The Tsar, The Empire, and The Nation

Aoshima, Yoko, Staliūnas, Darius

Published by Central European University Press

Aoshima, Yoko and Darius Staliūnas.
The Tsar, The Empire, and The Nation: Dilemmas of Nationalization in Russia's Western Borderlands, 1905-1915.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/89934.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/89934

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=3187360
The Fugitive Nose and the Question of Colonial Imagination

By opening his book *Internal Colonization* with a discussion of Nikolai Gogol’s “surrealist” short story *The Nose* (1836), cultural historian Alexander Etkind was not simply hoping to achieve the literary impact so valued in contemporary humanistic studies. According to Etkind, “Gogol is an imperial author who belongs to the list of great colonial authors, along with James Joyce and Joseph Conrad,” as evidenced by his famous satirical work that encompassed the sweeping expanse between Riga, St. Petersburg, the Caucasus, and Kamchatka.1 Etkind also notes that the story’s fugitive nose was apprehended on its way to Riga without speculating why the mystical creature was trying to reach the center of the Livland province, a question that would be an entirely logical one and might provide insight into the nature of the Russian colonial mentality. So, why exactly did the nose of the story’s unfortunate protagonist, Kovalev, decide to depart St. Petersburg for Riga, when it could have easily chosen Helsingfors (today, Helsinki), Reval (Tallinn), Warsaw, Vilna, Kiev, Odessa, Nizhny Novgorod, or Moscow? This study, which focuses on excursions, especially but not only school tours organized in the so-called Northwest Region of the Russian Empire in the early twentieth century, provides an answer to this question.

among others. I assert that group travel was not just an educational tool or form of recreation, it was also a cultural undertaking that helped define a specific political space and disseminate an imperial ideology in the imagination of Russia’s subjects.

Such an analytical viewpoint would have been impossible in Lithuanian historiography fifteen or twenty years ago because of the predominance of ethno-linguistic and ethno-confessional themes in local historical research. For a long time, nineteenth-century history was largely constructed as a narrative about the struggle to retain a Lithuanian-language press, Lithuanian schools, and to defend the rights of a Lithuanianized Catholic Church. Any analysis of the circumstances of this struggle from the Lithuanian perspective viewed Russian imperial power as a repressive external force, and all of its employed tactics were defined as furthering Russification, which meant nothing less than the assimilation of local inhabitants. By the turn of the twenty-first century, however, such a defensive, ethnocentric historical model concentrated on political events and linguistic issues began to erode. In the past two decades, there has been a shift away from the study of the ethnic Lithuanian nation toward the analysis that includes all ethnic and confessional groups residing in the territory of Lithuania. The dynamic diversity of political and administrative methods of governance has been much discussed, and the multifaceted meaning of “Russification” has been revealed. Moreover, the grand narrative has been rejected as the search began for new approaches that draw on the lessons of the so-called “turns” in the humanities. All these methodological changes have made it possible to delve not only into the facts of political and social life of the former empire, but also into the mentality, imagination, and emotions of a bygone society.²

To Sense an Empire

This article follows these trends in Lithuanian historiography. Several points of departure are important for my analysis: first and foremost, is the tenet, which comes from postcolonial theory, that an imperial government and the nations ruled by it are not simply two separate, opposing historical actors, but that they are constantly interacting and constructing new, mixed forms of reality; here it is important to take note of Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of “contact zone” and Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of cultural hybridity. This perspective suggests a second principle, which requires taking into account not only the destructive, autocratic expression of power that led to the country’s underdevelopment, but also the creative and inventive practices undertaken by imperial authorities. Thirdly and finally, my focus will center on visual practices because, based on John Urry’s view of tourism, one can assert that any form of sightseeing is primarily and essentially associated with the visual experience. Thus, I rely on insights offered by visual culture studies, but instead of scrutinizing specific imagery, I focus on the context of visual perception. In so doing, through the prism of the history of organized travel, I reveal how the Russian government responded to the political, economic, and social challenges of a new era and sought to modernize its strategy for integrating and protecting the empire. At the same time, however, I highlight a contradictory aspect of this process and demonstrate how, despite the government’s efforts, one construct of tsarist administration—the Northwest Region comprised of six Lithuanian and Belorussian provinces—remained one of the most problematic regions within the imagined imperial space.

Against Entropy

In 1908, Georg Kerschensteiner (1854–1932), the renowned German educator and promoter of the so-called new school concept, published an


article on the issues of national education in the journal *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik*. Three years later, the text was translated into Russian and included in a collection of articles by Kerschensteiner published in Moscow. In his paper, Kerschensteiner warned his readers about the destructive entropy eating away at the foundations of modern, democratic states: “Everything that we value the most in a contemporary state—the freedom of academic research, a free press and free speech, the right of assembly and association, universal suffrage, free industry and communication—all of these freedoms and their consequences for the industrial and economic life of a country, all of this uncurbs individualism, counteracts the solidarity of the masses, and encourages centrifugal, not centripetal forces.”

