptive reform, another factor was the modernizing impulse characteristic of the last two decades of the century, accompanied by the widespread, official, and unofficial perception of an urgent need to close the economic gap. These were the years when, after the famine and epidemic of 1891–92, the Marxist Petr Bergardovich Struve exhorted the intelligentsia to "admit our backwardness and learn from the school of capitalism."²⁵ The expression "impoverishment of the center" summarized a much-debated issue and the findings of special commissions. The backdrop of poverty-stricken rural areas in European Russia brought accounts extolling the unexploited resources of Asiatic Russia even more to the fore. Positivist culture interpreted demographic increase as a major factor in social evolution, thus reinforcing the belief that populating space also meant advancing along the stages of human society.²⁶ The idea of colonization as productive enhancement of territory, in itself not a new concept in imperial discourse, found further significance in the conviction that developing its borderlands would offer a powerful stimulus to the empire's overall growth, enabling Russia to overcome its backwardness.

Phraseology such as "drawing the borderlands closer to original Russia," the official rationale for building the Trans-Siberian Railway, came to include a

²⁴ N. Kh. Bunge, "Zagrobnye zametki," *Reka vremen*, no. 1 (1995): 198–254. On Bunge's role in formulating the resettlement policy, see RGB OR f. 178, M9803, d. 5, ll. 1–5; V. L. Stepanov, "N. Kh. Bunge i voprosy pereselencheskoi politiki v 80–90-e gody XIX veka," in *Politika tsarizma v Sibiri v XIX–nachale XX v.* (Irkutsk: Irkutskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii institut, 1982), 118.

²⁵ P. B. Struve, *Kriticheskie zametki k voprosu ob ekonomicheskom razvitiu Rossii* (St. Petersburg: I. M. Skorokhodov, 1894), 288.

²⁶ The historian and sociologist M. M. Kovalevskii is one example. See N. D. Kondrat'ev, "Rost naseleniia kak faktor sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia v uchenii M. M. Kovalevskogo," in *M. M. Kovalevskii: Uchenyi, gosudarstvennyi i obshchestvennyi deiatel' i grazhdanin (1851–1916)* (Petrograd: A. F. Marks, 1917), 180–95.

range of goals with multifarious connotations.²⁷ It was not easy to distinguish social and economic reforms from expansionistic ambitions, the consolidation of internal rule from the conquest of new territories, and the search for international power from the decision to deal with unresolved problems. “Colonization” had several objectives: promoting modernity and social cohesion, developing communications, gradually overcoming asymmetries of territorial administration, and pursuing a gradual standardization of state territory along cultural, linguistic, and identity-forming lines.²⁸ The variety and breadth of these aims added moral and ideological value to the traditional political-military bases of governing the empire’s eastern regions: for example, consolidating control over recently conquered territory by garrisoning recruits and supplies in difficult-to-defend areas.²⁹ Pride in being Asia’s civilizers went together with the desire to renew the Russian homeland, and these expectations could manifest themselves in a variety of political forms. At the end of the 19th century, the “resettlement cause” was enthusiastically supported not only within the official hierarchy but also by the public at large. In 1891, the symbolic journey from Vladivostok to Moscow made by the tsarevich, the future Nicholas II, conveyed the message of a renewed possession of the eastern territories by the ruling family.³⁰ Yet this dynastic scenario coexisted with multiple colonization plans with objectives that could be socialist, liberal, or generically modernizing and patriotic.

Stronger emphasis on the peasantry as a key participant in the colonization process represented a new cultural assumption that further increased the appeal of resettlement as a national cause. Those in favor of liberalizing population transfers beyond the Urals argued that the traditional mobility of Russian villagers should be recognized as a long-neglected but valuable part of the imperial mission, and that the peasants’ tendency to “wander” would facilitate colonization. It was necessary to accept that “these gray, needy, ignorant, and ill-equipped people are carrying to the remote periphery the

²⁷ *Kolonizatsiia Sibiri v sviazi s obshchim pereselencheskim voprosom* (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1900), 121.

²⁸ L. M. Dameshek and A. V. Remnev, eds., *Sibir’ v sostave Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2007), 51–61.

²⁹ Since the 1850s, these goals had been evolving and increasingly encompassed questions related to the demographic profile of the outlying regions. See Peter Holquist, “To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald G. Suny and Terry Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 117–20.

³⁰ *Ot Vladivostoka do Ural’ska: Putevoditel’ k puteshestviu Ego Imperatorskogo Vyschestva Gosudaria Naslednika Tsarevicha* (St. Petersburg: Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del, 1891), 1; Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 2:324–30.

powerful spirit of the Russian state, ... which incessantly and impetuously extends the confines of our fatherland for the glory of Russian Power.”³¹ The assimilation of outlying territories was increasingly represented as a physical and symbolic “peasantization,” with new Orthodox churches and new villages with Russian names and three-field crop rotation replacing nomadic animal herding. In many ways, the vocabulary of colonization was related to the populist idea of the peasant as the true bearer of Russia’s national identity.

Seen in this light, the government project paralleled the pioneering ruralism envisioned by the socialists. Sergei Nikolaevich Iuzhakov supported “large-scale, organized resettlement” and defined colonization as “the most powerful means to extend popular [i.e., communal] land tenure.” He theorized the penetration of Central Asia as the expression of a “nonbourgeois, noncapitalistic country” based “on the peasant principle,” which was as such ideologically opposed to British imperialism. Iuzhakov took as an example the “American system” of allotting homesteads to new immigrants, but he insisted that new villages be granted collective rights to possession of state land. He supported peasant colonization as a way to affirm the communal principle beyond the Urals at a time when its virtues were being questioned in the center.³²

Many officials and experts came from a populist or liberal milieu, close to the progressive intelligentsia that had rallied to the peasants’ support after the famine of 1891–92; those assigned to the Ussuri or the Steppe Region considered this to be a way of helping hungry emigrants arriving there.³³ Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Kornilov, later famous for his work as a historian and leader of the Constitutional Democratic Party, ignored the advice of his liberal friends and joined state service in Irkutsk because he wanted to aid peasant resettlement in accordance with the tenets of patriotic constitutionalism. The zemstvo statistician Fedor Andreevich Shcherbina, who headed the expedition to study nomads’ use of land in the Steppe Region, applied the analytical categories he had developed in his study of the peasant economy in European Russia (the famous “production–consumption budgets”) to the discussion of how to identify space that could be assigned

³¹ “Zhurnal Komiteta Sibirskoi zheleznoi dorogi” (27 January 1899), in *Materialy kantseliarii Komiteta ministrov* (St. Petersburg: n. p., 1899), 7, 24 (Russian National Library); Remnev and Suvorova, “Upravliaemaia kolonizatsiia,” 164.

³² S. N. Iuzhakov, *Anglo-ruskaia raspria: Nebol’shoe predislovie k bol’shim sobytiiam. Politicheskii etiud* (St. Petersburg: Russkaia skoropechatnia, 1885), 4; Iuzhakov, “Pereselencheskii vopros,” *Severnyi vestnik*, no. 8 (1886): 25–27, 30–32.

