



Territory, enclosure, and state territorial mode of production in the Russian imperial periphery

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Abstract. After the imperial land consolidation acts of 1906, the Russian land commune became a center of territorial struggle where complex alliances of actors, strategies, and representations of territory enacted land enclosure beyond the exclusive control of the state. Using original documentation of Russian imperial land deals obtained in the federal and municipal archives, this study explores how the Russian imperial state and territories in the periphery were dialectically co-produced not only through institutional manipulations, educational programs, and resettlement plans but also through political and public discourses. This paper examines how coalitions of landed nobility and land surveyors, landless serfs, and peasant proprietors used enclosure as conduits for property violence, accumulation of capital, or, in contrast, as a means of territorial autonomy. Through this example, I bring a territorial dimension into Russian agrarian scholarship by positioning the rural politics of the late imperial period within the global context of capitalist land enclosure. At the same time, by focusing on the reading of territory from the Russian historical perspective, I introduce complexity into the modern territory discourse often found in Western political geographic interpretations.

1 Introduction

There can be, gentlemen, fateful moments in the life of the state, when state's necessity is above the law and when it is crucial to choose between the integrity of theories and the integrity of the fatherland. [...] The temporary measure is a harsh measure, it should resolve the criminal wave, it should break down the ugly phenomena, and retire into eternity. – Pyotr Stolypin (1907:433–445)¹

¹In this speech, Pyotr Stolypin delivered his intentions to employ emergency measures of a court-martial law during the revolutionary acts, the number of which increased in 1906. The statement was titled “Speech about provisional laws” and issued in the period between the First and Second Duma, uttered in the State Duma on 13 March 1907. Stolypin’s speech also explains the legal aspects of the Article #87 of the Russian Constitution that allows the repeal of any law in times of emergency. This article itself “establishes the procedure for the termination of such a temporary measure” when the necessity is over – meaning that “temporary laws can be terminated in the same order as permanent laws”.

Sovereignty implies ‘space,’ and what is more, it implies a space against which violence, whether latent or overt, is directed – a space established and constituted by violence. – Henri Lefebvre (1991:280)

Motivated by the Western liberal ideas, Pyotr Stolypin, prime minister of the Russian Empire, portrayed “exceptional measures” of land reforms as being crucial for the integrity of the state and security of the populations. The Stolypin land consolidation acts of 1906, 1910, and 1911 laid the foundation for continuous exploitation of land, customary territoriality, and human bodies in the Russian peasant land commune, an object of collective land tenure that predated serfdom. Land enclosure aimed at overcoming economic instabilities and the growing legitimation crisis of the Russian imperial state, thus assisting in the formation of a new territorial order of proprietary capitalism.

As a consequence of Stolypin’s new land policy, landless peasants, legally separated from their village communities, became an integral part of the state’s surge for industrialization, accumulation of capital, and the everyday struggle

over property in land. The former land commune became a strategic and disputed periphery open for speculations, where the hegemony of the individual, the collective, and the state was contested and challenged in the process of territorializing new socio-spatial relations of power. This collapsing of the sovereign territoriality on a local scale challenges the traditional political geographic reading of territory, which is often seen as a “state power container” formed and deformed at the national borders – the issue this paper aims to address through a historical geographic lens. I argue that in the case of Russian land enclosure, land-embodied social and ideological relations exceeded the Western regime of private property and social contract, sovereignty characterized collective territorial autonomy of the commune in contrast to the European context, and strategic territories of dispossession did not necessarily remain confined to the national frontiers.

Drawing on original records of the Russian imperial land deals that I obtained at the Russian federal and municipal archives² and popular discourses promoted by the Russian legal and political theorists through economic and agrarian periodicals, this paper explores how the Russian imperial state and territory in the land commune were dialectically co-produced through the coalitions of landed nobility and land surveyors, landless serfs, and peasant proprietors that used enclosure as a conduit for extralegal governance, accumulation of capital, or, in contrast, as a means of territorial autonomy. I argue that the Russian regime of fictitious property eroded the sovereign space of the commune to insert a new institutional structure of control and extralegal domination over land and human bodies, yet allowing space for an organized resistance by the multiplicities of actors through which territory was produced, contested, and fractured. Through this example, I bring a territorial dimension into Russian agrarian scholarship by positioning the rural politics of the late imperial period within the global context of capitalist land enclosure. At the same time, by focusing on the reading of territory from the Russian historical perspective, I introduce complexity into the territory discourse often found in Western political geographic interpretations.

In a traditional sense, the purpose of territory is often associated with state space; territory defines the operationalization of state sovereignty at the national frontiers, where, seemingly, “political-economic life is neatly separated into ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ realms” (Brenner and Elden, 2009:354). This necessity of territorial delineation for defining and legitimizing the sovereign body was emphasized by Carl Schmitt – only through territorialization, a particular social and political order of “a tribe, a retinue, or a people becomes settled” or “historically situated” in the

founding of “a city or a colony” (Schmitt, 2003:70). Only through the appropriation of land, resources, or human subjects, Schmitt argues, does the individual, the collective, or the state legitimize its sovereignty (Schmitt, 2003). As he states, “no man can give, divide, and distribute without taking, only a God, who created the world from nothing, can [...]” (Schmitt, 2003:345).

Analytical research on territory has traditionally focused on the bordering of state national limits – one of the most complex and comprehensive analyses of territorial manifestations often stemmed from the modern Eurocentric context (Giddens, 1985; Gottmann, 1973; Mann, 1984; Ruggie, 1995; Taylor, 1994). This common conception of territory does not necessarily engage with alternative modes of decentralized territorial production outside the experiences of the European nation-state and has been an important focus of scholarly critique over the last decade. More specifically, a robust field of political geographic literature is now involved in exploring the properties of territory that have been undervalued, due to the “analytic flattening” of the concept into a single meaning of the “encasing” of state sovereignty (Sassen, 2013). Approaching the subject from a decentralized (Agnew, 2005, 2015; Antonsich, 2009; Paasi, 2003; Mountz, 2013), deterritorialized (Dell’Agnese, 2013; McCann and Ward, 2010; Paasi, 2009), and decolonized perspective (Halvorsen, 2018; Routledge, 2015; Schwarz and Streule, 2016) requires at a minimum working on multiple operational scales and exploring alternative territorialities produced within the hegemonic systems of power, or what Prakash describes as that “which the dominant discourse cannot appropriate completely, an otherness that resists containment” (Prakash, 2000:288).