The views of this German academic were quite popular in early twentieth-century Russia. Many Russian social activists who advocated for the unification of the heterogeneous ethno-cultural and economic imperial space eagerly supported his ideas. Kerschensteiner proposed combatting destructive centrifugal processes not by employing coercive administrative measures, but through educational and cultural methods, which is precisely what the Russian government began to consistently implement from the 1880s onward. “When people are connected by a common cultural aspiration and when they understand this tie, they perceive weakness in any attempt to divide their forces, and thus seek to avoid it. So, the modern state is a union consolidated by such common cultural objectives,” wrote Kerschensteiner trying to demonstrate the advantages of the cultural approach. What is more, he believed that cultural activity can only be effective in a large country (which Russia certainly considered itself to be), because only a large country is (potentially) capable of providing for a modern individual’s spiritual needs. Kerschensteiner proposed developing the collective activity of young people based on a shared sensory experience, the

5 Georg Kerschensteiner, “Problema narodnogo vospitaniia,” in Georg Kerschensteiner, *Osnovnye voprosy shkol’noi organizatsii,* pervoe so vtorogo nemetskogo izdaniia pod red. E. Ger’e, s vstup. stat’ei N. V. Speranskogo (Moscow: Tipografia T-va I. D. Sytina, 1911), 33.

6 Ibid., 36.
pleasure of which would awaken children’s drive to serve others and bind
their individual egoism to a community spirit, helping to nurture, in the
author’s words, a social instinct and sense of solidarity, thereby educating
the nation as an integral whole.

Kerschensteiner singled out student associations for sport and tourism
as one of the few forms of German collective cultural activity that actually
fostered the devotion of young people toward their community and their
homeland. His assertions began to resonate just as the practice of organizing
group excursions was beginning to take hold in the Russian Empire.
The development of Russian tourism was supported by several favorable cir-
cumstances: the emergence of a railway network, the relative liberalization
of the internal passport regime in 1894, and discounted railway fares
approved at the turn of the twentieth century.

Tours organized by schools became the most popular type of early mass
tourism in Russia. In 1900, the Ministry of Education revoked an 1873
edict establishing summer educational programs largely limited to writing
exercises and instead instructed primary and secondary schools to intro-
duce nature walks and field trips.7 Detailed rules for educational tours were
developed in the first decade of the twentieth century. School trips were re-
quired to be organized in accordance with administrative orders and re-
strictions based on sex and nationality. Tour organizers had to obtain a per-
mit from the overseer of the local educational district. Girls’ schools were
encouraged to focus on travel to nearby locations and religious or agricul-
tural sites. It was not recommended to take Jewish students on long-dis-
tance trips, but if tours did include these students, organizers were required
to obtain advance approval for their participation from the local adminis-
trative bodies in the district to be visited if it was beyond the permitted set-
tlement zone.8 By the early twentieth century, then, opportunities to ex-

7 “(2-go avgusta 1900 goda, no. 20185). Tsirkuliar Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia popechiteliam
uchebnykh okrugov – ob otmenе letnikh kanikuliarnykh rabot uchenikov srednikh uchebnykh zavede-
nii,” Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia 311 (sentiabr’ 1900): 64.
8 “Svedeniia ob uchenicheskikh ekskursiakh,” in Vilenskii kalendar’ na 1911 prostoi god (Vilnius: Elektro-
Tipografia “Russkii Pochin,” [1910]), 64.
plore the Russian Empire had expanded considerably, but the chance to travel freely through the vast country was largely reserved for male persons of Christian faiths.

Organized touring was considered to be a modern and effective pedagogical tool. It was asserted that travel could help overcome the conflictual relationships between teachers and their students, bring students together, shape shared group interests, and instill a sense of mutual solidarity. This method did have one serious shortcoming, however—it was expensive. This explains why efforts were made to reduce travel costs. Beginning in 1902, discounted train fares were introduced, low-income students were provided with financial assistance, support was obtained from local municipalities and private transport companies, and internal resources were sought through fostering cooperation among institutions reporting to the Ministry of Education. This policy produced certain results; for example, the professor of classical philology and the descendant of petty Lithuanian nobility, Merkelis Račkauskas (1885–1968), recalled that a tour of Kiev organized by a secondary school (gimnaziia) in Shavli (Šiauliai) for about fifty students, both Orthodox and Catholic, was particularly appealing for him as someone who had never visited any larger city, and that the cost of the trip was low—only seven rubles.9 Nevertheless, despite government efforts, travel to more distant locations remained out of reach for poorer pupils. The opportunity to visit the remote expanses of Russia was primarily enjoyed by the children of wealthy families. Thus, for objective reasons school trip organizers in the Northwest Region, as in the empire overall, focused their efforts mainly on the middle class, that is, the families of local officials and representatives of the intelligentsia as well as members of the bourgeoisie and gentry. At the same time, however, it was precisely these professionally active and financially independent social groups that played an essential role in the country’s economic development and political stability.

Knowing One’s “Little Motherland” and Loving the “Great Fatherland”

Fundamental school reforms launched in the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe, Russia, and the United States conferred new importance on tourism as a broad means of education. This process was influenced by the rapidly adopted understanding of visual learning, which was centered on the belief that training should be based not on theory or “book knowledge,” but on direct, sensory (especially visual) experience capable of providing children with specific information and practical skills. Human vision was believed to have exceptional educative powers. It was asserted that “the eye is not only a conduit of light, but also of enlightenment,” and therefore, all efforts had to be undertaken to ensure that “the foundation of any instruction must be ‘visibility’, so that an ‘object’, or at least its image, shall have precedence over the word.”