³³ One example is N. A. Sborovskii, a member of social democratic circles as a student and later second-in-command in the Tomsk Resettlement Administration: Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Omskoi oblasti (GAOO) f. 2668 (N. A. Sborovskii), op. 1, d. 1, ll. 14–151.

to settlers.³⁴ Working as a surveyor in the newly founded Resettlement Administration meant identifying areas in the taiga or the steppe where new groups arriving from European Russia could settle. It was a concrete way of serving the people by giving “land to those who work it.” Peasant colonization could be experienced as a social and patriotic mission.

At the same time, however, the desire to “impetuously extend the frontiers of our homeland” weakened the effectiveness of the reformist impulse, which to some extent inspired colonization. Inevitably, the annexation of new and remote regions made assimilation an even more complicated task. The logic of territorial expansion became particularly destabilizing when, as in the Far East in the years leading up to the 1905 revolution, power politics intersected with the rhetoric of a grandiose Asian dream. Visions such as Esper Esperovich Ukhtomskii’s “asianism” erased not only the mental but also the political boundaries between Russia and the East. Although these unofficial undercurrents were programmatically anticolonial in their ideological motivations, they acquired an aggressive geopolitical stance, exemplified in the claim that “beyond the Caspian Sea, the Altai Mountains, and Lake Baikal we cannot find a clearly defined border . . . beyond which our rightful land ceases to be.”³⁵ Arguments for colonization as an expansionist tool resurfaced in 1916, on the eve of another Russian revolution. The official report from an expedition to northern Persia argued that, in view of Persia’s weakness and the imminent collapse of the Ottoman state, spontaneous peasant migration would serve the strategic goal of further conquests in the south; an appropriate demographic policy would transform the Black and Caspian seas into “internal Russian regions.” Migration was justified using all available ideological arguments: economic modernization, geopolitical destiny, the Byzantine historical legacy, the Russian people’s civilizing role in Asia (cultural superiority), as well as Russia’s proximity to the Orient (cultural closeness), not to mention the more prosaic advantage that the

³⁴ A. A. Kornilov, “Vospominaniia,” *Minushee*, no. 11 (1991): 95–97; *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, 1:541–43; F. A. Shcherbina, *Krest’ianskie biudzhetny* (Voronezh: V. I. Isaev, 1900); I. W. Campbell, “Settlement Promoted, Settlement Contested: The Shcherbina Expedition of 1896–1903,” *Central Asian Survey* 30, 3–4 (2011): 423–36. Remnev and Suvorova note that there was a “compromise between state service and populist ideals” (“Upravliaemaia kolonizatsiia,” 157).

³⁵ E. E. Ookhtomsky (Ukhtomskii), *Travels in the East of Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia When Czar Nicholas II* (Westminster, UK: Constable, 1900), 2:287; Marlène Laruelle, “The White Tsar: Romantic Imperialism in Russia’s Legitimizing of Conquering the Far East,” *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 25 (2008): 127; David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 42–60; David McDonald, *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia, 1900–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

“New Orangeland” (*Novaia Apel’siniia*) of the south would replace costly imports of citrus fruit from Italy.³⁶

The consequences of this ambiguity could be ruinous. By the early 20th century, Manchuria had been occupied de facto and some Russians had already begun to call it “our first colony in the Far East.”³⁷ The lack of clear definitions about what qualified as “internal” and “external” sharpened international tensions that would lead to the war with Japan and to the subsequent military defeat, helping to cause the 1905 revolution. Seen in this light, the colonization of Russia’s remote borderlands had disastrous effects on the center. It can be argued that its results were diametrically opposed to those envisioned by those government officials who had conceived the development of Asiatic Russia as a contribution to reform and political stability in the empire. The “absence of a clear boundary between foreign and domestic policy” also complicated the pursuit of colonization as state building.³⁸

A New and Better Russia

The paradox of the later period, especially the years after 1906, is that migration became more difficult to control (the peak was reached in 1908, with almost 700,000 people passing through the resettlement point in Cheliabinsk) at the very time when it was invested with the most ambitious purposes.³⁹ The project began to encounter serious difficulties in practice, generating criticism and protests, just as the notion of colonization became charged with a significance that intensified its ideological value and potential for transformation. The debate no longer unfolded within ad hoc inter-ministerial bodies but spread to the political–institutional context of the Duma monarchy, where budgets had to be discussed publicly and defended against criticism from national minorities and the press. Colonization policy became a battleground of ideas, requiring a public campaign to affirm, above

³⁶ G. F. Chirkin, *Otchetnaia zapiska o poezdke vesnoi 1916 g. v Astrabadskuiu i Mazanderanskuiu provincii Severnoi Persii* (Petrograd: GUZZ, 1916), 42–45; G. F. Chirkin, *Kolonial’nye interesy v sovremennoi voine i nashi zadachi na Blizhnem Vostoke* (Petrograd: GUZZ, 1915), 19–23. On Russian plans for northern Persia, see Peter Holquist, “In Accord with State Interest and the ‘People’s Wishes’: The Technocratic Ideology of Imperial Russia’s Resettlement Administration,” *Slavic Review* 69, 1 (2010): 167–69.

³⁷ A. Khvostov, “Russkii Kitai: Nasha pervaiia koloniia na Dal’nem Vostoke,” *Vestnik Evropy* 36, 10 (1902): 653–96.

³⁸ A. V. Remnev, “Geograficheskie, administrativnye i mental’nye granitsy Sibiri,” *Elektronnyi zhurnal ‘Sibirskaiia zaimka,’* no. 8 (2002): 1 (www.zaimka.ru/08_2002/remnev_border, accessed 29 August 2011).

³⁹ *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, 1:492.

all in St. Petersburg, the viability of internal migration as a patriotic and modernizing endeavor.⁴⁰

A more interventionist approach was to some extent a consequence of experience in the field. The organized transfers undertaken from the 1890s on had brought to light difficulties and limits. It had become clear that opening new means of communication and assigning large land areas to the immigrants was insufficient. New settlements needed infrastructure, ongoing investment, and above all increased supervision.⁴¹ Colonization institutions were given additional responsibilities beyond simply organizing the migrants' journey to the east: they had to ensure the "settlers' solid, productive establishment and [the administration's] comprehensive support of their subsistence."⁴²

In 1910, the government announced its decision to postpone extending the right to elect local administrative bodies (*zemstva*) even to the most "ready" (from the imperial point of view) eastern provinces of Tobol'sk and Tomsk. Simultaneously, the Resettlement Administration was made responsible for more systematic territorial and economic planning and given wider powers and increased resources (although in practice enforcing its decisions proved difficult). Ideologists began to portray the Resettlement Administration as nothing less than a "zemstvo executive of all Asiatic Russia": the true interpreter of "local needs" and a centralized agent of enlightenment, social improvement, and modernization.⁴³ Such descriptions were meant to affirm the authority of the colonization apparatus as a single, all-powerful agency within the complicated hierarchy of the late empire's litigious administrative bodies (ministries, Cossack administration, governors, etc.).