While Russia of the tsarist period was an expansive empire, as argues Russian cultural historian Alexander Etkind following Said’s concept of Orientalism, in political and public discourses “ethnic and cultural differences between the East Slavic peoples were denied or minimized, and class distinctions between rural, urban and noble-people were described as deep, close to racial” (Etkind et al., 2012:15). Russia “orientalized” its peasants within the central regions in a manner similar to that of the Western maritime empires in their colonies (Etkind, 2013). This drew many urban intellectuals to study the land commune as something forgotten but also foreign, or as a periphery in relation to the centers of knowledge and power. “Missionary work, ethnography and exotic travel – characteristic phenomena of colonialism”, as argues Etkind, “in Russia were turned inside its own people” (Etkind et al., 2012:15). The analysis of enclosure of the Russian peasant land commune – a subaltern subject within the territorial space of the state – has a potential to contribute to the alternative reading of territory, though it is unquestionable that Russia does not possess “any type of consciousness other than Eurocentrism” (Morozov, 2015:5). Land appropriation in Russia is a familiar story, yet it was guided by multiple historical legacies of the collective land ownership

²Data for this research were collected in the winter of 2017 in the Russian federal and municipal archives – Central State Archive of the City of Moscow (TsMAM), Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), and State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF).

and fictitious private property, centralized state oppression, and stateless territorial autonomy of the commune. Territorialization of the regime of private property in the commune was achieved through meticulous institutional arrangements, educational programs, or everyday representations of territory through exemplary farm movements, maps, public announcements, and other encounters, which this paper examines in detail.

In the next section, I unpack my conceptual readings of the state and territory nexus borrowed from the Agambenian reworking of the “state of exception” as a decisional power of the subject to include spaces and human bodies under the law, or under control, through their subsequent enclosure and exclusion. I highlight the relevance of Agamben’s work for making sense of the crisis-fueled dynamics of enclosure and the legitimation of property violence through exceptional political technologies that allow for state territorialization on a local scale. In the section that follows, I introduce the territorial construction of the Russian land commune as a sovereign entity formed through an array of competing knowledge, interests, and practices that the state and the peasants prescribed to it. Section 4 explores the exceptional measures of enclosure and unpacks three modes of the state territorial production in the Russian imperial periphery, namely territorial regulation and institutional fragmentation of the commune, representational measures of the territory of property, and material homogenization of space under a new measure of the land. In the final section, I reflect upon the historiography of the Russian land enclosure to highlight the main theoretical insights that it could introduce into the traditional Western debate on territory.

2 State territorial mode of production

Jean Gottmann, in his seminal work *Significance of Territory* (1973), explores the idea of territory through the triad of “security, opportunity, and happiness” within recognized frontiers. Building on a genealogical account of world territorial repartitioning observed through the influential works of Enlightenment thinkers, his project reproduces the Eurocentric preoccupation with questions of territorial integrity and fundamental rule of the state upon the formation and fixing of national borders. Gottmann emphasizes a shift from space as a means of safety, shelter, and survival to space as a means of power, to later develop an argument that territory should be “defined by the unity of government”, for the “civilized man would not live by security alone” (Gottmann, 1973). Territory, for Gottmann, is an intangible entity, as it is “not the ‘body politic’ which is people, but the support on which the body politic rests and without which it lacks balance and position in space”; territory resembles the exercise of state sovereignty (Gottmann, 1973:14).

The “state territorial mode of production” mobilizes institutional power to reshape spaces of capital, “subjecting

them, simultaneously, to processes of fragmentation, hierarchization, and homogenization” on both spatial and institutional levels (Brenner and Elden, 2009:359). As argued Henri Lefebvre, homogenization of territory, organized following the regular and repetitive rationality, allows the state to “introduce its presence, control, and surveillance in the most isolated corners” (Lefebvre, 2008:86). Yet, as many recently argued, sovereign power is “neither inherently territorial nor is it exclusively organized on a state-by-state basis” (Agnew, 2005:437). The recent focus on spatial relations of sovereignty has shifted scales to explore the “more ambiguous spatial arrangements” or “‘gray’ zones through which sovereign power operates,” calling for a more nuanced engagement with alternative modes of territorialization and referring to a decentralized category of territory to explain these trends (Mountz, 2013:830). Following these insights, this paper examines the shifting scales of power by mapping complex geographies of enclosure aimed at meticulous territorialization of the regime of private property inside the sovereign space of the Russian land commune.

Territory, as a strategic political technology and a contested social practice, maintains its legitimacy through the workings of exclusion, particularly in times of crisis; it too, as argues Stuart Elden, exercises the right of expelling or terrifying (2010, 2013). This recalls the Agambenian rereading and reworking of the state of exception that allows one to trace the architecture of the sovereign – whether the individual, the collective, or the state – and its ability to exclude territories, identities, and human life from the law and by the law itself, to preserve the political order in times of emergency (Agamben, 1998, 2005). Exception here is an “ontological dispositif” of enclosure, whereby previous territorial structures are enclosed, expelled, and released for appropriation, distribution, and new modes of production (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2012, 2015; Rossi, 2012). It is through enclosure that exception materializes itself in space, allowing for the formation of a new territorial order and its successive suspension in times of economic and political instabilities (Belcher et al., 2008; Minca, 2006, 2007).

The same argument, however, can be applied to the territory of property, where places and bodies are legally recognized and secured through their subsequent exclusion and separation from the outside – the political legal outcome of the workings of enclosure. Property is also “premised on spatial exclusivity” (Blomley, 2016:593) – the existence of property relies explicitly on the domain of non-property (Blomley, 2003, 2017; Cohen, 1927). The “constitutive outside” of the property is the common – where there is the common, there are lawlessness and chaos; where there is property, there are law and order (Blomley, 2003). This theoretical focus on the territory of property does not necessarily abandon the state; it allows for a more nuanced and decentralized treatment of competing territorial strategies as they relate to the workings of space, power, and capital, but on multiple spatial scales. Historiography of the Russian land enclosure

offers a unique opportunity to trace and expose similar dynamics.