Influenced by such views, schools in the Russian Empire began to assemble visual aids and change their curricula. Excursions became one of the most effective new visual educational tools, giving students the opportunity to view the natural and cultural sites they were learning about in situ.

The principles of visual learning and the practice of organizing tours were closely linked to an ideology grounded in getting to know one’s birthplace. This attitude promoted the belief that it was essential to become familiar with one’s immediate surroundings because, according to the proponents of this approach, only through the specific and personal experience of the “little motherland” (rodina) could one hope to develop a proper love for one’s “Great Fatherland” (Otechestvo).

Local studies had been encouraged throughout Europe since the days of the Enlightenment and romanticism. “One doesn’t have to become a profound scientist, but failing to come to know the land in which one lives is


a great shame—and an even graver shame if one knows more about foreign lands than about one’s own,” wrote the poet Ludwik Kondratowicz (1823–62). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, such patriotic ideas that emerged alongside national movements began to take on a political form in many countries, and exploratory wandering through the countryside by lonely intellectuals were soon replaced by organized group excursions. It should be noted that according to the Russian interpretation, exploring one’s native land had a specific aim. On the one hand, it was intended to help Russian settlers truly “own” the newly colonized territories, providing a sense of “home” for colonists finding themselves in foreign surroundings. At the same time, it was also hoped that ethnic minorities, once armed with greater knowledge about their own history and having experienced pride for their “little motherland,” could better participate in Russian social life and become more effectively integrated into the greater imperial space. Therefore, teaching about local nature, economics, and culture as a part of imperial geographical and social structure was considered to be an effective means for consolidating multi-ethnic society in such a huge country, the Romanov Empire.

The task of developing “homeland studies” programs (rodinovedenie) began to be addressed in Russian educational institutions starting in the 1860s. Among the first to tackle these courses was the renowned Russian educator Konstantin Ushinskii (1824–71), who believed that children must know their own country, but also argued that such knowledge should be visual, specific, and must begin with a student’s native region: children must learn how to compare the familiar with the remote and must properly understand the relationships between things. This particular pedagog-

---

14 See Konstantin Ushinskii, Rodnoe slovo: Dlia detei mladshego vozrasta: God vtoroi (St. Petersburg: Tipografia Glavnogo artilleriiskogo upravlenia, 1864).
ical method was likely first adopted in the Dorpat (Tartu) educational district. According to Ulrike Plath, after the publication of Gustav Blumberg’s book *Heimathskunde. Stofflick begrenzt und methodisch bearbeitet* (Dorpat: Gläser, 1869), schools in the Baltic provinces, where the German cultural influence was predominant, began to teach local history and geography, and patriotic tourism (walking Heimat) was introduced step-by-step as a practical means of education.15

By the early twentieth century, “homeland studies” had become an integral part of the primary school curricula throughout the European territory of the Russian Empire.16 A considerable body of educational literature was published for the subject in the form of textbooks instructing teachers how to correctly develop the educational process beginning with a child’s living place and progressing to the Russian Empire as a whole, and specialized surveys that described the climate, nature, demographics, native populations, economy, and culture of individual areas. To make such instruction more effective, many of these publications featured extensive illustrations. Efforts to make “homeland studies” more visual reached their zenith in the years between 1909 and 1911, with the ambitious idea to incorporate colored photographs taken by Sergei Prokudin-Gorskii (1863–1944), which represented various locations throughout the empire and their inhabitants with extraordinarily powerful realism.17 In 1910, a special inter-ministerial commission was established to acquire and publish the photographic prints. The resulting album was meant to serve as a grand visual encyclopedia of the country ruled by the Romanov dynasty, and a subscription campaign was launched to encourage advance purchases of the book. The institutions of the Vil’na educational district were also required to order the collection of pictures, and only three of them had the courage to refuse to do so due to the prohibi-


itive cost of the publication for their meager school budgets. But despite the energy invested in the launching of the project, the endeavor was never realized, likely because of the unfavorable financial and copyright terms (Prokudin-Gorskii offered to sell his collection for a hundred thousand rubles on the condition that he would retain sole rights to his work).

Notwithstanding the drive to create an illusion of reality and to present all material as clearly as possible, the vision of the country that unfolded before students’ eyes on the pages of textbooks was rather fragmented, consisting of individual landscapes, examples of local flora and fauna, ethnic types, and economic and cultural sites. According to Marina Loskutova, the mosaic-like nature of the presentation was the result of an ahistorical, naturalist approach as well as disparate classification principles, which is why the “native land” had no recognizable features: “In Russia, the little motherland could easily shrink to the horizons of one village, and just as easily expand to the very edges of the great ‘fatherland.’” We could go further and assert that, in both Russian imperial discourse and in the academic geography that reflected it, the only absolute and unquestionable concept was the “Great Fatherland,” while one’s homeland was devoid of clear content or autonomous value. Its depiction was subjected to political circumstances and only became meaningful when projected upon a symbolic metastructure: the Romanov state. This approach was particularly evident in schools in the Northwest Region.

