# "Power of the Land": The Formation of New Otherness under Frontier Conditions. Translation from Russian[1]

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## Abstract

The article is devoted to a very important issue of the cultural transformation of a settler or a colonist who finds himself in the new natural and cultural conditions of frontier heterotopia. The new space absorbs and consumes the subject, forcing one to constantly transgress. Coming into contact with the Alien, the subject constantly transforms, becoming the Other for the representatives of his indigenous culture. An external observer finds in one more common features with the Alien, the bearer of the local tradition, than with the representatives of the ethnic community from which one came. A settler demonstrates his closeness with this Alien everywhere, dressing like him, speaking his language, adopting his alimentary traditions, etc. All this leads to the settler developing a new worldview that brings him closer to the local peoples and distances him from his own ethnic group. As a result, a new regional sub-ethnic community is formed, aware of its special identity. We find such a model of integration into new natural and cultural realities everywhere, be it the American continent, the Caucasus, or Siberia. This was especially evident in Siberia, where contact with local peoples and a special natural environment gave rise to a new sub-ethnic community — the Sibiryak (Siberian), who is clearly aware of the exclusivity and differences from Russians. Without separating themselves from Russians in general, Siberians nevertheless declare their differences from other peoples, which is manifested in a special mentality, special behavioral patterns, etc.

## Keywords

Frontier; Alien; Other; Transgression; Cultural Transformation; Cultural Landscape; Identity

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# «Власть земли»: формирование новой инаковости в условиях фронтира. Перевод с русского языка[1]

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## Аннотация

Статья посвящена очень важному вопросу культурной трансформации переселенца или колониста, оказавшегося в новых природных и культурных условиях фронтирной гетеротопии. Новое пространство вбирает субъекта, поглощает его, заставляя постоянно трансгрессировать. Соприкасаясь с Чужим, субъект постоянно трансформируется, становясь Другим для представителей его культуры. Внешний наблюдатель обнаруживает в нем больше общих черт с Чужим, носителем местной традиции, чем с представителями той этнической общности, из которой он вышел. Он повсеместно демонстрирует свою близость с этим Чужим, одеваясь как он, говоря на его языке, переходя к его алиментарной традиции и т.д. Все это приводит к тому, что у переселенца выстраивается новая картина мира, сближающая его с местными народами и отдаляющая его от своего от этноса. В результате образуется новая региональная субэтническая общность, осознающая свою особую идентичность. Подобную модель встраивания в новые природные и культурные реалии мы обнаруживаем повсеместно, будь то американский континент, Кавказ или Сибирь. Особенно ярко это проявилось в Сибири, где соприкосновение с местными народами и особая природная среда породили новую субэтническую общность – сибиряк, четко осознающую свою исключительность и свои отличия от русских. Не отделяя себя от русских в целом, сибиряки тем не менее заявляют о своих отличиях от других народов, что проявляется в особой ментальности, особых поведенческих паттернах и т.д.

## Ключевые слова

фронтир; Чужой; Другой; трансгрессия; культурная трансформация; культурный ландшафт; идентичность

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Frontier is a special state of liminality in which cultural processes take on completely new forms, different from mainstream society. A society located in the new geographical spaces is forced to form a new worldview that would fully correspond to the new conditions. The traditional worldview is a complex system of certain symbols that receive clear semantic content under the influence of many factors: geographical (spatial), economic (which are also largely related to geographical), social, political, etc. This worldview is reflected in language, religion, literature, folklore, art, ideology, behavioral stereotypes, and finally, in psychological types. The specific combination of these factors creates a national worldview, which performs an important function of adaptation to various conditions, both natural and social.

However, one should not perceive this worldview as something secondary, following external factors automatically and dependent on them. In some cases, the national worldview turns out to be primary, and the real geographical or social landscape is merely integrated into it or, more precisely, restructured according to it. It is enough to recall the following maxim of the socialist era: "We cannot wait for favors from Nature; to take them from It is our task" (Michurin, 1950, p. 10).

The restructuring of nature, adjusting it to one's ideological patterns, becomes an "internal stimulus" of historical development, overshadowing all others. In these cases, nature turns out to be an important factor in overcoming difficulties. It seems to challenge Man, forces him to fight it, making his desire to prove his superiority over it important. This false cultural paradigm built on the antinomy of Man/Nature, ultimately results not in gain but in global loss. A person with such a worldview turns out to be unprepared for the spontaneous manifestations of nature. All this found expression in an ironic folk saying regarding some such manifestations: "And this time, winter came unexpectedly, catching us by surprise."