The legitimization crisis of the Russian imperial state, peasant uprisings of 1905, agrarian crisis, and the defeat of Russia in the Japanese and Crimean wars have granted the state a decisional power to pursue land consolidation. “Aiming that the poor will sell their land and leave for cities and the rich will buy more land and normalize agricultural production,” many thought land reforms would solve and offset the crisis of Russian imperialism (Medushevsky, 2015:287). In this surge for privatization, the imperial periphery became the stake and the medium of crisis management. Russian land consolidation acts of 1906, 1910, and 1911 granted the peasants a right to exit the commune and to secure private ownership of consolidated land plots, followed by the elimination of the commune at last. It is by enclosing and excluding the land commune from the law that the state included it and its members under the political and juridical recognition, under the state of exception.

In the next section, I consider a set of contested territorialities that shaped the space of the commune, against which enclosure would operate through new technologies of exception, exclusion, and property, and which different actors would employ to exercise domination, or in contrast, achieve territorial autonomy. This is not limited to the representations of territory or ways in which territory of the commune was perceived, imagined, and symbolized by different actors, but also includes its material and lived dimensions, or territories of representation, that exhibit the ways in which the territorial construction of the commune was materialized through the everyday experiences and physical encounters by various users and inhabitants.

3 Contested territorialities in the Russian peasant land commune

The centuries-old culture of commoning – collective production of space, knowledge, and personhood in the Russian imperial periphery – was embedded in the Slavic settler territoriality and a long-lived legacy of the collective struggle of peasantry over land. The meaning of the commune as a collective right to territory was contested. Urban intellectuals and members of the intelligentsia termed the commune *obshchina*, a unit of land use, or *sel'skoe obshchestvo*, an official administrative unit institutionalized in 1861. Both terms are derived from the same root as “society” or the “common” (*obshchestvo* or *obshchii*). Yet in contrast, peasants used an older term *mir* to describe the collective land tenure, meaning in the Russian language the “world” or “peace” (Lewin, 1990:20). In the minds of the masses, land was “no one’s” and “God’s property” (Peshehonov, 1907) – “people used land and landed resources like air, and no one had in mind, that it could be turned into an exclusive usage or even ownership” (Witte, 1923:407).

The land commune was a complex territorial entity in its own right. In regard to the territorial delineation of the post-emancipation *mir*, one could identify the manor lands divided into courtyards and arable lands divided into strips, along with hayfields, forests, and pastures – as described a peasant from Vashutino village in Moscow *uyezd* that participated in the Free Economic Society Survey in 1890 (RGIA, 91.2.776, 1879).³ Land redistribution among the emancipated peasants was organized around a normative unit based on either demographic characteristics, such as the amount of male power or “male souls” (*dushy*), number of “eaters” (*edoki*), and “foreheads” (*lby*), or socioeconomic parameters, such as the size of capital stock (*kopeiki*) or amount of “good” or “bad” land divided into quarters (*sokhi*) (Barykov et al., 1880:8). Most communes underwent yearly land repartitioning to meet changes in the demographic composition or to adapt to economic instabilities. This right to communal territorialization defined the very essence of *obshchina* and was seen by many as one of the critical functions of peasant economy, with little or no analog found in world history (Nafziger, 2016; Pallot, 1999; Zyrianov, 1992).

Some later claimed that the sacral attachment of the Russian peasants to the land had, in fact, no evidence in real life and was a common over-romanticized assumption often applied to a subaltern subject. This sentiment, as argued Richard Pipes, was to be found “mainly in the imagination of gentry romantics who visited their estates in the summertime” (Pipes, 1974:156). Others believed the commune was a mechanism of state control and a tool for tying people to the soil – one of the main aspects and goals of serfdom. Prior to the Emancipation Reform of 1861, the peasants were attached to the commune where it existed. Elsewhere, this attachment was introduced by the state. The state was aware that if peasants were allowed to abandon the land they would “roam the country in search of easier and more remunerative work” (Pipes, 1974:164).

The earth held the peasant in its grip, sometimes giving, sometimes withholding, forever mysterious and capricious. He [peasant] fled it as eagerly as he fled the landlord and the official, turning to peddling, handicrafts, casual labor in the cities or any other work that would free him from the drudgery of field work (Pipes, 1974:156).

Boris Chicherin, political philosopher and jurist of the Russian Empire, described the commune as a “family at large” and the “owner of the land” (Chicherin, 1856:374). This patriarchal nature of the Russian sociopolitical order in which “family was a prototype of the people” distinguished the Russian land commune from the feudal societies in Europe, where communal or cooperative relations were estab-

³This abbreviation marks the location of archival documentation in the Russian state archives, where, for example, “91.2.776” refers to repository no. 91, inventory no. 2, case no. 776.

lished by the legislative and governmental measures from above (Chicherin, 1856:375). For instance, a custom of equal land repartitioning, a core territorial identity of *obshchina*, evolved from the ancient origins of the old Russian law, namely from the inseparability of family's property, in contrast to the individual property rights found in Western traditions. Chicherin, too, compared the Russian peasant land commune to the holy public land or *ager sacer* and *ager publicus* of patrician Rome, land use in Greek Sparta, and Jewish communities that restricted private property in favor of the common. Yet, in his article in the journal *Russian Herald* (*Russkii Vestnik*) Chicherin concludes that the late imperial *obshchina* became a "fictitious phenomenon," corrupted by the invasion of Western ethnic groups and a new communal order of *druzhina*, a retinue in service of a chief – "from a means of kinship, [the commune] became a means of social contract" (Chicherin, 1856).