The concept of “homeland studies” reached the Northwest Region at the same time as other areas of the Russian Empire. After conducting an inspection of schools in Vitebsk, Dinaburg (Daugavpils), and Mogilev in 1865, the overseer of the Vil’na educational district complained that students lacked...
information about their neighboring provinces and that Russian geography was being taught as if it was the geography of China.²¹ Although local officials regularly emphasized the need for learning about one’s native land, no significant progress on this subject was achieved as evidenced by the concerns periodically expressed by educators as well as the lack of instructional tools allocated to the Western provinces. Not a single geography textbook encompassing the entire Northwest Region was published prior to World War I. Indeed, publishers only succeeded in issuing brief, non-illustrated surveys of the Minsk and Vil’na provinces that appeared particularly insubstantial within the overall context of similar publications elsewhere in the Russian Empire.²² In truth, efforts were made to incorporate elements of “homeland studies” programs into Russian language and literature lessons, but these attempts also avoided the use of illustrations of local sites of interest.²³ More importantly, textbooks on Russian literature for local children were compiled according to a contradictory logic: rather than beginning with a focus on subjects pertinent to the native land, publications started by examining works that glorified Russia, inserting information about the regional culture in the form of brief supplements. The conclusion, then, is that the “native land” in the course books used in Northwestern regional schools remained invisible both literally and figuratively; its representation “faded” due to the focus on the “Great Fatherland.” Given that the literature intended for “homeland studies” programs was closely related to the practice of educational excursions (by providing selective information, textbooks shaped the principles of instructional tourism), one can assume that a similar strategy for controlling perspective was also applied in the organization of student tours.

²¹ “Report by the overseer of the Vil’na educational district, Ivan Kornilov, on the inspection of schools in Vitebsk, Dinaburg, and Mogilev, April 1865,” LVIA, f. 567, ap. 3, b. 1435, l. 14v–15.
Travel Itineraries: Opportunities and Limitations

As in other European countries, the appeal of tourism within the Russian Empire was bolstered by popular science publications, travelogues, and adventure fiction, particularly the romantic novels of James Fenimore Cooper, Thomas Mayne Reid, and Jules Verne, all of which were eagerly collected by Russian school libraries. The imperial royal family’s trips were held up as exemplary models for school excursions, including the 1837 visit made by the future emperor Alexander II to twenty-nine of the Russian Empire’s European provinces, which the poet Vasili Zhukovskii (1783–1852) compared to a “national betrothal to Russia,”24 or the tour to the Russian Far East taken in 1890 by the future Nicholas II in order to inaugurate the construction of the Trans-Siberian railroad—a visit that was later widely promoted through illustrated lectures, photography collections, and books.

Much like the travels embarked upon by the country’s leaders, school excursions were also ideologically driven and strategically motivated. The dominant elements featured on the educational tourism map included the old and new capitals of Russia, Kiev—long considered the symbolic cradle of Russian statehood and the Orthodox religion—as well as entire regions, first and foremost the Volga region, Crimea, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Finland. The geography of educational tours essentially reflected the colonial structure of the Romanov Empire, and it was meant to shape the spatial perception of a “Great Russian State” to be embraced by the tsar’s subjects.

The Vil’na educational district began organizing tours in 1900, the same year in which the Ministry of Education directive was issued.25 Following education policymakers in St. Petersburg, local teachers began discussing the special benefits of tourism, asserting that group travel would provide children with necessary knowledge and would help to harden students phys-

---

24 Sergei Tatsishchev, Emperor Aleksandr II: Ego zhizn’ i tsarstvovanie, izdanie 2-e, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Izdanie A. S. Suvorina, 1911), 82.
To Sense an Empire

ically as well as to develop their willpower, responsibility, and self-reliance. In the view of educators, school tours would also bring teachers and students closer together and, most importantly, would inspire young people’s faith in the moral and material capabilities of the Romanov Empire.26 Already in the first three years, alongside a number of local hikes, several long-distance trips took place: visits to Pskov, Kiev, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, an excursion to the famous Orthodox Solovetskii monastery and the Murmansk area, as well as a trip to Crimea with stops in Gomel’, Kiev, Yekaterinoslav, Kherson, Odessa, Sevastopol’, Yalta, Feodosia, and Khar’kov.27 Systemic planning of multi-day trips to more distant locations took on even greater relevance in 1910, after the board of the Vil’na educational district called for more attention to be devoted to visiting remote regions.28

In many respects, school travels organized in the Northwest Region differed little from the routes that were popular in the rest of the country. The tours promoted in the Vil’na educational district brought students to St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, the Black Sea resorts, and the Caucasus and Turkestan. It is worthwhile noting that the last destination was the most challenging. Implemented in 1911 to replace a planned visit to Vladivostok and the Russian Far East Region because of an outbreak of the plague, the excursion to Turkestan lasted forty-two days and included numerous stops in Khar’kov, Rostov-on-Don, Baku, Krasnovodsk, Bukhara, Samar-kand, Khodzhent, Tashkent, Samara, Nizhnii Novgorod, Moscow, Smo-lensk, and other cities. Thirty-eight children and eight adults from various Northwestern schools with their personal belongings and ten photo cameras covered 10,002 verstes (10,670 km) by train, steamship, and horse-drawn

28 Medvedev, ed., Opisanie ekskursii, 3.
carriage. The travel costs for each participant totaled sixty rubles and students’ families and public donations defrayed these costs.29