At the same time experts and government officials emphasized the peasant settler's inadequacy. The traditional image of a rough-hewn patriot and spontaneous colonizer was ambivalent from the start, since the migrants belonged to a category of subjects—former serfs—deemed incapable of self-government outside the restricted world of the village. Yet it is in the 1890s that we find peasants portrayed in the specialized literature as inexperienced,

⁴⁰ See, e.g., the exchange between A. A. Kaufman, *Pereselenie: Mechty i deistvitel'nost'* (Moscow: Narodnoe pravo, 1906); and A. Uspenskii, "Deistvitel'nost', a ne mechty," *Voprosy kolonizatsii* 2 (1907): 1–28.

⁴¹ S. Iu. Vitte, "Vnutrennee obozrenie: Znachenie kolonizatsii Sibiri i budushchnost' nashikh tikhookeanskikh portov, po vsepoddaneishemu dokladu ministra finansov," *Russkoe ekonomicheskoe obozrenie* 8, 2 (1903): 84–92. Coquin noted a "certain crisis in the traditional migratory movement" in the early 20th century (*La Sibérie*, 710).

⁴² *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, 1:464.

⁴³ V. P. Voshchinin, *Pereselencheskii vopros v Gosudarstvennoi Dume III-ego sozyva: Itogi i perspektivy* (St. Petersburg: n. p., 1912), 100; Uspenskii, "Deistvitel'nost'," 28; "Soobshchenie N. L. Skalozubova o sibirskikh voprosakh v Gosudarstvennoi Dume" (25 July 1910), in *Sibirskii listok* (Tiumen': Mandrik, 2003), 3:389–98; Remnev, "Rossiiskaia vlast'," 170.

shiftless, and wasteful, a tendency that continued and intensified in the years that followed. Peasant settlers appear as targets more often than as protagonists of the civilizing mission. Experts and officials distinguished between simple “peopling” and “true colonization,” contrasting the need for “active colonizers” (*deiatel’nye kolonizatory*) with the reality of a needy mass of “settlers” (*pereselentsy*). The most important interpretive contribution published in these years, Aleksandr Arkad’evich Kaufman’s *Pereselenie i kolonizatsiia* (Resettlement and Colonization), revolved around the idea that the peasants’ low “level of culture” posed a limit to the actual demographic capacity of a seemingly boundless space and therefore reduced the potential for successfully populating the peripheries. The peasant colonists’ backwardness was seen as a subjective, immaterial hurdle that could be overcome only through educational policies.⁴⁴

This realization did little to stop the emergence of approaches that recast obstacles as opportunities. The rationale for peasant colonization—that the process would simultaneously civilize native populations and enlighten and uplift Russian immigrants—fostered the hope that the borderlands would be the site of radical renewal. Resettlement was presented as an opportunity to build a better Russia as the “new places” appeared—in theory at least—free from the burden of stifling tradition. The debate on colonization was influenced by diverse and often competing projects, both reforming and revolutionary, and these became more radical after 1905.

This shift in vision was not limited to official circles and was shared by advocates of very different political persuasions. In Lenin’s approach, for example, the center–periphery spatial hierarchy was based on the persistence of what he called “feudal remnants.” The legacy of serfdom still dominated gentry estates in interior regions—the aforementioned “impoverished center”—but became progressively less common in the southern and especially eastern territories, where it was still possible to cultivate “as far as the plough will go.” Considered from this point of view, the borderlands featured agriculture without land rent. Building on Karl Kautsky’s and Aleksandr L’vovich Parvus’s theories of agrarian economy, Lenin called this model “American” and defined it as the complete absence of limits to capitalist development, the maximum degree of freedom and productive rationality possible in the

⁴⁴ On “active colonizers,” see A. Stishinskii, “Gg. Gubernatoram: Tsirkuliarno,” 11 January 1893, n. 13771, in *Materialy Zemskogo otdela* (St. Petersburg: Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del, 1882–95), 1–7 (Russian National Library); A. A. Kaufman, *Pereselenie i kolonizatsiia* (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol’za, 1905). Whether accurate or exaggerated, pessimistic views about the settlers abounded. See the evidence provided in Remnev and Suvorova, “Russkoe delo,” 160–79; and Alberto Masoero, “Autorità e territorio nella colonizzazione siberiana,” *Rivista Storica Italiana* 115, 2 (2003): 467–69.

given historical conditions. The idea of a higher level of capitalist intensity made it possible to portray the borderlands as the vanguard of pan-Russian development.

Lenin's opposition to tsarist colonialism did not involve the denial of an extraordinary modernizing destiny for the eastern periphery—which, on the contrary, he described in optimistic and imaginative terms. His criticism focused on the narrowly class-based, pro-nobility bias and Russifying nature of state policy, which constrained Russia's colonizing potential. He held that a political break was necessary to release the intellectual and productive energies of the masses. A revolution would transform the “semi-Asiatic” Russian peasant into a historical agent and therefore, in the future, into an energetic colonizer capable of populating the vast expanses of Siberia. Replying to Kaufman's caution in a chapter titled “The Question of Colonization,” Lenin stated that the true obstacle to peasant resettlement was social and political, rather than cultural. The “antifeudal” revolution would turn Russia's periphery into a space for boundless future growth; its internal colonization would be analogous to the westward expansion of the United States.

Russia possesses a gigantic [land] fund for colonization that will become accessible to its people and accessible to the culture, not only with every step forward in agricultural technique in general but also with every step forward in the process of freeing the Russian peasant masses from the yoke of serfdom. This circumstance is the economic basis of the bourgeois evolution of Russian agriculture according to the American model.⁴⁵

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, Prime Minister Stolypin also put great store in the destiny of Asiatic Russia. He saw western Siberia and the Steppe Region as a “cradle still free of social conflict,” where, through colonization, a “new and powerful Russia could grow.”⁴⁶ In this case, the goal was to make the peasant a solid pillar of what Stolypin called a future “Great Russia.” The purpose was to transform impoverished, supposedly lazy, and rebellious troublemakers (the memory of the 1905–7 agrarian revolts was still fresh) into hard-working, patriotic landowners who would willingly respect the authorities. The central role played by the resettlement policy within Stolypin's program of reforms was also grounded on the belief that a new, highly mobile frontier society, where stable social norms were not yet

⁴⁵ V. I. Lenin, “Agrarnaia programma sotsial-demokratii v pervoi russkoi revoliutsii 1905–1907 gg.,” in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1979), 16:230.

⁴⁶ S. E. Kryzhanovskii, “Zametki russkogo konservatora,” *Voprosy istorii*, no. 4 (1997): 113.

ingrained, offered the opportunity to implement change that required endless mediation in the center, political battles, and bitter debates.