Contrary to Chicherin's historical findings, another legal thinker and Slavophile of the Russian Empire, Vasily Leshkov, saw the commune as an embryo of the institute of public law – "communal ownership offered *obshchina* not only 'dominium' over land, but partial 'imperium' over its institutional structure," or territorial integrity (Peshehonov, 1907:199). Comparing communal territoriality to sovereignty, Leshkov thought that within defined borders, *obshchina* exercised the right of the people to the land and the right of the commune to the people. As he writes, the commune's hegemony over territory, or "distrustful isolation of the Russian land commune" could be seen through an "example when nobody was allowed to enter a village without calling out a *znatok*, a citizen, who would know a guest and would vouch for him in front of the commune" (Leshkov, 1858:209).

The Russian communal territoriality was a partial but distinct jurisdiction under imperial and, later, socialist regimes – it was both the political technology crucial for the security of the state and the autonomous customary land law in its own right. The commune simultaneously exercised and conceived sovereign territoriality, in part by extending the rule over territory and the people through customary techniques of land repartitioning and sacred legacy that portrayed the commune as the "great truth" or God's property (Frierson, 1993). However, in the turn of the twentieth century, *obshchina* became a disputed ground for debate about the backwardness of the Russian economy in relation to the West. Discussions around the nature of *obshchina* and its part in the Russian economic development diverged – proponents of the centralization and representatives of the Russian "state school" saw the commune as a "fiscal-administrative device created by the state" in the modern time; the Slavophiles insisted on the ancient origins of the commune and its emancipatory capacity to "accommodate social needs [...] and interests of the people," while the populist proto-socialist intellectual groups praised the commune's potential to achieve the "highest socialist form skipping [the stage of] the negation of

private property."⁴ At last, the commune exercised the "autonomous alternative sociality", which represented the possibility of a revolutionary separation from the logic of power and capital (Atkinson, 1983).

On the eve of the reforms, the Russian peasant economy was depicted as a backward project, in contrast to the progressive economy of the West. While the English yeoman could sell his farm and use the funds for investing outside of agriculture, the member of the Russian land commune was attached to the soil through redemption payments, which, as argued a liberal historian Alexander Gerschenkron, was the most irrational feature of the Russian peasant economy (Gerschenkron, 1962). Gerschenkron's mainly economic, limited treatment of backwardness reinforced the "fixed geographic opposites in Europe – England as the extreme West, Russia as the extreme East," the advanced and the primitive (Kotsonis, 1999:5). The peasants were made backward, and the backwardness was a project that legitimized property violence within the land commune. As writes Yanni Kotsonis, "society," or *obshchestvo*, in 1914 characterized membership of a "small educated or propertied elite that was 'cultured' or 'civilized', and was used in contradiction to the 'people', the '*narod*', or 'depersonalized masses'" (Kotsonis, 1999:7). These hegemonic discourses fractured identity of *obshchina* and externalized the collective from the individual. Being outside of all political matters, the peasant was put outside of the society, outside of advanced cities, and hence outside the Western democratic principles.

The Russian land commune, though a defining feature of the rural society throughout centuries, was not an ahistorical phenomenon, while the origins of the commune as an archaic system of social organization or a form of the redistributive land tenure were often a heated subject for debate (Bartlett, 1990:38). The territorial organization of the commune also varied; though collective land tenure stretched from central European Russia to Siberia, regional differences and distance from the centers of power created a wide variety of territorial patterns (Alekseev, 1966; Kochin, 1965; Shapiro, 1976). Yet, studying the commune as a contested historical geographic phenomenon comprised of different meanings and territorial manifestations, versus seeing it as a fixed temporal and spatial container, can help to illustrate the complexity of overlapping territorialities, which would later serve as the very infrastructure for capitalist development.

4 Exceptional measures of land enclosure

Richard Pipes once argued that Russia's main difference from its Western counterparts was that Russia's empire and the nation-state arose concurrently and not consequentially

⁴The debate on the role of the commune in economic development of Russia has been examined by many prominent scholars. For a more detailed examination of overlapping political and intellectual discourses please see Atkinson (1983:21) and Shanin (1985:78).

as in the West, which made for “close identification between national and imperial identity” (Pipes, 1996). Starting with Peter’s *ukazy* (decrees) new project of state building implied a fundamental shift “from the ‘property of the tsar’ into a ‘commonwealth,’ an impersonal *partie* or fatherland in which every member had an equal stake and to which everyone was naturally attached” (Greenfeld, 1992:192). This process followed different insights unlike those for building an empire – “while the essence of the former consisted in the elimination of internal differences, imperial administrations sought to maintain and institutionalize them” (Etkind et al., 2012:2017). Development of the new national identity required making peasants into citizens while still holding centralized control over their life (Etkind et al., 2012; Gerasimov, 2004; Gerasimov et al., 2009; Kotsonis, 1999).

Along with the growing legitimation crisis of the Russian imperial state, rapid population growth in the commune increased reliance on land for peasants’ wellbeing. The crop failure in 1891 caused a severe famine accompanied by a typhus and cholera epidemic and followed by escalating land prices that rose from 12.6 rubles per *desiatina*⁵ to over 100 rubles by 1910 (Atkinson, 1983). The Russian countryside, which was already weakened by lifted tax obligations due to the defeat of Russia in the Crimean war, organized into an agrarian revolution in 1905, opening eyes to the likelihood of the backwardness of the Russian peasant economy and a long-coming dissolution of the Russian Empire (Gerschenkron, 1962).

Peasant relations prior the reforms were “neither subject to nor protected by the laws of the tsarist government” and followed local customs of land organization rather than state law (Yaney, 1964:279). Without the means of legal contract, little or no land organization was controlled or recognized by the state and the police filled the institutional gap (Yaney, 1964). Sergei Witte, an econometrician and prime minister of the Russian Empire under Alexander III, assigned problems of the Russian economic development to the political–legal and not political–economic organization of the peasant economy. Witte propagated the principle of individual ownership in land and claimed that the commune is “only a stage in the life of the peoples; with the development of culture and statehood, ownership must inevitably pass into the hands of the individuals, into private property; ‘I’ organizes and moves everything.” (Witte, 1923:405). Russian jurist and a politician Vladimir Gessen summarized this point well – “where the legal order is almost non-existent and arbitrary rule prevails, correct economic activity is impossible and at the same time is impossible the lasting well-being of the population” (Gessen, 1904:42).