One can contemplate turning northern rivers to the south and remain unprepared for the regular change of seasons.

At the same time, such a cultural model is not universal and it is largely dictated not by the national worldview but rather by overly rigid and primitive ideological attitudes that override common sense.

However, the presence of common sense (conditional as it may sound, since common sense itself is conditional) does not destroy this paradigm, which can coexist with many others, proving its viability, or, conversely, disappearing due to its failure.

But let's not devote more attention to it, as our goal is the formation of otherness under new conditions, i.e., conditions in which the subject largely restructures oneself according to the new conditions, trying to derive maximum benefit from them, because it is for this benefit that one goes to the ends of the earth, hoping for new better living conditions. However, in some cases, he is not the subject of this move but an object who is forced into new living conditions within new territorial boundaries.

These different approaches form two main paradigms for integrating the subject and society into the natural environment: topophobic and topophilic. However, both paradigms can exist in parallel within the same society. This was especially evident in two such archetypal motifs of new lands as finding paradise or descending into hell. New territories turn out to be either territories analogous to hell on Earth, i.e., territories unsuitable for life, or a dream of returning to paradise.

The frontier situation integrates the subject not only into new natural conditions but also into new cultural ones, as he finds himself face to face with the Alien, who is an integral part of this new territory in which the frontier subject finds himself. Often finding oneself alone with new conditions, both natural and cultural, he is forced to transform himself, undergoing certain changes. As the Greek theologian Christos Yannaras (2005) notes, "the person 'undergoes' what happens in nature" (p. 114). Well, since the frontier realities turn out to be completely new for the frontier subject, his experience turns out to be completely new, different from the habitual experience characteristic of his parent society.

Hence, the existential boundaries of the subject are constantly changing, forming a new personality that now acquires all the features of otherness. Life in a frontier territory, whose conditions are harsh and require maximum effort and abilities from the subject for survival, shifting him to an extreme position in relation to the traditional norms of his society. New living conditions require from him a new modality and new norms. They seem to crystallize gradually as he adapts to the new conditions. In fact, these norms are variants of adaptation models fixed in his behavioral patterns.

Among these conditions (factors) influencing the transformation of the frontier subject are the following:

1) Natural (geographical, climatic, etc.).
2) Cultural (both of the subject himself and of the ethnic groups in contact with him).

It should be understood that cultural factors represent exo- and endo-factors, which can be subjective and objective. Human's ability to communicate with subjects of a foreign culture, the rigidity of his own cultural attitudes, the ability of subjects of the contact culture to engage in dialogue, methods of communication, conditions of cultural exchange — all this will significantly influence the methods and possibilities of the subject's adaptation to new conditions.

The importance of all these factors is easily revealed while analyzing the historical destinies of various colonies in New England and their ways of integrating into the new geographical and cultural landscape: the Virginia, Plymouth, and Pennsylvania colonies. In each of these English colonies, its own mechanism of "undergoing" the new reality developed. This applies both to the development of the geographical landscape and to relationships with the cultures of other peoples

who were an integral part of this landscape. It seems that the word "undergoing" is most suitable for defining the integration mechanism of the colonists of the Plymouth and Pennsylvania colonies. It should be taken into account that these colonists were members of two different religious organizations, each of which interacted differently with local tribes. The forms of relationships with natives in various colonies differed significantly from each other. If conflicts with Indians were characteristic of the Virginia colony (Cave, 2011), and even among the colonists themselves, then in Pennsylvania there were practically no such conflicts throughout the entire 17th century. William Penn's Quakers not only managed to maintain peace with local tribes for a long time but also later gave shelter on their territory to other tribes, perceiving them as "their Indians" (Sipe, 1929, p. 102).