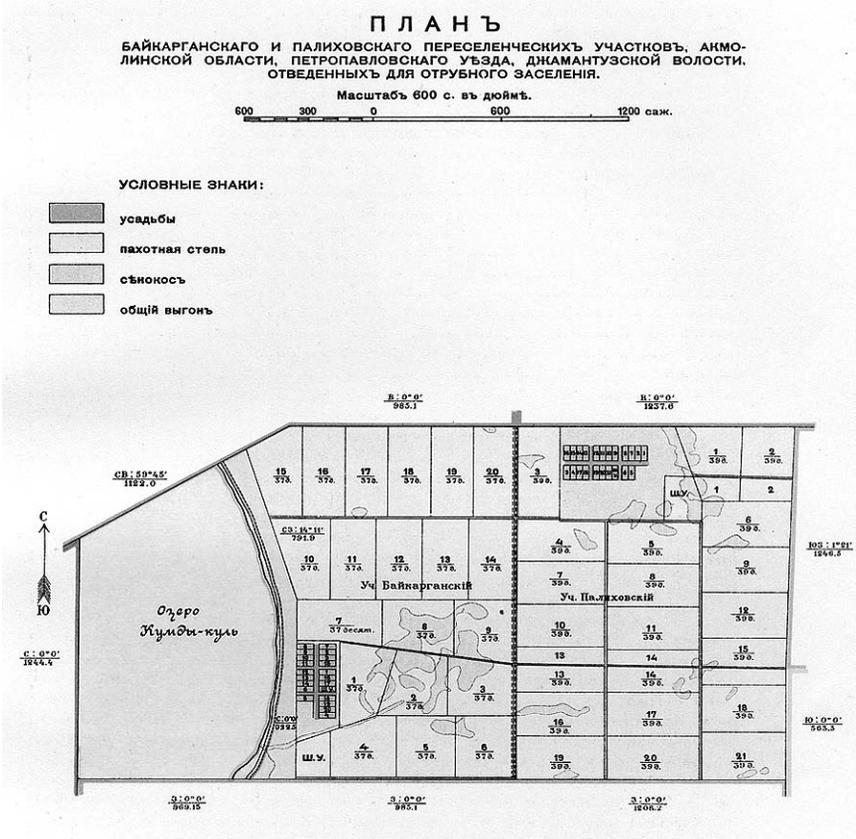
Despite the reforming thrust of his public declarations, the prime minister privately expressed a sense of urgency and danger, a further variant of the fear of losing control over the periphery that had previously characterized the debates on the concept of colony. Returning from his official journey to Asiatic Russia in 1910, he wrote to Nicholas II that “Siberia is growing fabulously.” Nonetheless, he also warned that success brought risk: the rise of an “enormous, rude, democratic country that soon will take Russia by the throat.” He was referring to the rapid growth of a communal peasant society largely independent of the center and still lacking a trustworthy local elite, an almost *too successful* plebeian colonization in vast regions where state control was remarkably thin. Not by chance, he insisted on the “need to couple the resettlement policy with strong reinforcement of administrative authority in the periphery.”⁴⁷

The campaign to assign individual plots to immigrants in Siberia was based on a similar combination of anxiety and hope for rapid change. It was deemed vital to fix the basis of rational agriculture from the start (an “easier and more rewarding task in Siberia”) before the Great Russian archaic, communal institutions also became rooted in the resettlement areas.⁴⁸ The copious cartographic production of colonization organizations began to include plans for model villages in the steppes: since the objective of colonization was to teach the Russian-European colonist the virtue of private property and intensive agriculture, even before the immigrants arrived, farmland was divided into well-ordered plots). In various competing ways, Siberia had come to be seen as an ideal place for social experimentation.

The concept of colonization as a strategy of both imperial rule and assimilation of the borderlands underwent a semantic shift, especially in some more specialized sectors of the administration, toward the older idea of an agricultural colony capable of progressing more rapidly than the metropolis. The regions of settlement now appeared not only as distant places in which to spread culture and institutions from the center—according to an authoritarian Russifying impetus to some or a desire for more prudent management of local interests to others—but also as the theater of a society in the making. The

⁴⁷ P. A. Stolypin to Nicholas Romanov, 26 September 1910, in “Iz perepiski P. A. Stolypina s Nikolaem Romanovym,” *Krasnyi arkhiv* 5, 30 (1928): 82–83; A. V. Krivoshein and P. A. Stolypin, *Zapiska Predsedatelia Soveta ministrov i Glavnoupravliaiushchego zemleustroistvom i zemledelieo p poezdke v Sibir’ i Povol’zhe v 1910 godu* (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1910), 29–30, 123.

⁴⁸ The quotation is from G. F. Chirkin, “O zadachakh kolonizatsionnoi politiki v Sibiri,” *Voprosy kolonizatsii* 8 (1911): 11.



Settlement project divided in family lots (*otruba*) in the Akmolinsk region

Source: *Aziatskaia Rossiia* (St. Petersburg: A. F. Marks, 1914).

appeal of the “resettlement cause” combined enthusiasm for the acceleration of progress with almost utopian aspirations of a veritable metamorphosis of the “Russian person.” The hyperbolic reports of Vladimir Petrovich Voshchinin, one of the apologists of migration policies under Stolypin and Krivoshein, echoed Lenin’s American parallel. He eulogized with futurist coloring the “cinematographic speed [with which] the cities grow, the creative labor blazes untiring.” He contrasted the “slow step” of the “old Russia” with the places “where five years ago eagles soared and jackals roamed, and now motor vehicles rush about with noise and clamor,” referring to the trucks used for transporting the migrants.

The builders of this new life—clearly American in style—are the emigrants, those same gray *muzhiki* we are accustomed to seeing in tattered greatcoats, who hasten to raise their hats when they see a cockade [i.e. functionary]. Siberia regenerates man [*Sibir’ pererozhdaet*



Resettlement vehicle in the Baraba steppe

Source: V. P. Voshchinin, *Na sibirskom prostore* (St. Petersburg: Nash vek, 1912).

cheloveka]. The Russian peasant, fearful and forgotten by history, raises his head as soon as he treads the boundless space of the steppes or the forest and is no longer limited in means; he builds his life in the new places, forgetting the routine of “Russia.”⁴⁹

The State Colony as a Plantation

Democratic overtones, hostility to the agrarian nobility, and empathy with the settlers’ plight were widespread among mid-level officials in the Resettlement Administration, who appeared to some of their contemporaries to be “left-wingers” (*levye*) or even “populist idealists.” These attitudes did not contradict an increasingly interventionist interpretation of peasant migration as “state policy in the widest sense of the word.”⁵⁰ In the specialist literature the word “colony” was no longer euphemistically masked or shaded in insecurity. It was used with pride and programmatically affirmed as the foundation of a promising avenue of social and productive growth. The word now denoted the entire, immense extension of Asiatic Russia.

⁴⁹ V. P. Voshchinin, *Na Sibirskom prostore: Kartiny pereseleniia* (St. Petersburg: Nash vek, 1912), 5.

⁵⁰ A. A. Tatishchev, *Zemli i liudi: V gushche pereselencheskogo dvizheniia, 1906–1921* (Moscow: Russkii put’, 2001), 35, 42; Chirkin, “O zadachakh,” 1.