The land reform has attempted a revolution in the legal system of governance – the commune was recognized under the state law after its subsequent enclosure and exclu-

sion. This political legal and political strategic aspects of territorialization of the regime of private property became the first goal of enclosure. Considering the legal autonomy and sacral legacy of *obshchina*, the state had to penetrate the communal structural organization from within through regulation and institutional innovations, representational practices, and material technologies of enclosure – three modes of territorialization that I review below. These practices and livelihoods they embraced were legitimized by numerous orders, decrees, and subsidies and through the everyday encounters of peasant households with the police, land surveyors, agronomists, banking officials, church, and nobility, which unveiled enclosure’s multiscale rationality.

The extralegal character of the reforms is still a contested subject open for debate since much of Russia was under martial law in the period of enclosure. Regulation on military courts, proposed by the Council of Ministers on 19 August 1906, was set to speed up the legal proceedings in cases of civilians accused of robbery, murder, attacks on the officials, and other crimes, for which there was no apparent need for additional investigation. From 1906 to 1907, military courts were established in 82 of the 87 provinces that were considered under emergency protection. In a state of exception, enclosure of the land commune has emerged as a daily practice of extralegal territorialization and decentralization of state power, whereby the commune became instrumental to the security and integrity of the state.

4.1 Territorial regulation and institutional fragmentation in the commune: *Zemstva*, *skhod*, and land settlement commissions

Prior to enclosure, the commune’s peasant assembly regularly gathered to repartition land parcels, synchronize agricultural operations, and delineate the commons for everyone’s free use. These meetings, or *skhod*, were the core of the commune’s autonomous social reproduction from the bottom up. *Zemstvo*, an assembly of rural self-government, represented proprietors, landed gentry, and land communes at the institutional levels of provinces and districts. Both rural organizations acted as local agents in the implementation of the reforms. *Zemstvo*, whose interests were aligned with the plans of the ministers, received subsidies to assist communes in the process of land consolidation, while *skhod* became a vehicle for delivering news about the reform, approving separation of the individual farms, and working out land delineation projects in collaboration with the agronomists. Yet, if the *skhod* withheld the approval of land organization, the state would employ compulsory procedures to pursue enclosure (Atkinson, 1983; Pallot, 1999). Even though *skhod* was relatively ineffective at preventing enclosure, it was still one of the few oppositional forces. As Pallot argued, the participation of the *skhod* in the reforms “also enabled it to become the principal locus of resistance to it” (Pallot, 1999:172).

⁵A *desiatina* was a unit of area in imperial Russia, approximately equal to 1 ha.

New land settlement commissions were established on district and provincial levels to oversee the process of physical rearrangement of land under the supervision of the Chief Committee for Land Settlement. District land settlement commissions were comprised of the members of the nobility, a representative of the judiciary, a tax inspector, and a land captain, appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture (Atkinson, 1983:64), along with the members of the locality – those “familiar with the area, people with higher education in law or agronomy, or those who held administrative positions beforehand” (TsMAM, 369.4.1, 1906). Provincial land settlement commissions, however, included local members of peasant assemblies and nobles of the province, along with powerful representatives of the financial institutions such as the Peasants’ Land Bank, the Nobles’ Land Bank, and the regional offices of crown lands (Atkinson, 1983). This expanding network of state representatives occupied the commune – in 1913, 463 district land settlement commissions resided in 468 districts across the European part of Russia, and by 1914 “they had some 1600 agronomists in the field, along with 2000 assistants, and 800 land organization specialists” (Atkinson, 1983:65). *Skhod, zemstvo*, land settlement commissions, and newly arrived agronomists all mobilized peasants in different ways, by guiding enclosure, delivering instrumental changes, or obtaining subsidies for continuing communal farming within the constraints of the reform.

In the process of land enclosure, the commune became a new object of science. Alexander Chaianov, a scholar of social agronomy, developed a set of guidelines for disciplining the peasantry through working the land, described in the new manuals of social agronomy. Following these scientific suggestions, Alexander Krivoshein, the minister of agriculture and executive administrator of the reforms, wrote a petition asking all agronomists to reside in the villages as long as possible in order to obtain trust from the peasants and implement more comprehensive changes (RGIA, 408.1.153, 1910). As some peasants of the Lugansk governorate described in their official complaint forms – soon for every 50 households there will be assigned one agronomist, “neither to plow, nor to sow, nor to mill, nor even bake or cook anything the peasants cannot dare without his permission” (RGIA, 408.1.153, 1910). The agronomists had to be supported by the peasants themselves, who were paying a third of the profit for agronomist work, or as some described, “the third egg from every chicken” (RGIA, 408.1.153, 1910).

State strategies to secure hegemony over territory from within the commune either eroded commune’s autonomy or strengthened it. Some land communes, with the help of land settlement commissions, pursued the wholesale land enclosure in order to escape the rule of the reforms and to regain the collective control over land – they would continue communal land repartitioning across the strict boundaries drawn by land surveyors. While others exploited involvement of the peasant assembly in land reforms in order to organize boycotts or refuse to participate in the elections of land

settlement commissions or other state-led activities (GARF, 102.116.42, 1907).