The mechanisms of adaptation to new conditions in the Plymouth colony were somewhere in the middle between the behavioral stereotypes of the colonists in Virginia and Pennsylvania colonies. The leadership of the Plymouth colony even allocated some funds both for the propagation of Christianity among the Indians and for supporting a number of Indian families who showed zeal in joining Christianity. As a result of the efforts of these missionaries, by 1674 about 1000 Indians were converted to Christianity. 142 of these Indians could even read in their own language, and 9 people learned to read in English as well. And by 1685, the number of Indians who had adopted Christianity had already reached one and a half thousand people (Bushnell, 1999, p. 70). Naturally, this created a completely new cultural situation in the colonies, whose inhabitants were integrated into a constantly changing cultural landscape. It was this that gave rise to special hybrid personalities, combining many cultures. But it is not only alimentary or vestimentary traditions, languages, or economic structures that mix. Mixing occurs at the level of mentality, it is the formation of a new worldview, in which the Alien and One's Own are integrated in a completely new way. The difference between the subject and the Alien can be leveled, while the difference with one's own can intensify. This was very well noted by Leo Tolstoy (1936), himself a participant in frontier processes in the Caucasus, in his famous story "The Cossacks": "Living among the Chechens, the Cossacks interbred with them and adopted their customs, way of life, and manners of the highlanders; but they retained there, in all their former purity, the Russian language and the old faith.... Even to this day, Cossack families are considered related to Chechen families, and love of freedom, idleness, robbery, and war constitute the main features of their character... A Cossack, by inclination, hates less the dzhigit-highlander who killed his brother than the soldier who is stationed with him to defend his village but who smoked his hut with tobacco. He respects the enemy-highlander but despises the soldier, who is alien to him, and an oppressor. Actually, a Russian peasant is for the Cossack some kind of alien, wild, and contemptible creature, a sample of which he has seen in visiting traders and Ukrainian settlers, whom the Cossacks contemptuously call shapovals. Dandyism in dress consists of imitating the Circassian. The best weapons are obtained from

the highlander, the best horses are bought and stolen from them. A fine young Cossack boasts of his knowledge of the Tatar language and, when carousing, even speaks Tatar with his brother" (Kazaks, 1936, pp. 15– 6).

Of course it should be understood that the Greben Cossack was initially the Other even within the Russian cultural landscape; however, his otherness was not initially as significant compared to those cultural realities that Leo Tolstoy encountered in the mid-19th century.

We find a similar situation in various regions of Siberia. The Transbaikal Cossacks actively mixed with local peoples. The Russian traveler, journalist, and officer of the Russian Army M.V. Grulyov (1901) who visited Transbaikalia at the end of the 19th century, noted that the Cossacks, and other segments of the population, due to the small number of Russian women, actively stole Buryat women, to which the church gave its consent, willingly registering these marriages, provided the captive converted to Orthodoxy (p. 215). All this even led to the local Buryats striving to counter this abduction, introducing a tradition of forced travestism:

> "To protect their women from being abducted by monastic peasants, the Buryats changed the costume of girls and boys, dressing some in the clothes of others. This was facilitated by the absence of mustaches and beards in men, which is characteristic of the Mongolian race. The abduction of Buryat women after that was accompanied by bitter disappointment for the predators and thus deterred them from attempting to kidnap Mongolian Sabine women. Nevertheless, the exchange of clothing among Buryat boys and girls is still observed today, especially among the Kudarin Buryats: girls cut their hair short, wear a cap (kartuz), a poddyovka (short caftan), a man's shirt worn outside, plush trousers (sharovary), and boots; only a practiced eye can distinguish a girl from a boy" (Grulyov, 1901, p. 215).

However, even without bride kidnapping, the process of miscegenation proceeded very actively naturally, as mentioned by P. S. Pallas:

> "Since among the townspeople and rural residents in the Selenginsk district and in Dauria a great mixture with the Mongols is visible, the wealthier Russians in the villages, as well as townspeople, being forewarned that Tatar blood is hotter, have taken it as a custom to marry Buryat and Mongol women; which is not unprofitable for the fathers-in-law, and therefore they willingly give their daughters to be baptized into the Russian faith. — There are also examples around Selenginsk that a Buryat, to please a Russian girl, gets baptized himself in order to marry her. From both types of weddings, a sort of mule is born, who always have something Mongolian in their face, black or very dark brown hair, however, with all that, very well-built and pleasant faces; they are called karymkas. However, the Buryat way of life through such mixing, as well as the Mongol language, takes root most of all among the common people of those places" (Pallas, 1788, p. 383).