Migration was consistently presented as a contribution to the spread of Russian culture, but nationalistic motivations, while certainly important in the imperial policy of those years, were generally less conspicuous in the treatises produced by experts on resettlement. Local officials expressed uneasiness about orders to Russify, which they considered artificial impositions from the center.⁵¹ The definition of colony was connected to a specific economic-productive and legal condition rather than geographic remoteness or ethnic difference. The goals of sedentarizing the Kazakh nomads and “intensifying” the Slavic immigrants’ agriculture were based on the same modernizing ethos. This civilizing mission was overseen and managed by the imperial state, in practice a group of enthusiastic intellectuals and administrators working in or with its ministries after 1905. The young colonizers of the Resettlement Administration adopted the official line of Stolypin’s policy (although they did not always fully agree with it), in which the impulse for reform was always tempered by more prudent reasons of state.

What distinguished the tsarist colony in spatial and social terms from other regions of the state? How did the measures routinely described using the word *kolonizatsiia* differ from the promotion of economic growth in general? Gennadii Fedorovich Chirkin, who was to become the last director of the tsarist Resettlement Administration, wrote of a vast reserve of “free land—that is, not privately owned.” The more official *Aziatskaia Rossiia* (Asiatic Russia [1914]), personally edited by the strongman of the resettlement apparatus, Grigorii Viacheslavovich Glinka, called the lands east of the Urals “our sole colony.” These territories differed from the rest of the empire because “from the border between Europe and Asia to the coasts of the Pacific Ocean, except for the holdings of the indigenous population in Turkestan, there is almost no private [landed] property. In conformity with the tsar’s title, according to which the sovereign is the possessor [*obladatel*] of the territory, in Asiatic Russia almost all the land belongs exclusively to the state.” The persistence of the state’s right to the territory of Siberia and the Steppe Region made these lands a gigantic “single state domain [*gosudarstvennoe imenie*] with small numbers of permanent users [*vechnye pol’zovateli*] in the most developed areas.”⁵²

Georgii Konstantinovich Gins’s essay “Resettlement and Colonization” (1913) was the last comprehensive analysis of the subject before the demise of the empire. A student of the liberal jurist Petrazhitskii, Gins emphasized the legal dimension and showed an impressive knowledge of the Western

⁵¹ See Tatishchev, *Zemli i liudi*, 112; and his comments on the “monstrous” requirement to rent land only to “Russian workers of the white race” in the Far East.

⁵² Chirkin, “O zadachakh,” 1; *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, 1:532; Uspenskii, “Mechty i deistvitel’nost’,” 24; Krivoshein and Stolypin, *Zapiska*, 28.

literature on colonization. His definition of colony was not limited to the geographic and demographic fact of a sparsely populated territory with vast reserves of unexploited natural resources. What distinguished “colonization as an all-embracing development of the productive forces” was the “absence of effective owners” and the condition in which the “colonizing state is the proprietor in the sense of private law [*khoziain v smysle chastnopravnom*], the owner of the land and its resources.” When natural resources are “secured to private possessors [*chastnye obladateli*],” Gins argued, there could be no colonization, because “state policy ... collides with the psychology of the title holder” and therefore “does not always act with the desired speed.” Legal obstacles included pre-existing personal property but also corporate rights such as the landowning privileges of the Cossacks and dynastic patrimony, such as the Cabinet’s holdings in Altai. These now appeared to be a legacy of an archaic concept of state property (personal property of the sovereign, “exclusive” property of the Treasury or forestry department). They were all personal or juridical “private subjects” (*chastnye sub’ekty*) that interfered with “true”—that is, modern, systematic, and productive—colonization of the territory.⁵³

This analysis rejected the periphery’s image as a relatively free frontier society (populated over the centuries by Cossacks and political exiles, religious dissidents, and fugitive peasants), as it had been depicted throughout the 19th century from the Decembrists to Shchapov, from Iadrintsev to Grigorii Nikolaevich Potanin.⁵⁴ More important, this form of colonization was seen as superior to the historical experience of Western colonialism. Gins called the latter “de facto colonization,” the unintended result of “European nations’ civilizing influence on some Asian states,” and he held that it lacked an overall plan, while modern colonization required unimpeded will and conscious design. Its main precondition was the absence of any legally binding, particularistic control over the use of the natural environment. Centuries of tsarist history had preserved broad, albeit archaic and imperfect “state rights” to the land, water, and mineral resources of Siberia. Therefore, its vast expanses offered the most “fertile soil on which colonization could be sown.” Despite profound ideological differences, Gins’s argument bore some resemblance to Lenin’s idea of land nationalization as the destruction of all “feudal remnants”

⁵³ G. K. Gins, “Pereselenie i kolonizatsiia,” *Voprosy kolonizatsii* 13 (1913): 39–40.

⁵⁴ A. E. Rozen, *Zapiski dekabrista* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblott, 1870), 318; A. P. Shchapov, “Zemstvo,” 753–59; N. M. Iadrintsev, *Sibir’ kak koloniia v geograficheskom, etnograficheskom i istoricheskom otnoshenii* (St. Petersburg: Sibiriakov, 1892, 1st ed. 1882); G. N. Potanin, “Zavoevanie i kolonizatsiia Sibiri,” in *Zhivopisnaia Rossiia: Otechestvo nashe v ego zemel’nom, istoricheskom, plemennom, ekonomicheskom i bytovom znachenii*, ed. P. P. Semenov (St. Petersburg: Vol’f, 1884), 11, 31–48.

and as a precondition for Russia's development along the "American path." The main difference was that Lenin envisaged a revolutionary upheaval followed by the unleashing of the masses' productive potential, while Gins stressed the role of the central authority as a prudent, humane manager and legislator over a vast *res nullius* inherited from the tsarist past.⁵⁵

In Gins's enlightened vision the principle of state property was not meant to justify mass expropriations or brutal population transfers. It was meant to lead not to arbitrariness but to the introduction from above of multiple layers of new rights, understood as a set of tools that could bring about social change and productive development. His vision of colonization incorporated, quite consciously, the tradition of paternalistic reformism rooted in the experience of the Ministry of State Domains, the precursor of the Ministry of Agriculture in its various denominations, where generations of experts and administrators had practiced direct management of state properties and state peasants without the mediation of the serf owners.⁵⁶ The state colony represented a legal vacuum that could be filled with a differentiated set of forms of possession carefully chosen and "cultivated," as though they were different botanical species that corresponded to different productive types and social functions.