Tour planners sought to portray the Russian Empire as a country of inexhaustible natural resources, boundless economic possibilities, and innumerable cultural treasures. Various mnemonic techniques including journaling, drawing, and photography were employed to record travellers’ experiences. In mandatory reports about their travels written after returning home, sightseers and their tour leaders usually emphasized their impressions of the country’s great diversity. To put it more precisely, the most important leitmotif of these bureaucratic travelogues was not dangerous difference but rather variety as a peaceful kaleidoscope of landscapes, ethnicities, and cultural landmarks emblazoned in the memory and joined into an integral whole by recurring symbols of imperial rule and the expression of Russian nationhood. School reports drafted to satisfy the demands of the Ministry of Education displayed a clear overall ideological trend that embraced the image of the Russian people as a supra-ethnic community. In other words, accounts written by tour participants captured the emerging idea of a complex form of “Russianness” as an alternative to the portrayal of a homogenous Russian nation. They signaled the increasing acceptance of the need, according to Vera Tolz, to cultivate multiple, complementary identities in an effort to more effectively manage Russia’s ethnic plurality.30

However, this interpretation of the Russian state as a resultant force encapsulating the energies of numerous constituent nationalities generally incorporated slightly different content in different regions and was developed in particular local ways, as is demonstrated in the history of tours organized in the Vil’na education district.

Not surprisingly, prevailing anti-Polish policies meant that schools in the Northwest Region had to refrain from organized travel to the Kingdom of Poland. It is also understandable that pupils from this restive area were not given the opportunity to visit foreign destinations, despite the

29 Ibid., 5–9.
fact that many students and teachers from other provinces of the empire were traveling to Paris, Prague, Berlin, Constantinople, and Jerusalem with increasing frequency. Since 1911, when the ministers of education, internal, and foreign affairs approved a form of collective foreign student passport, departures of general and higher education school groups abroad became much easier. Meanwhile, no such excursion was organized by the Vil’na educational district. It seems that tsarist authorities, fearing the influence of Polish nationalism and Catholicism as well as revolutionary ideas spreading across European countries, sought to obstruct any Western-orientated school trips arranged in the Northwest Region. What is especially notable, however, is that local education administrators generally avoided traveling to the Grand Duchy of Finland and the neighboring Baltic provinces. Only a handful of such tours were organized in the 1910s, including an excursion for students of the Pinsk Realschule (real’naia shkola) to the environs of the Gauja river, known as the Livliandian Switzerland; a sailing trip for Vil’na educational district students in the Bay of Finland; and visits by schools from Ponevezh (Panevėžys) and Vil’na to Libava (Liepaja). Of these tours, only the first was motivated by genuine cultural interest, while both the sailing trip and excursions to Libava (then famous for its modern submarine base) were organized with propaganda goals in mind—to extol the power of the Russian navy. These facts are indeed telling if we remember that a multitude of tourists from across the Russian Empire regularly visited Riga, Reval, Helsingfors, and Imatra. Finland was an especially popular destination—the country was viewed as an ideal imperial colony. Its idyllic portrayal encompassed the safety of

---

32 Ivanov, Istoriiia rossiiskogo turizma, 146.
agrarian conservatism, practicality of Western cultural convenience, and the beauty of primordial nature. Therefore, the Grand Duchy of Finland was visited by both members of the imperial royal family as well as students from the Caucasus educational district, which itself was not lacking in natural treasures. When the director of the Vil’na Secondary School (gimnaziya) proposed a tour of the Baltic provinces, St. Petersburg, and Finland, however, the overseer of the educational district rejected the idea, arguing that “tour participants would encounter the foreign Finnish and German cultures..., while they should first be exploring native Russian regions [korennye oblasti Rossi] with all of their holy sites and historical landmarks which are so dear to the Russian heart.”

The geographical boundaries of school trips organized in the Vil’na educational district were limited by long-established political interests. For example, Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, the author of a monograph about the Russian railway era, cited a brochure by Sergei Buturlin (1803–73) that had been published in 1865 during a debate on further railway development. In his pamphlet, Buturlin warned against the dangers arising from expanding the communications network linking the Western territories and suggested forcing the “binding” of these border areas to the territorial core of the country. School tour organizers adhered to a similar principle, attempting to associate the cultural experiences of students in the Northwest Region with the central and more distant territories of the Romanov Empire, hoping to prevent the rise of any new separatist sentiments among local communities in the process.

---

To Sense an Empire

A Split Identity, or Where Does Russia End?

As the history of school travels shows, the tsarist government saw the intellectual and emotional integration of residents of the Western region into the greater imperial space as an important strategic aim. At the same time, however, organized tourism from the central imperial territories to the Lithuanian and Belorussian provinces was rarely undertaken. In truth, when the railway line linking St. Petersburg to Warsaw opened in 1862, Vil’na was increasingly visited by various transients, mostly traders and entertainers in search of better wages. The rapid rise in travellers is evidenced by the growth of businesses offering temporary lodging: in 1864, only seven such businesses operated in Vil’na, while by 1915, there were as many as seventy-five hotels and rooms for rent. The development of a travel industry is also evident in the publication of tourist guides and books.