As a result, a new hybrid culture was formed, distinguished by its special uniqueness and syncretism. Proximity to local peoples leads to the active borrowing of many cultural elements:

> "This commonality of occupations with the Buryats contributed to a closer rapprochement with them, and at the same time — to the borrowing from the Buryats of their experience, concepts, and views; gradually, the language, signs,

> and products of the Buryats were assimilated; horse saddlery in the border Cossack villages is entirely borrowed from the Buryats, and even the Buryat names are retained. From clothing, the *tyrlyk* and *delya* (winter and summer robe), *unty* and *gutuly* (winter and summer footwear) were borrowed. In terms of food, the Cossacks, like the Buryats, highly value kyrsen (the breast tip of a ram), as well as khurut (cheese), shulyu (soup), etc.; in all these, as in many other cases, even the Buryat names are retained...
>
> But besides these external borrowings and distortions of the minutiae of domestic life, much more important and sadder is that many 'Buryatized' Cossacks even now in border settlements and 'outposts' prefer to speak Buryat rather than Russian, — believe in Buryat shamans, and even sometimes keep shamanic burkhans (idols) with them" (Grulyov, p. 223).

The process of Russian settlers borrowing local traditions of indigenous peoples is also noted by V. L. Kign-Dedlov (1894), a famous Russian writer and journalist who worked for a long time in the Resettlement Administration of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. In his opinion, although the Russians influenced the culture of neighboring peoples in the Trans-Urals, they themselves often fully borrowed the culture of the Kazakhs:

> "Thousands of these people are scattered across the winter camps of the colossal Kyrgyz territory, and ... it will be somewhat awkward when the Kyrgyz evict them and themselves begin to plow the land, set up villages, and build mosques; and it will be even more offensive if these tenants become 'Kyrgyzized', for which there are many examples" (p. 56).

Dedlov (1894) also notes the desire of colonists to actively borrow foreign ethnic speech and manners:

> "The wildness of the Cossack infects even the peasants migrating here from the internal provinces. Not only the stern Great Russian adopts the robber-like swagger of the Cossack, but even the soft-mannered khokhol (Ukrainian), who says 'you' to his zhinka (wife), changes his 'Poltava tenor' for a hoarse baritone, and his orphan manners for the habits of a cattle rustler. Siberian Cossacks, as they say, have become so wild that they consider it especially chic to speak among themselves not in Russian, but in local native dialects. The Orenburg Cossacks were not born such savages either. They were recruited from everywhere from the internal provinces and only became fierce here, in semi-Asia" (p. 23).

The Siberian ethnographer and writer N. S. Shchukin (1844), who visited Yakutsk in the first half of the 19th century, noted that

> "Russian old women often talk among themselves in Yakut. This language dominated in Yakutsk among all classes, like French in our capitals. There is not a single resident who does not know Yakut. And it is not surprising: in the house, the nanny is a Yakut woman, the cook is a Yakut woman, the worker, the coachman — all are Yakuts. A child, with the appearance of a sense of hearing, is struck by the sounds of the Yakut language; upon entering the performance of the duties of a citizen, he deals mostly with Yakuts. The local resident, from dealing with them, imperceptibly adopts all their customs, and speaks the Yakut language better than his native one. A resident of Yakutsk and a resident of Russia understand each other imper-

> fectly in conversation; it is necessary to resort to explanations and repetitions" (Shchukin, p. 228).

N. Shchukin also points to the active borrowing by Russians of the alimentary and vestimentary traditions of the Yakuts (p. 229).

A similar picture persisted in some regions of Siberia even at the end of the 19th century. The famous populist ethnographer V. V. Bartenev (1896), exiled to the Tobolsk province in 1891 and serving his exile in the village of Obdorsk, noted:

> "Almost all Obdorians speak Ostyak and Samoyed. The Ostyaks, in general, understand Russian very poorly, and the Samoyeds, eternally nomadic in the tundra, do not know Russian at all. Russians sometimes speak Ostyak even among themselves; there are those who have almost forgotten their native language and have completely become wild, but this is rare, and in general, the dominance of foreign languages in Obdorsk is weaker than, for example, in the Yakut region" (p. 20).