Nomads were to enjoy temporary land rights until they were sedentarized. Peasants and non-Russian sedentary "aliens" (*inorodtsy*) were to be assigned property rights with the prohibition of sale "for at least the lifetime of one generation," a measure taken to prevent speculation. Large landholdings for entrepreneurs such as livestock breeders or cotton planters were to be assigned as long-term rentals of state territory to avoid their use as unproductive latifundia, while private mining companies were to be granted temporary concessions of state mineral rights. In one significant respect, however, Gins's taxonomy of legal and productive categories differed from Stolypin and Krivoshein's unrealized project, set forth in the 1910 Siberian Land Statute. It did not foresee the introduction of large "private land property" (*chastnaia zemel'naia sobstvennost'*) for the "civilized" elements of a future landowning elite. This was a further sign of the mistrust toward the nobility common among colonization officials of the time.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Gins, "Pereselenie," 39–40. Gins joined the anti-Bolshevik forces and ended his life as a pioneer in the study of Soviet law at Berkeley: George Guins, "Professor and Government Official: Russia, China, and California" (Berkeley: University of California, Bancroft Library, Regional Oral History Office, 1966). See Lenin's comments on land nationalization as a "clearing of estates" or *chistka zemel'* ("Agrarnaia programma," 253).

⁵⁶ Gins, *Sel'skokhoziaistvennoe vedomstvo*, 38, 53–60.

⁵⁷ Gins, "Pereselenie," 49, 76, 83–92; "Polozhenie o pozemel'nom ustroistve krest'ian i inorodtsev na kazennykh zemliakh Sibirskikh gubernii i oblastei," in *Programma reform P. A.*

Reality, both de jure and de facto, challenged the narrative of an authority intent on molding the borderlands' social landscape according to a plan, whether this was tempered by humanitarian legal consciousness, as in the case of Gins, or was more focused on productive development, as in Chirkin's or Uspenskii's proposals. Resettlement and ruling the territories involved compromise, adjustments, and often the acceptance of existing conditions. This was true in Turkestan, where imperial law was often in conflict with Islamic notions of property, and in Transbaikal, where attempts to limit the Buryats' land use generated endless legal proceedings that seriously delayed settlement operations. The neopatrimonial spatial rhetoric underpinning the interventionist ideology of colonial development clashed with the empire's legal structure and its many avenues for lodging appeals. Local courts encountered difficulties in reconciling the principle of state management of natural resources with existing rights and customs. The most stubborn resistance to the Resettlement Administration's projects came from other branches of the bureaucracy pursuing competing agendas. Maximizing rent from state forests, for example, conflicted with setting aside land for new settlements. Colonization officials were required to carefully assess local needs and productive potential in order to calculate the optimal amount of land that should be assigned to the settlers, but they often found this task impossible because they lacked trained personnel. They were then authorized to establish boundaries on the basis of the size of existing lots. In practice, the goal of introducing "rational" agriculture from above and establishing clear-cut regulations amounted to the legalization of customary use.⁵⁸ The intensifying technocratic propensity implicit in the colonization ideology of the years 1910–14 should be seen as a guiding principle rather than an

Stolypina: Dokumenty i materialy, ed. P. A. Pozhigailo (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002). On the important distinction between elitist "private property" and peasant "individual property," see Yanni Kotsonis, "The Problem of the Individual in the Stolypin Reforms," *Kritika* 12, 1 (2011): 29.

⁵⁸ Paolo Sartori, "Colonial Legislation Meets Shari'a: Muslims' Land Rights in Russian Turkestan," *Central Asian Survey* 29, 1 (2010): 43–60; Ekaterina Pravilova, "The Property of Empire: Islamic Law and Russian Agrarian Policy in Transcaucasia and Turkestan," *Kritika* 12, 2 (2011): 353–86. On Buryat lands, see Russkaia natsional'naia biblioteka, Otdel rukopisei (RNB OR) f. 742 (P. A. Stolypin), d. 2, ll. 2–3 (letter from A. V. Krivoshein to Stolypin, 29 October 1910). On rational vs. customary definitions of land use, see GAOO f. 46 (Tiukalinskaia pozemel'no-ustroitel'naia partiia), op. 1, d. 1, ll. 60–61 (Tobol'sk Resettlement Administration, Circular, 27 September 1910). On the relationship between colonization and land rights, see Alberto Masoero, "Layers of Property in the Tsar's Settlement Colony: Projects of Land Privatization in Siberia in the Late 19th Century," *Central Asia Survey* 29, 1 (2010): 9–32.

unhindered practice, as one element in a complex interplay of factors shaping the evolution of local society in the regions of settlement.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the search for a legally “empty” and socially alterable territory represented a fundamental component of the mindset of the group of practitioners and theorists who contributed to the journal *Voprosy kolonizatsii*. Adding more land to the “colonization fund” was a typical concern at the time, a goal achieved by both selfless exploration of the inhospitable taiga and reducing nomads’ pasturelands in the steppes.⁶⁰ These efforts involved exerting the authority of the Resettlement Administration over vast areas previously entrusted to allegedly “sleepy” authorities, such as the Department of Forestry; the practice sometimes generated more intrabureaucratic conflicts than land disputes with native populations.⁶¹ The frantic search for “supplies” (*zagotovki*) of cultivatable land was the consequence of the pressing need to settle the numerous irregular immigrants who had arrived in the great wave of transfers between 1907 and 1909. At the same time, the quest for an ever-expanding space ready for settlement also reflected the ambition to create a realm free from interference and competing prerogatives within the segmented, multilayered geography of imperial authority. The notion of colonial territory had become associated with the ever elusive, disputed ideal of “virgin soil” that would be directly subordinated to expert supervision, a field where there were no obstacles to the creation of new social forms.⁶²

This explains the ambivalence that characterized the last generation of imperial colonizers. To a degree, the young, enthusiastic resettlement officials expressed “antifeudal” feelings in Lenin’s sense of the word. Their ethos was “democratic” inasmuch as they were against the privileged or parasitic appropriation of public resources. A socialist flavor was also implicit, since in their vision, land should be distributed among settlers according to their presumed need. Colonizers considered themselves agents of modernization, dedicated to applying techniques in the borderlands they had drawn from a

⁵⁹ Holquist, “In Accord with State Interest,” 152.

⁶⁰ See the expedition and ten-year plan for the Narym region: A. A. Prazdnikov and N. A. Sborovskii, *Narymskii kraï: Svodka otchetnykh dannykh po obsledovaniiu v 1908–1909 gg. chinami Tomskoi Pereselencheskoi organizatsii levoberezhnoi—po Obi—chasti Narymskogo kraia* (Tomsk: Sibirskoe tovarishchestvo pechatnogo dela, 1910).

⁶¹ A few examples are documented in GAOO f. 46, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 34–35, 44–46, 50–51.