The first study about Vil’na to meet the demands of the travel guide genre was issued in 1856 by the publisher, archaeologist and antiquities collector Adam Honory Kirkor (1818–86). Written in Polish, the book emphasized the heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania based on the traditions of Western culture and was aimed at educated readers in the lands of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

After the Polish–Lithuanian Uprising of 1863–64, travel guides about Vil’na began to appear in Russian. The first to begin writing such guides was the playwright, poet, and Orthodox Church historian Andrei Murav’ev (1806–74). Likely encouraged by his brother, Mikhail Murav’ev, the Governor General of the Northwest Region responsible for the suppression of

39 Jan ze Śliwina [Adam Honory Kirkor], Przechadzki po Wilnie i jego okolicach (Vilnius: [s. n.], 1856).
Jolita Mulevičiūtė

the 1863–64 uprising, A. Murav’ev prepared a brief survey of the city’s Orthodox churches, which was published in St. Petersburg in 1864 and soon reprinted in both Russian and French in Vil’na.41 The brochure became the foundation of a canon of all subsequent Russian guidebooks about Vil’na. In it, A. Murav’ev portrayed the region’s central city as a historical cradle of the Orthodox religion, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as a Russian state, and its territory as a collection of Russian-Lithuanian lands that fell into decline after unification with the Polish Kingdom, recovering only after their “return” to the Romanov Empire. The publication’s author, thus, sought to find a place for Vil’na within the expanse of an imagined Russian world and encourage other travellers, first and foremost pilgrims from the interior Russian provinces, to visit the city. But neither A. Murav’ev’s book nor later, more expansive guides succeeded in achieving these goals.42 Statistics about the number of visitors to the Vil’na Public Library and its Antiquities Museum attest to this fact.43

Records from that bipartite institution dedicated to local history and culture show only sporadic visits by tourists from more remote regions. In 1902, 1903, and 1909, they tell of visits by students from the Irkutsk and St. Petersburg Orthodox Seminaries, as well as pupils from a girls’ secondary school (gimnaziia) in Pskov.44 In addition to civilian Vil’na residents...
and Russian soldiers stationed in the city, the majority of tourists visiting the public library and museum consisted of students from the Vil’na, Warsaw, and Kiev educational districts, as well as Catholic and Orthodox pilgrims from the Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Polish provinces. Given that in the early twentieth century, museum tours were an obligatory part of the official educational policy program, such visitation statistics for the region’s most important cultural institution suggest that Vil’na was considered primarily a locally significant site on the Russian tourism map. Its draw was limited to the Northwest Region and its neighboring provinces. In other words, despite the efforts of the tsarist administration to integrate the Western areas into the imperial body through both administrative methods and cultural means, the appeal of this historic center reached only into the former territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, failing to penetrate deeper into the empire.

Vil’na was a rarely embraced destination for rank-and-file imperial officials as well as the ruling elite. A tour by Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich is particularly telling. From 1884 to 1888, this member of the Romanov royal family made a series of trips to the western borderlands of the country, which were later described by the poet and novelist Konstantin Sluchevskii (1837–1904), who accompanied the duke on his travels. Vladimir Alexandrovich devoted considerable attention to visiting Finland and the Baltic provinces, familiarizing himself with regional administrative, economic, and cultural centers, as well as the area’s smaller historic cities and resorts. The Northwest Region was relegated to the sixth, or last, place on the itinerary. Instead of traveling to the main city of the region, Vil’na, connected with St. Petersburg by a direct railway line, the Grand Duke made a detour, briefly visiting Kovna (Kaunas), Jurburg (Jurbarkas), and Grodno. From there, he went to Osowiec and Warsaw. After a three-day visit to Warsaw, the traveller turned back to the imperial capital, stopping along the way in Novogeorgievsk (today Modlin, a part of the city Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki), Brest Litovsk, Nesvizh, Minsk, Smolensk, Kaluga, and Tula. Although the tour was officially represented as a sort of cultural activity, its trajectory suggests that inspecting this “wedge-shaped territory”
(which, according to Sluchevskii, “continues to demand difficult and persistent government efforts to achieve its final unification with the empire”\textsuperscript{45}), Vladimir Alexandrovich was guided by strategic state interests. Nearly all of the aforementioned stops on the tour were important military sites that had assumed extraordinary significance in the context of the foundation of the Triple Alliance in 1882. Even the picturesque Neman (Nemunas) river valley stretching from Kovna to Jurburg was not chosen for its historical treasures: the high-ranking traveller was more concerned with security along the border zone with Prussia, through which an unprecedented quantity of contraband was flowing to the Romanov Empire.

The image Russian travellers had of the Northwest Region differed considerably from their perception of neighboring lands. Finland and the Baltic provinces were traditionally associated with Western culture. This Russian-controlled “domestic” West, this “Little Europe,” attracted even the aforementioned character from Nikolai Gogol’s story. Having escaped from its master and determined to enjoy life, Kovalev’s nose decided to travel to Riga, which surpassed Reval in its urban appeal and which, compared to Helsingfors, was much more accessible (crossing the border into Finland would have required the fugitive to present papers and undergo a luggage inspection).