V. Bartenev also writes about the active borrowing by Obdorians of various elements of culture from local peoples. First of all, this again applies to vestimentary and alimentary traditions (pp. 16–20). Should all these facts be attributed to the processes of miscegenation of the Russian population with local peoples? V. Bartenev, speaking about the literacy of the population, clearly implies that "in Obdorsk a significant part of the Russian population, which has preserved the purity of blood (marriages with foreigners are extremely rare) are literate" (p. 16). According to his observations, marriages between Russians and representatives of local peoples were very rare (pp. 24–25).

As we can see, all the above-mentioned authors note this tendency of rapprochement with local peoples, the willingness to switch even among themselves to the language of the Alien, to adjust to him, to adopt his clothing, even to externally merge with him/her, gradually turning into the Other within their ethnic community and increasingly drawing closer to the Alien.

But as the already mentioned M. Grulyov (1901) notes, not only cultural contacts with local peoples influenced the transformation of the culture of Russian settlers in Transbaikalia; the geographical factor was no less important:

> "An even greater significance in this respect belonged to the physical conditions of the area: the first Russian newcomers inevitably spread over a vast space, coming into contact with the mass indigenous population of the Mongol-Buryat race in scattered, almost single, forces. Finding themselves in a free and wild region, with uncultivated and infertile soil, the first Russian settlers most readily took up cattle breeding, already tested by the natives; especially since this was facilitated by vast meadows and an abundance of livestock, requiring almost no care" (p. 222).

It is the influence of the environment by which V. Bartenev also explains all the borrowings of food traditions and costumes by the Obdorians from local peoples. The environment itself forces one to eat stroganina (frozen raw fish):

> "The consumption of venison in raw form is partly explained by the high cost of vegetables and, in general, seasonings for fried and boiled meat. Besides, venison is

> generally not good boiled, and fried is not particularly tasty either, so it's best to eat it raw" (Bartenev, p. 19)

It is very interesting that the Russian in Siberia, even where those live compactly and do not mix with the local population, gradually turns into the Other, receiving the name (Sibiryak) that embodies specific characteristics (strong health, strength, love of freedom, etc.). And even within this large regional group, there are many similar formations: chalodons (cheldons), kamen'shchiks, kerzhaks, etc.

On the frontier territory, the subject acquires incredible opportunities either to maximally preserve his Otherness or to create it on a new basis. It is in this connection that frequent attempts arise to compare the differences between Siberian "old-timers" and new settlers from Russia. Detailed characteristics of these two groups of the Siberian population are given by the economist A. A. Kaufman (1905), who specifically studied the economic issues of settlers. He notes that new settlers treat the economic structure of the old-timers with some contempt:

> "And the settlers themselves, moving to Siberia, always expect to apply their, Russian, orders, their, Russian, tools in the 'new place'; they strictly condemn, in the first days and weeks of their stay in Siberia, the extensive farming of the surrounding old-timer population, promising to 'teach' the old-timers to work, 'show them what the land can give', plant fruit or berry gardens, — and this innocent boasting impresses many 'friends of the settlers' and undoubtedly affects their judgments and assessments" (pp. 327–328).

Even more categorical in his remarks is the exiled writer and doctor S. Ya. Yelpatyevsky (1893):

> "Among the diverse elements inhabiting the Siberian village, there is only one missing — the Russian. This conclusion did not come to me immediately — for a long time I only felt that something was missing in Siberia; but when this conclusion appeared, it struck me. The 'Russian' is not seen or heard, Russia is not felt in Siberia. Among the varied buildings you will not see only one — the ordinary Russian hut of the middle forest zone of Russia; among all kinds of costumes you will not see the poddyovka and sarafan. There are no round dances (khorovods), no Russian dance, no Russian chatter, you don't even hear swearing — that swearing which, I was sure, would pass with the Russian man across any Urals. In the street crowd you will come across, obviously, not native, some kind of, so to speak, international, worn-out physiognomies, usually shaved, with a downtrodden expression in the eyes, but those about whom one could say directly: 'this is a Russian' — you will meet very rarely. Where is the Russian? Where do these waves of Russian people pouring into Siberia every year — exiles and settlers, traders and servicemen — disappear to?" (pp. 29–30).