⁶² The search for a new definition of “public property” documented in Ekaterina Pravilova’s innovative analysis did not contradict the colonizers’ ambitions and in fact gave their authority a stronger interventionist connotation. See E. Pravilova, “Les ‘res publicae’ russes: Discours sur la propriété publique à la fin de l’empire,” *Annales: Histoire, sciences sociales* 64, 3 (2009): 579–609.

competent study of foreign experience (whether Danish dairies or irrigated agriculture in Idaho).⁶³

At the same time, however, these central policies competed with and hampered multiple local initiatives or “awakenings,” undertaken in a spirit of public modernization, by both Russian and non-Russian groups.⁶⁴ The policies were regularly described in the regional press as bureaucratic plans that interfered with the autonomous efforts of cooperative organizers, activists, and entrepreneurs from below.⁶⁵ To the extent to which it was conceived as radical and accelerated transformation, the colonization project carried with it both an authoritarian and destabilizing potential.⁶⁶ Whereas in the 1890s, Bunge had warned against resettlement as a mechanical “transplanting” of core institutions to the periphery, post-1910 formulations employed the gardener metaphor more unconditionally and forcefully. References to Francis Bacon’s early modern scientific utopia and his vision of colonization as the cultivation of society figured prominently as a source of inspiration in the programmatic vision outlined by Gins (“Planting of countries is like planting of woods.... For government, let it be in the hands of one, assisted with some counsel”). Gins repeated the statement twice: “To colonize a country is like planting woods.”⁶⁷ Even before the war, the project of a colonial society built from above was being prepared to interact with the construction of a socialist society.



It is not surprising that ideas and people that participated in the tsarist colonization experience passed to the Soviet context. Their passage, which has been documented by Peter Holquist, was neither automatic nor predetermined; in many ways, it was comparable to that of other categories

⁶³ One example was E. E. Skorniakov, *Oroshenie i kolonizatsiia pustyn' shtata Aidago v Severnoi Amerike, na osnovanii zakona Keri (Carey Act)* (St. Petersburg: R. Golike i A. Vel'borg, 1911).

⁶⁴ Ilya V. Gerasimov, *Modernism and Public Reform in Late Imperial Russia: Rural Professionals and Self-Organizations, 1905–1930* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

⁶⁵ N. Skalozubov, “Pis'ma deputatov” (14 May 1909), *Sibirskii listok*, no. 3 (Tiumen': Mandrik, 2003), 183–85. See Masoero, “Il regionalismo siberiano nel contesto imperiale russo,” 1008–92, for an interpretation of Siberian patriotism as an ideology of colonization and regional modernization led by the local intelligentsia in competition with the imperial government.

⁶⁶ Charles Steinwedel, “Resettling People, Unsettling the Empire: Migration and the Challenge of Governance,” in *Peopling the Russian Periphery*, 128–47.

⁶⁷ Bunge, “Zagrobnye zametki,” 21; Sir Francis Bacon, “Of Plantations,” in *Bacon's Essays* (Boston: C. S. Francis and Co., 1857), 329, 331; G. K. Gins, *Pereselenie i kolonizatsiia* (St. Petersburg: F. Vaisberg i P. Gershunin, 1913), 1:34; Gins, “Pereselenie,” 40.

of prerevolutionary experts, such as the economists and statisticians studied by Alessandro Stanziani.⁶⁸ By 1919, at the peak of the Civil War, Voshchinin was trying to resuscitate a journal meant to be a Soviet sequel to *Voprosy kolonizatsii*. Siberia and Central Asia were controlled by the anti-Bolshevik forces, and all attention had turned to the northern regions of Murmansk and Arkhangel'sk. Voshchinin applied the same arguments to them that had been applied to the eastern steppes—which suggests that the notion of Orient plays a secondary role in understanding the profound nature of these phenomena. The same author who had a few years earlier celebrated the new-found dignity of the peasants in the borderlands, spoke of prewar policies as “amateurish” (*kustarnicheskie*), unsystematic measures. He described peasant migration in the Stolypin era as the “transport of human scum” (*peresadka chelovecheskoi nakipi*) beyond the Urals, an extreme example of the tendency to see colonists as passive targets rather than active protagonists of “organized” colonization. He recalled the prerevolutionary Resettlement Administration as the valuable precursor of a still integral and efficient “colonizing apparatus,” an operative machine that needed to be launched, finally equipping it with those “dictatorial powers” that the tsarist government had never really granted it. The theories and practices of the late imperial experience, he explained, were to be converted; the objectives of colonization could hence be summarized as the “development of the productive forces” and the realization of the “state economy on a large scale.”⁶⁹

Conclusion

While colonization contributed to the “complicated process of transforming Siberia and the Far East into Russia,” its motivations were neither mono-centric nor static.⁷⁰ Rather than a single, gradually implemented project of national–imperial assimilation, the concept emerged from a debate that reached different points of equilibrium at different stages. There was no consensus about what society had to be “extended” to the new territories, and the goal was pursued with varying degrees of intensity, relying on different tools at different times. Peasant migration had been a “fact of life” for centuries and the state had employed population policies before. The distribution of a multiethnic labor force in its territories predated the adoption of a European colonial vocabulary and the founding of the Resettlement Administration.

⁶⁸ Holquist, “In Accord with State Interest,” 171–79; Alessandro Stanziani, *L'économie en révolution: Le cas russe, 1870–1930* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998).

⁶⁹ V. Voshchinin, “Gosudarstvenno-neotlozhnye zadachi kolonizatsii,” *Ocherednye voprosy kolonizatsii*, no. 1 (1919): 9–13. Voshchinin's change of attitude was striking, since he had written a laudatory essay on Krivoshein in 1916. See Holquist, “In Accord with State Interest,” 176.

⁷⁰ The quotation comes from Remnev, “Vdvinut' Rossiui v Sibir',” 223.

The idea of building a better society on a peripheral tabula rasa was hardly new.⁷¹ Modern ideologies of colonization did not overturn these patterns of spatial transformation; they grew out of them, adding a stronger yet ambivalent intensity that emerged from the challenging context of the postreform era. Over time, supervised migration to the peripheries came to be seen as a powerful instrument for changing society and Russia itself. It evolved from a set of approaches used to govern an expanding dynastic empire to become a political myth, a strategy for accelerating modernization charged with patriotic and even socialist overtones. It reflected the sensitivity of an age of revolutions no less than one of empires.

Russian interpreters adopted the term “colony” reluctantly or saw the colony as a transitional stage.⁷² This was because, by the middle of the 19th century, the word was associated with political independence. Insofar as colonies appeared as a “new political organization,” they conflicted with an intensifying notion of territorial integrity articulated along imperial or national lines.⁷³ By contrast, “colonization” had wide appeal. It gave spatial expression to the desire to perform a civilizing mission, interpreted in a variety of ways. Opponents questioned its feasibility, not its merit. Yet this rhetoric covered different motivations. Some, but not all, involved a colonial or even imperial viewpoint. The debate took off after a military defeat, at a time of high expectations for reform. It intensified after political and social crises of increasing gravity (1881, 1891, 1905–7). Regardless of its success in transforming territory (which, at least in Siberia, was quite significant), colonization was pursued with an enduring sense of ambivalence, aptly captured in Remnev and Suvorova’s image of an “uncertain *Kulturträger*.”⁷⁴ This is why, as Sunderland noted, two words, rather than one, were used to describe the phenomenon: resettlement and colonization. Experts developed their specialized knowledge from Leroy-Beaulieu’s migration/colonization dichotomy, which encompassed both savagery and cultural superiority. This dual terminology projected a cultural distance already present in the civilizing core onto the peripheries.⁷⁵

“Resettlement” involved a precarious spreading over the territory. It denoted survival in an environment which, though difficult, could also be

⁷¹ Andreas Schönle, “Garden of the Empire: Catherine’s Appropriation of the Crimea,” *Slavic Review* 60, 1 (2001): 1–23; Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field*, 70, 87–88.