Riga, Reval, and Helsingfors were destinations unto themselves, while Vil’na and Kovna were rarely chosen as the final stop on most tours. The Northwest Region was usually a brief stopover, as was the case for a group of railway school students from Odessa embarking on a tour of St. Petersburg and Finland in 1910.\textsuperscript{46} Similarly, cities in the Lithuanian and Belorussian provinces were presented as transit stops in guides and travel books printed by foreign as well as Russian publishers.\textsuperscript{47} One such book was published by naturalist, translator, and poet Vasilii Sidorov (1843–1903) in


\textsuperscript{46} See \textit{Odessa, Vil’na, Peterburg, Finlandiia: Ekskursiiia uchashchikh i uchashchikhsia Odeskogo zheleznodorozhnoho uchilishcha: 1910 g.} (Odessa: Tipografia Ia. Kh. Shermana, 1910).

\textsuperscript{47} For instance, see \textit{Russland: Europäisches Russland, Eisenbahnen in Russ-Asien, Teheran, Peking. Handbuch für Reisende} (Liepzig: Verlag von Karl Baedeker, 1904).
This Baedeker-style pocket guide was notable for its vibrant, literary form of narrative. In it, Sidorov described his journey from St. Petersburg to Yekaterinoslav, devoting quite a bit of attention to his brief visit to Vil’na.

Sidorov began by viewing Vil’na from a distance, from a hill in the suburbs, looking out over an enticing landscape. He noticed the dwellings, Catholic churches, and Orthodox shrines climbing the slopes of the Vilia river valley and admired the picturesque urban texture interspersed with occasional pyramids of poplars and islands of green gardens. But once the traveller descended into the dense world of the city, his impression changed. Having arrived from Riga where he enjoyed that city’s broad boulevards and spacious squares, Sidorov was unpleasantly surprised by the crooked, narrow, and poorly-paved streets of Vil’na crammed with Jewish residents; by the city’s old and dilapidated houses; and, most importantly, by a reflexive sense of uncertainty. This feeling only grew in intensity after seeing Catholic churches converted into military barracks: cabbage soup simmered and horses neighed where God had once been worshipped. Local holy sites handed over for use by the Orthodox faithful offered little solace either. The Catholic spirit, so foreign to the Russian mind, was still clearly evident in the old architectural forms hidden beneath Byzantine decoration. Overall, the local milieu suggested something ambiguous and left unsaid—as if something were missing. It was an unfinished, discordant, ill-defined city lacking sufficiently comfortable living space. Here, too, Sidorov’s imagination takes a sudden leap. In his words, observing such cities as Vil’na always made him want to spring forward at least one hundred years into the future to see what this place would be like: “I feel as if I can see electric lights everywhere, and all these [cities] of Vil’na, Kovna, Perm’, and Cheliaba will have been transformed into something almost like Paris or Berlin.”

49 Ibid., 16.
50 Ibid., 23.
51 Ibid., 22.
Sidorov’s thoughts reveal his own inner bewilderment. Neither the city’s “Latin” past nor its Russian Orthodox present satisfied him. The former seemed too alien, while the latter appeared apocryphal and deceiving. In- capable of discerning a connection between the different components of Vil’na’s identity, Sidorov sought refuge in his own imagination, which he deployed to compare the center of the Northwest Region to insignificant Russian provincial backwaters and relegate the city to the margins of his own reflections.

Other travellers transiting through the Lithuanian and Belorussian provinces expressed similar feelings of uncertainty and dissatisfaction.\(^5\)\(^2\) Considering both the low number of visitors and the content of their travelogues, it can be assumed that the image of the Northwest Region embraced by Russians was extremely contradictory, and thus hardly conducive to the promotion of any tourism-related activity. Indeed, ambiguity was engrained in the name of the administrative unit itself, which was devised to erase, along with the name Lithuania, any allusion to the historical sovereign European polity the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth that once existed on this edge of the Russian Empire. Although it denoted the “North West,” the toponym invented by Russian authorities essentially meant “the East” (i.e. Eastern Christendom), positioning the Lithuanian and Belorussian provinces as the Western part of the Russian Orthodox world. And yet, the “Western” vector in the place-name made the Russian description of the region rather vulnerable, forcing the need to constantly prove the region’s geopolitical and cultural dependence.

The difficulties arising from attempts to describe the essence of this administrative unit is evident from the failure to produce a single school textbook reviewing all six of the border provinces or any Russian travel guide that promoted the region as a unified whole prior to World War I. Rather, this task was undertaken not by some representative of official Russian culture, but by the Vil’na-based Polish journalist and theater critic Napo-

Leon Rouba (1860–1929). In 1908, Rouba invited the local Polish-speaking intellectuals to collaborate, and in a year’s time, with the assistance of some eighty respondents, he prepared and published an encyclopedic guide. The book was titled *A Guide to Lithuania and Belorussia*, avoiding any reference to the name, “the Northwest Region.” Indeed, its title included two geographic names defining the territories of two different ethnic communities, which testified to the modern split that had taken place in this historical area.

Historians emphasize that different imperial regions were given different status within Russian nationalist discourse—some of them were perceived as imperial borderlands and others as Russian “national territories.” Finland, Estland, Livland, and Kurland belonged to the category of borderlands. Sidorov had no doubt, for example, about Riga’s German character. Everything there was different than in Russia: the language, customs, domestic conveniences, and rules governing trade. It was an unfamiliar land, almost foreign. Thus, even upon noticing the distaste local Germans had for Russians, he felt little personal discomfort. His encounter with Vil’na, on the other hand, troubled him: this city was part of “ancient Russian lands,” but its Russianness was difficult to discern. Failing to recognize the ideological phantom constructed by imperial policymakers, a large part of Russian society experienced similar complications. In their search to find a way out of the stalemate in which they found themselves, Russians adopted a strategy similar to that of Sidorov; that is, marginalizing the Northwestern provinces on their own mental maps, and transforming them into an unappealing and insignificant peripheral area, a kind of transit zone, thereby seemingly securing the right for themselves to ignore unresolvable geopolitical, cultural, and psychological problems.