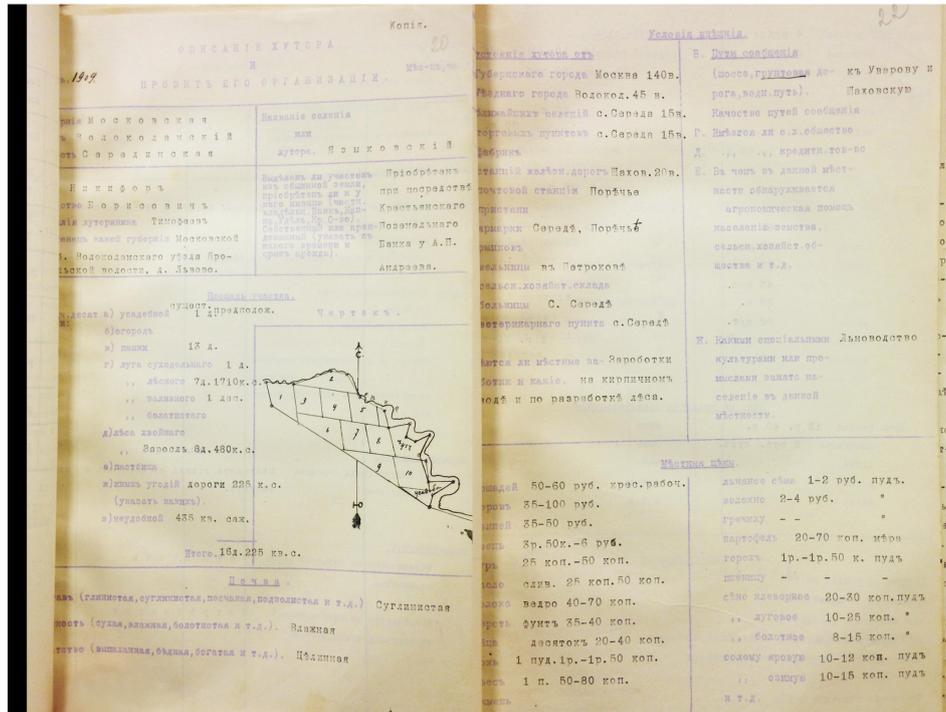
4.2 Representational measures of the territory of property: tours, exhibitions, and archetypal farms

From the physical consolidation of land plots to prescribed guidelines for homestead design, the elimination of the peasant land commune became a project of the emergent capitalist economy. Among many representational practices of private property were projects of public demonstrations of the archetypal farms, fields, and housing estates. Through these exhibitions, the new territorial organization of an enclosed land parcel was set up before the viewer to guide privatization and promote a new form of possessive individualism. These were to “serve as practically an agrarian school that would teach application of ready-to-make husbandry models, [...] and offer a manual for producing a more or less systematic knowledge of [rational] land management” as described Pavel Sokovnin, director of the Chief Committee for Land Settlement (TsMAM, 369.4.34, 1908:26). The archetypal farm exhibitions were accompanied by organized excursions of peasants to sites of the exhibits, the distribution of specialized literature, public lectures, meetings with agronomists, and demonstrations of innovative methods of crop rotation and the use of fertilizers.

Physical organization of the archetypal farms unfolded on the land of educational institutions, scientific societies, agrarian farms, or estates acquired by the Peasants’ Land Bank (TsMAM, 369.4.34, 1908:26) – chosen places were easily accessible and visible to the peasants. As described in the Journal of the Economic Council of Mozhaik *zemstvo* of 26 May 1908, setting up these demonstrations on the land of educational institutions would “give students a chance to always have before the eyes a properly organized husbandry that could have been conducted under the normal economic conditions” (TsMAM, 369.4.34:53). These representational territories were set as a golden standard against which one could measure, compare, and evaluate the rate of agricultural production of a peasant household and its gradual improvement (see Fig. 1).

Most of the archetypal farms were advertised for rental purposes with a right to buy that could be obtained after all requirements were met and tested during the two or three full cycles of crop rotation, “not earlier than 8 and not later than 20 years of operation” (TsMAM, 369.4.34, 1908:31). The rental agreement followed a set of mandatory recommendations proposed by the Chief Committee for Land Settlement in 1908. The leaseholder was supposed to “keep the economy in compliance with all requirements established by the ‘organizational plan,’ to record the yields in a particular book issued to him, to allow the agronomists to inspect and supervise the agricultural production, to pay all costs, and to be responsible for the integrity of the property,” as out-

(a)



(b)

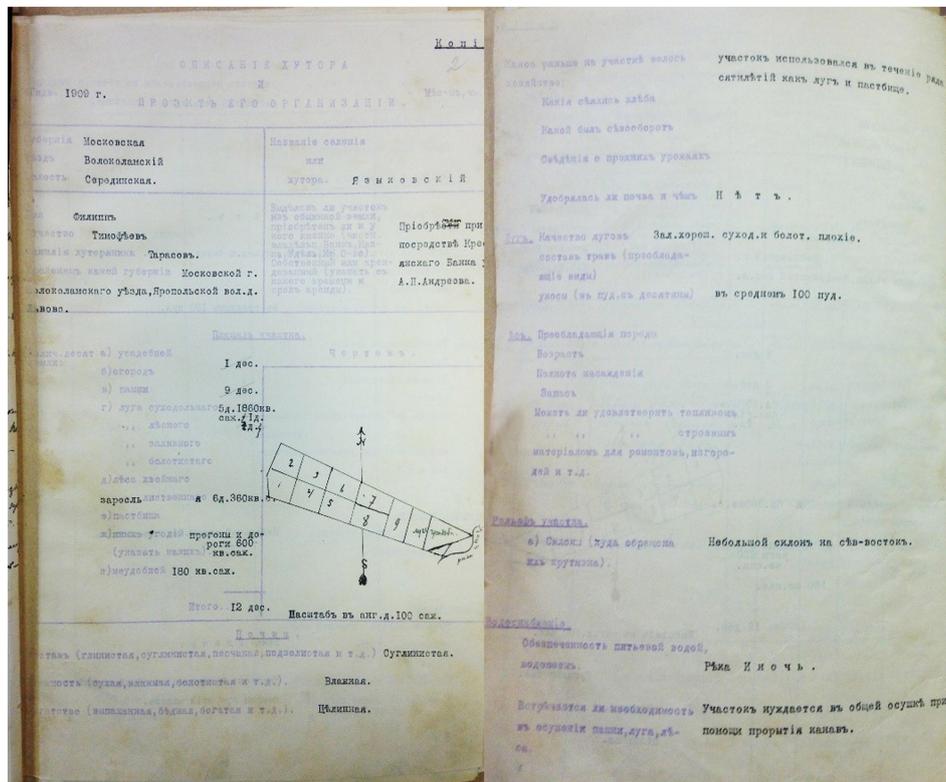


Figure 1. Examples of a protocol filled by an owner of a model farm, which contained questions about the physical delineation of land into crop fields, area of a plot, quality of soil, distance to the nearest city, and prices of agricultural commodities. (a) Protocol for the farm of Nikifor Timofeev in Moscow governorate; (b) protocol for the farm of Phillip Tarasov in the same location (source: TsMAM, 369.4.34, 1909).

lined Sokovnin in the proposed project (TsMAM, 369.4.34, 1908:26).