⁷² Remnev, “Rossiiskaia vlast’,” 162.

⁷³ The quoted phrase is from Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2005), 4, 10.

⁷⁴ Remnev and Suvorova, “‘Russkoe delo’ na aziatskikh okrainakh,” 219–21.

⁷⁵ Sunderland, “Empire without Imperialism?” 103–05; A. Etkind, “Bremia britogo cheloveka, ili vnutrenniaia kolonizatsiia Rossii,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (2002): 275.



Sergei Ivanov, *On the Road: Death of a Settler* (1889)

Source: The Yorck Project, *10,000 Meisterwerke der Malerei* (DVD, 2002) via Wikimedia Commons. This image is in the public domain worldwide as part of the Yorck Project.

romanticized. At best, it satisfied the material needs or wasteful greed of the poor. It entailed the risk of de-Russification, poverty, and death, depicted in Sergei Vasil'evich Ivanov's painting *On the Road: Death of a Settler* (1889). "Colonization" instead denoted a purposeful, economically solid, and culturally influential transformation of the environment. Only the latter term evoked national dignity and "progress." The two words were used together in a variety of ways, but they were also cyclically contrasted to express past inadequacies about to be overcome by a better future approach. The meaning of colonization intensified over time, from providing "assistance to the migrants" to organizing people's lives in the new places, and finally, after the revolution, to building a "state organization of social production."

Resettlement started to become a "cause," a systematic policy, and a specialized field in the late 1870s and early 1880s when peasants, intellectuals, and government officials literally, as well as figuratively, crossed the Urals to pursue parallel, not necessarily mutually exclusive agendas. Peasants sought their ideal of a better life in spatial terms and located it further eastward. Intellectuals studied the "new places" and projected upon them their own notions of civic commitment and sociopolitical renewal. Government officials started to see peasant migration to the Asiatic provinces as a way of strengthening the state after the revolutionary crisis of 1881. A narrower understanding of migration as "tsarist welfare" evolved into a strategic project of integrating and modernizing the borderlands. The concept's flexibility and vagueness allowed it to accommodate diverse motivations under the banner

of “colonizing Asia.” It provided the opportunity for a compromise between state priorities and service to the people, although this compromise was precarious.

The ideological intensity of the post-1907 period reflected political instability and a desire for modernity. The emergency created by an unprecedented migratory wave coincided with a degree of “disillusionment with the colonization potential of the Russian people.”⁷⁶ These factors produced the widely shared belief that, more than ever before, peasant spontaneity was not enough. Colonization required dramatic, powerful gestures of some sort: special institutions, more resources, planning, infrastructures, new laws, education, or some combination of these. The reformism that postdated the conflicts of 1905 further emphasized the cultural significance of Asiatic Russia as a testing ground of the empire’s greatness, Russia’s dignity as a nation, and its ability to become prosperous. Existing discursive patterns, such as the image of a rapidly growing new society, therefore became more prominent. The previous emphasis on assimilation was partially modified by the hope of building a better Russia in the periphery.

The desire to populate and develop did not automatically lead to a single authoritarian solution. Resettlement officials sometimes acted at the local level in ways that blurred the distinction between government-appointed colonizer and community organizer.⁷⁷ Lenin argued that a revolution and a new state were needed for Russia to exploit its immense Asiatic potential. Among ideologists of the central Resettlement Administration, these attitudes evolved into a promethean vision of cultivating modernity with unrestrained will. Their technocratic propensity was a consequence, as much as a cause, of a semi-utopian understanding of borderland development as social transformation on a grand scale. That is why *this* component of the tsarist elite, at *this* time (1910–14), began to define Asiatic Russia as a colony.

In their understanding, the word did not signify a territory inhabited by non-Russian peoples that would be dominated and governed by separate institutions. It denoted the dream of a moldable space, where reformers could freely build railways and canals, found new villages and cities, implement updated technology, sedentarize the nomads, attend to the transformation of the Russian peasant into a “new person,” and do so without the limitations of competing ministerial interests, socially conservative landowners, or powerful

⁷⁶ Remnev and Suvorova, “Upravliaemaia kolonizatsiia,” 170.

⁷⁷ The head of the Transbaikal resettlement organization, D. M. Golovachev was eulogized as a Siberian patriot, an influential elected member of the municipal duma, and an effective colonization official. See the collection of obituaries from Siberian newspapers in “Dmitrii Mikhailovich Golovachev: Nekrolog,” *Voprosy kolonizatsii* 14 (1914): 447–59.

governors. This is why the definition of colony included an emphasis on the image of Asiatic Russia as a gigantic state domain. Unrealized proposals to turn the Resettlement Administration into a ministry of Asiatic Russia were a logical consequence of the desire to provide reformer-colonizers with the authority to achieve these goals.⁷⁸ Gins proposed perhaps the most sophisticated argument for such development, although the vision of a “state plantation” entrusted to legislator-colonizers could not mesh easily with the institutional and political reality of the late tsarist state.

At the same time, representing colonization in productive and demographic terms made it possible to conceive of it independently from the tsarist imagery of rule.⁷⁹ The only comparative diagram in the Resettlement Administration’s *Atlas aziatskoi Rossii* (Atlas of Asiatic Russia [1914]) mentioned neither “empires” nor “colonies” and did not distinguish between a civilized west and a colonial east. It rather compared the “size and population” of the “main states in the world” (including China, Argentina, and Norway). In each case, a populated “metropolis,” if one existed, was somewhat arbitrarily separated from an outlying, unnamed, and sparsely inhabited area. Demographic density was the only criterion of spatial difference. On this list of examples, Asiatic Russia differed from European Russia merely as a contiguous territory waiting to be populated and developed.⁸⁰ Thus understood, colonization could survive the demise of the empire and persist in the Soviet period as a word, a set of techniques, and a complex of ideas interacting with the ideology of a very different statehood.

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⁷⁸ Willard Sunderland, “The Ministry of Asiatic Russia: The Colonial Office That Never Was but Might Have Been,” *Slavic Review* 69, 1 (2010): 120–50; Remnev, “Rossiiskaia vlast’,” 170.

⁷⁹ For an example of a Soviet textbook written by two prerevolutionary experts, see I. L. Iamzin and V. P. Voshchinin, *Uchenie o kolonizatsii i pereseleniakh* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1926). For an analysis of the interplay of colonizing and decolonizing policies in the Soviet period, see N. Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera: Colonizzazione agricola, sterminio dei nomadi e costruzione statale in Asia centrale, 1905–1936* (Rome: Viella, 2009).

⁸⁰ *Atlas Aziatskoi Rossii* (St. Petersburg: GUZZ, 1914), map 7 (Diagramma velichiny i naselennosti glavneishikh gosudarstv mira).