---

Postscript

Guided by the approach outlined in a 1988 study by Gennadii Dolzhenko, Russian scholars have associated early Russian tourism in their works with the needs of public education and recreation. Studies by historians in other countries, meanwhile, underscore the political aspect, distinguishing all types of Russian tourism from the modern culture of Western travel and its orientation toward recreation, consumerism, and entertainment. The political dimension is particularly evident in the organization of school trips, which became the main form of group excursions in the Northwest Region. It is noteworthy that political propaganda objectives in these borderlands began to be increasingly emphasized in 1910, after the formulation of a series of official directives. It was in this year that, in addition to the previously discussed effort to organize more frequent tours to distant destinations, the overseer of the Vil’na educational district issued a directive to encourage students’ participation in marine tours organized by the Navy League (Liga obnovlenii flota), as well as to devote greater attention to paramilitary expeditions and visits to Orthodox temples and monasteries.

Tours were meant to foster deeper patriotism among students, instilling a common imperial dimension in the consciousness of a new generation. Even as the tsarist authorities persistently sought to incorporate the population of the Northwest Region into the larger imperial space, the integration of the lands of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania into the mental Russian map proceeded at a sluggish pace. Although the Northwestern provinces continued to be considered “native” Russian territories (first and foremost those areas with a predominantly Belorussian ethnic composition), such a depiction of these borderlands only functioned as intended on the official level. Even up to the outbreak of the Great War, the region’s place

56 Dolzhenko, Istoria turizma.
within the Russian world remained poorly defined and thoroughly contradictory as evidenced by the lack of records of Russian travel through the Northwestern provinces\(^{59}\) and the small number of tour groups visiting the region from areas in the central part of the Russian Empire.

An analysis of the origin of mass tourism offers us an opportunity to follow how the strategies for integrating and protecting the empire changed and how, within this field, compulsory political and administrative measures had become increasingly intertwined with cultural techniques focused on the modeling of a collective social experience for the Romanovs’ subjects. It is worth remembering that the start of organized educational tours coincided with the emergence of experimental pedagogy: it was precisely during this time that scholars began to explore students’ attention, memory, associative thinking, and imagination in laboratory conditions. New instructional and educational methods employed by promoters of school tourism emphasized the role played by the senses and emotions over the intellect. The rise of these approaches signified an essential modernization of imperial strategies that opened qualitatively new opportunities to manipulate the consciousness of the masses.

Seeking to summarize the assertions made in this chapter, the question arises as to the specific consequences that resulted from tour organization policies. Was this approach actually effective? How did it change the worldview of people living in the Northwest Region? Did new techniques help create a modern, integrated imperial society? Unfortunately, the lack of historical data prohibits me from reaching a defined, unambiguous, and credible answer to these questions. There is no doubt that organized tourism was effective on a regional level. According to Plath, “\([v]i\)siting Heimat was a form of giving social networks... a spatial dimension and creating personal mental maps.”\(^{60}\) However, it seems that when extended to

\(^{59}\) For a comparison of the statistics on travelogues, see Sergei Mintslov, ed., *Obzor zapisok, dnevnikov, vesˇom protestov, pisem i puteshestvi, otnosicha k istorii Rossii i napravlenykh na russkom iazyke. Vypuski IV i V: Vremena imperatorov Aleksandra II, Aleksandra III i Nikolaia II.* (Novgorod: Gubernskiaia tipografia, 1912).

\(^{60}\) Plath, “Heimat: Rethinking Baltic German Spaces of Belonging,” 74.
the country-wide educative method, group travel had a contradictory effect. After an analysis of the expansion of the Russian imperial railway network, for example, Schenk perceived a certain duality. He claimed that improved transportation possibilities and the resulting increase in travel frequency not only deepened the integration of the imperial space, but also contributed to its fragmentation, by emphasizing the country’s regional differences.\textsuperscript{61} Willard Sunderland perceived a similar duality in the country’s development. In his research on Russian colonization policies, he came to the conclusion that the late imperial period witnessed the emergence of opposite processes of homogenization and differentiation because state power was used both for the unification of the empire and for the fostering of the country’s internal differences.\textsuperscript{62}

The assertion itself, nevertheless, suggests that educational tours did, in the end, have a certain influence on the mentality of imperial Russia’s subjects. However, their impact upon the human psyche was neither direct nor immediate or easily predictable. In this respect, we might recall Račkauskas’s account of his excursion to Kiev as an eloquent example of such a delayed effect. Beneath the ironic fabric of their narrative, these memoirs, written by an elderly man who had subsequent personal knowledge of the first independent Republic of Lithuania and the reality of life under Soviet occupation, reveal a nostalgic admiration for youthful adventures, which gave a young man the opportunity to see undiscovered lands and experience moving encounters with the unknown.