The organizational plan of an archetypal farm was developed “on the basis of agricultural science and praxis” following established norms and standards for the typology of crop rotation, the number of livestock heads, quantity and quality of fertilizer, plant diversity, and number of products subject to exemption. These meticulous guidelines were monitored by local agronomists assigned by the government or the local *skhod*. All results of farming on the model fields were to be announced at regional agricultural exhibitions, public hearings, and meetings, where the most productive households would receive awards, medals, and monetary compensation (TsMAM, 369.4.34, 1908:31). In 1914 alone, when the reforms were losing their traction, 555 demonstration activities were organized, with 17 exemplary farms, 11 exemplary fields, and 527 homesteads (Romashova, 2004:25). Public excursions to the site of exhibitions were mandatory and arranged in every commune by the district land settlement commissions. Yet, these were also known to be avenues for protests – entire communities would resist the tours by simply refusing to join the excursion or volunteer for the land organization.

This territorial imagery, showcased before the landless peasant, was foremost performative rather than representational. It not only conveyed the changing conception of property’s spatiality but created a basis for control and surveillance in the land commune against which to evaluate the agrarian productivity of a separated household. In analogy to the English husbandry manuals, exemplary farm movements provided the commune with new measures of the land, and, most of all, with a new image of the individual.

4.3 Material technologies of enclosure and homogenization of communal territoriality

Concomitant to the homogenization of institutional and regulatory structure in the commune, there was also a tendency to spatial homogenization, as the former commune was broken into individual farms, eroding customary practices of collective land management (see Fig. 2). Territorial delineation of landed property followed complex guidelines outlined and institutionalized in the Land Organization Statute of 29 May 1911. If the physical separation of land holdings was not feasible, the households stayed in the village, retained their homes, and united separated strips of land under the tenure of an *otrub*. If the consolidated farm was transferred from the village into the field, the tenure carried a name of a *khutor* and was a preferred form of land organization by the Ministry of Agriculture since it resembled a physically separated individual property of a regular rectangular or circular shape (Chernyshev, 1917; Kofod, 1913).

Andrey Kofod, a chief inspector of the land reform, proposed at least four distinct spatial variations of privatized farms, which diverged from the panoptic territorial arrange-

ment of round or squared shape *khutora*, where, as he emphasized, “the farmer’s wife would be able to call her husband for lunch from the furthest corner of the house” to more prolonged farms with “the length of the plot being not more than 4 times bigger than its width” (RGIA, 408.1.272, 1914:61). These new recommendations were supposed to normalize what many called “land scattering” or *cherezpolositsa*, in which land strips of one household were scattered across the field as a result of land repartitioning. The commons, such as pastures, forests, or lakes, as Kofod believed, were “absolutely not compatible with enclosed farms” and had to be divided among adjacent households (RGIA, 408.1.272, 1914:62). Kofod’s guidelines attempted to establish a unified territorial order in the periphery, the one that “broke the close-knit mass of peasants” with its new borders, as peasants emphasized in the anonymous report titled *Land Disorder* (RGIA, 408.1.153, 1910:70).

One could argue this was an arrangement that supported contradictory movement among homogenization, territorial fragmentation, and hierarchization of space to reinforce the logics of power, through which territory was emptied of any differences and organized under a standardized and rational territorial order to ease the circulation of capital in land. Polish economic historian Witold Kula saw a unified measure of land, resources, and things to evolve from the “techniques of production, to means of packaging and transport, and finally to the needs of consumption” – measuring opened a possibility for deceit (Kula, 2014 [1986]). As Kula argued in his work titled *Measures and Men*, in the biblical tradition the notion of the measure was associated with cheating, “it symbolized the loss of primeval happiness, and it derived directly from original sin” (Kula, 2014 [1986]:3). The new measure of the land in the Russian imperial periphery was established and legitimized through different mechanisms, from husbandry manuals, archetypal farm movements, to mandatory annual reports and agrarian exhibitions, while most pre-enclosure measures that guided peasant practices of everyday territorialization were human in scale (Scott, 1998).

5 Discussion

Territories produce and are produced by the social relations of power. Reading territory from a Russian historical perspective allows an examination that reveals from the archive an array of alternative territorialities against which different actors exercised enclosure to achieve coercive control, hegemony, or, in contrast, territorial autonomy. The Russian land commune was as much a state project as it was a customary territorial order that offered a means of shelter and safety to some 12 million peasant households in a time of prolonged crisis of Russian imperialism. Contested meanings and practices that different actors prescribed to *obshchina* shaped its unique identity and place in Russian rural society as both a sacred structure of land organization based on family ties and