Thus, even by the end of the 19th century, clear differences persisted between old and new settlers, recognized by both population groups. However, it was eventually leveled out over time, as new settlers integrated into the already existing complex of economic relations, usually determined by special local physical and cultural factors:

> "...While bringing to the 'new places' and sometimes preserving certain minutiae of secondary importance, the newcomers, in what constitutes the essence of

> the economic structure, not only do not teach the old-timers, but on the contrary — learn from them; having left their homeland to avoid, so to speak, the progressive breakdown of their economic structure, they, without any difficulties, perform, in the new places, a regressive breakdown. Whether they came from the northeast, from Ukraine, or from the central Russian provinces, whether they settled in the Tara urman (dense forest), in the Ussuri taiga, in the Kyrgyz steppes, or on the Amur prairie — they all equally assimilate the orders of seizure-based land tenure and fallow farming developed by the old-timer population of the multi-land Siberian regions. Moreover: the fallow-field farming system of the Siberian old-timers has to be recognized as very perfect if compared with that truly monstrous farming that is conducted by the newcomers in the Kyrgyz steppes. And thus the 'power of the land', which in the homeland was powerless to overcome outdated techniques and habits, in the 'new place' easily gains the upper hand over them. And this is understandable: in the homeland, this power would need to rely on allies in the form of knowledge and capital; to return to the primitive forms of fallow farming, there is no need for either, and therefore this leap backward is made without any difficulty" (Kaufman, pp. 329–330).

These acts of transgression, or rather even regression, can be seen everywhere. The new locality and new cultural realities seem to force the subject to transform according to the existing local cultural norms (economic, political, vestimentary, alimentary, etc.). And this exists alongside the conviction that all these local cultural realities are "at" a lower stage of development.

As Omsk researchers A. V. Remnev and N. G. Suvorova (2013) note, the settler was not ready

> "for the rapid adaptation of his agricultural techniques to new natural and climatic conditions, he also lacked entrepreneurial spirit. Naturally, the settler looked for those conditions to which he was accustomed in his homeland, and if he did not find them, then, in the absence of necessary knowledge, determination, endurance, and material means, he could quickly lose patience and confidence in his abilities, abandon the land with which he had little connection" (p. 181).

We cannot but agree with the opinion of the Omsk historians; however, it seems to us that such a situation was precisely the result of adaptation to new conditions, which allowed extensive farming with a minimum of effort and innovation. This was integration into the already existing models aimed at simplifying the economic life of the settlers.

In addition to agricultural labor, the settler discovered a lot of other opportunities in the new lands: primarily hunting and cattle breeding, which further distanced him from the traditional Russian model. The hunter went further and further into the taiga, adopting hunting and trapping techniques from local peoples or old-timers, "undergoing" (according to H. Yannaras, 2005) a new reality:

> "And this struggling man must be eternally on alert, eternally look and listen — whether a branch will crack under the weight of a bear's paw, whether the blue back of an arctic fox will flash. As he forgets human speech, he learns the animal language — learns to unmistakably recognize the cry of birds and the roar of beasts, understands their manners, and, like a Tungus, begins to determine by the track whether an angry or a calm bear has passed. As he weans himself from human morals,

> he more and more accustoms himself to live by animal customs. He is all alone and must rely only on himself. Russian sloppiness and good-natured laxity quickly run off him: he all gathers himself, pulls himself together; his thick, spreading lips fold more sharply, compress more tightly; his eyes do not look openly, but peer from under his brows, track... His hand will not tremble, his face will not pale, his heart will not beat from fear when a bear unexpectedly comes out at him, and, of course, there will be no pity for this bear" (Yelpatyevsky, p. 23).

This connection with the land, with a special habitat, the feeling of being one's own on this land, ultimately leads to the fact that he turns out to be the Other in relation to extra groups of the Russian ethnic group, and those considered his own are by no means Russians, but other local peoples. The same dichotomy was revealed by Omsk historian M. A. Zhigunova, who studied issues of identity among the Russian population of Omsk. The antagonism of the local population towards newly arrived Russians from the CIS countries ultimately leads new settlers to a perplexed question: "Why do they [Siberians] befriend local peoples better, but treat us worse, do not consider us their own, after all we are also — Russian" (Zhigunova, 2011, p. 172).

Thus, it is the frontier territory, remote from the places of the subject's initial residence, that forms his distinctiveness, transforming him into the Other, and sometimes even the Alien. This otherness, in certain crisis moments of history, can completely distance such a frontier community from its initial ethnic core, placing it in an antagonistic relationship to it.

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