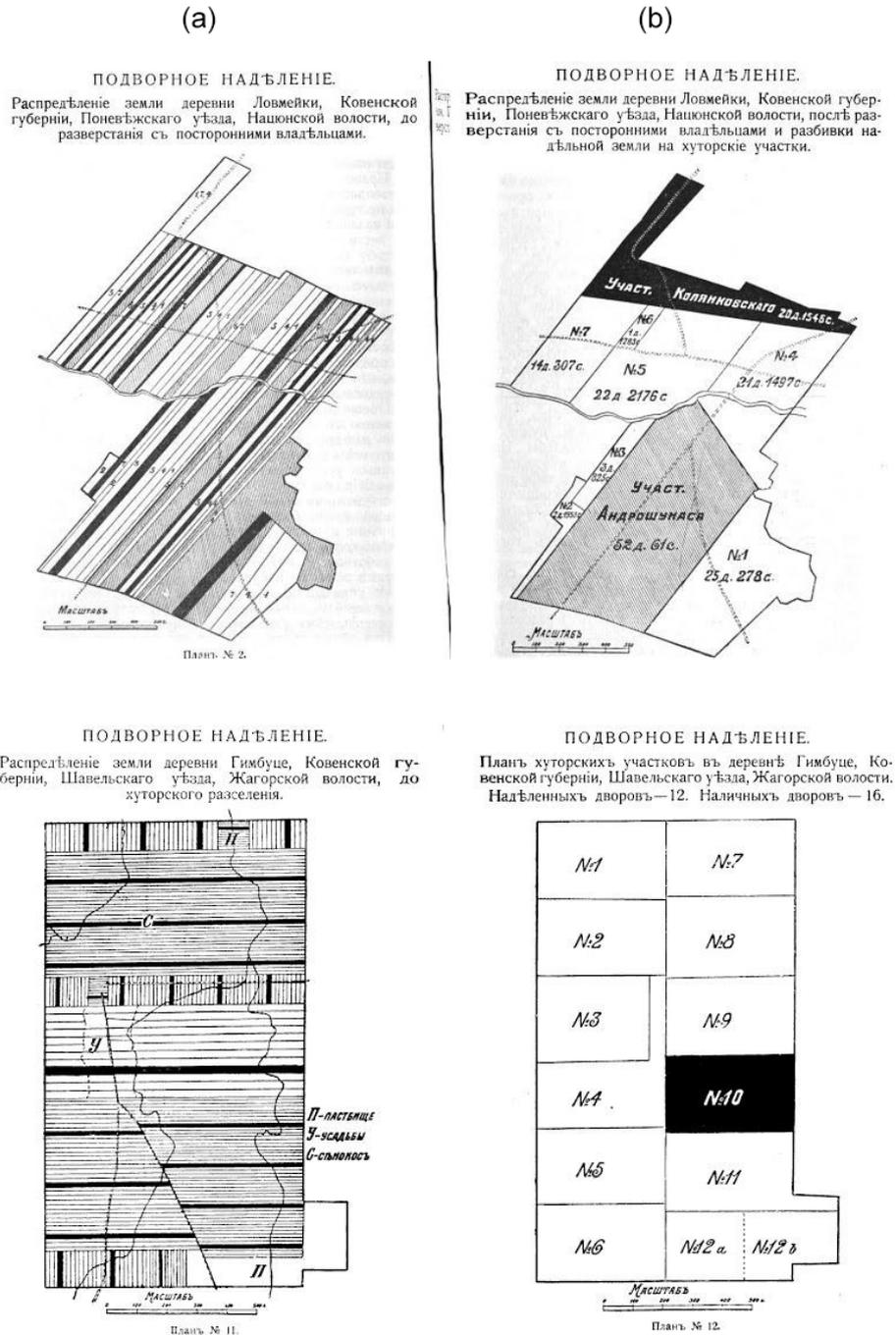


Figure 2. Different examples of land redivision in a commune, before (a) and after (b) land consolidation into enclosed farms. All examples are listed in a set of land settlement guidelines created by Andrey Kofod, a chief inspector for the land reform in the Russian Empire (source: Kofod, 1907:40–47)

a source of state oppression integral to the feudal political order.

In times of crisis, the land commune not only offered a pool of free workers but also an age-old heritage of collective identity, cooperation, and the multitude that was exploited by the multiplicities of actors in the pursuit of the proprietary

capitalist project. Though the Russian imperial state accommodated dissolution of the commune, it also gave rise to resistance across the borders of fragmented individual farms. The enclosed *obshchiny* continued customary practices of land management within the constraints of private property. Russian imperial land reforms did not achieve expected out-

comes and the land commune was revived by the new socialist power to signify an entirely different set of meanings, imaginations, and practices, thus giving rise to a new form of communal territoriality.⁶ If one were to consider *obshchina* as a spatial or temporal container, they would see a mere co-operation of peasants in a defined territorial area controlled by the state and would fail to grasp the essence of the commune as a core of collective domesticity, identity, and personhood – features that remain crucial in the struggle for social and territorial autonomy under Russian state capitalism today.

The enclosure of the Russian land commune is not reminiscent of the feudalist rule or capitalist transitions in a specific region but is an integral part of a long-lived legacy of the territorial struggle, which cuts across prescribed national and historical boundaries. Instead of extracting and essentializing the unique Russian experience of the production of territory, this work uses Russian examples to offer complexity into the traditional territory debate often seen through a Eurocentric lens. Many scholars of Slavic and Eurasian studies fall into a danger of extracting a particular “Russian imperial,” “socialist,” or “post-socialist” experience as a regional or temporal container (Tuvikene, 2016), thus reproducing limited knowledge of the subject, instead of recognizing global similarities in the struggles over commoning and occupation of space, work, and personhood, shared across many societies today. Seeing enclosure of the commune as an ordinary experience allows one to compare this case to the broader collective practices and customary forms of property in many early settled societies and communities from the Roman slave-owning landed estates *latifundia*, Mexican communal farms *ejidos*, East African kinship-based territorial formations, or other examples that cut across the limits of regional or historical scholarship (Cymet, 1992; Jones and Ward, 1998; Ship-ton and Goheen, 1992).

Bringing studies of the Russian land commune into the Western debate on territory, in particular, offers a wealth of scenarios that connect regionally specific knowledge of territory to the utopian state projects and practices of hegemonic land control (Scott, 1998; Peluso and Lund, 2011), legitimation of the territory of property and development of new measures of the land (Kula, 2014 [1986]; Blomley, 2016), and customary peasant territoriality that have now vanished (Marx, 1976 [1887]; Luxemburg, 2003 [1951]). Unraveling these disputed representations of territory in the Russian imperial periphery has the potential to offer a more nuanced debate on territory approached from a decolonized and decentralized perspective and hence to join a growing field of scholarship emerging in the recent years. The enclosure of the Russian land commune was not an exception but poten-

tially a part of a global mosaic of appropriation of space, personhood, and human bodies that still provides an illusory solution to the perpetuating state of crisis under capitalism today.

Data availability. The data that support the findings of this study are available on request to the Russian State Historical Archive, the State Archive of the Russian Federation, and the Central Municipal Archive of Moscow.

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⁶In a period from 1907 to 1915 about 2 million households left the commune, which constituted only 10 % of all peasant families, yet in 1927 as much as 91 % of peasant land was again under the communal tenure.

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