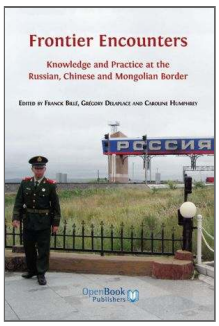

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For darkness restores what light cannot repair.
Joseph Brodsky

In the changing world of the Russian-Chinese borderland, the Argun River basin has been stable since 1689 when the Treaty of Nerchinsk created a modern institutional basis for Russo-Chinese relations. Unlike the "lost" border with Chinese Turkestan and the relatively modern section of the border in the Far East, the Argun River borderland has been a long-standing frontier of Russian cultural and economic expansion and the place where the Chinese and Russian civilizations clashed. Russian-Chinese relations before 1917 were based on Russia's demographic and military domination in the borderland area and its regular attempts to transform Chinese Inner Asia into "Outer Siberia".

After the collapse of Qing China and Romanov Russia, that section of the border system in Inner Asia (the USSR, Mongolia and China border triangle) functioned as the Sino-Soviet border management model for the area. This model was characterised by a closed-border policy, special attention by state authorities to the supervision of border communities (special rights,

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movement control, propagandist idea of the border as bastion, etc.), and a very strong connection between socialist modernisation and militarisation of the area (at an economic, cultural and social level). The members of the transborder quasi-indigenous Inner Asian communities (Russian Old-Settler communities) share very traumatic experiences of that time. They were subjected to forced separation from their family members, social stigmatisation in their own countries, demonisation as spies and bandits, and long periods of isolation from their place of birth and the members of communities in other countries.

Quasi-indigeneity is a descriptive term relating to cultural and identity forms taken on by the first settler community following colonial conquest and by their descendants. The ambiguous character of the category has provided a possibility for a simultaneous justification of cultural prestige of a given community (more white than indigenous) and contact with indigenous culture and territory. My usage of the category of quasi-indigeneity to describe the colonial experience of Eastern Siberia aims at integrating a set of theoretical, legal, descriptive and original names of communities which cohered as a result of biological metisation and cultural syncretism in Eastern Siberia: the popular ("Old Settlers" (*starozhily*), biological and cultural (mixed communities), administrative (local Russian) and academic (nativisation and creolisation). The term overcomes the limitations of these various overlapping categories. Quasi-indigeneity is formed when former migrant communities become inseparably connected (biologically and culturally) with the indigenous inhabitants of a region.

In the Tsarist time, the dominant cultural hierarchy described the origin and cultural status of these communities one-sidedly using two different frameworks: the first one saw new communities resulting from the orientalisation process of the ancestors of the first-wave of settlers in Siberia; the second was connected to the negative and emotional descriptions of Europeans' cultural and psychophysical degradation in Asia that were used by Tsarist officials and ethnographers. Today's literature concerning the region predominantly employs imported categories such as a "creole" ethnic group (Hancock 2003: 159), neutral ones such as "mixed communities", local terms used to describe a given community such as "old-settlers communities" (Vachtin, Golovko and Shvaitcer 2004: 14), or processual categories like "Siberian nativisation" or Russians "gone native" (Sunderland 1996: 807).

To my peers born in the USSR in the first half of the 1970s the first image of the interwar-period Sino-Soviet border area was shaped by the Soviet television series entitled *Gosudarstvennaya granitsa* (*State Border*),

which depicted the dramatic history of the Soviet border guard. In one of the episodes the plot moved to "Russian" Harbin which – thanks to the courage of the main characters – was transformed into a battlefield involving Soviet intelligence and a complicated network of enemies including Japanese secret service, Russian emigration officials and Transbaikal Cossack bands.[1] In this way, the writers of the series reinforced the image of the island of the Russian Émigrés in Northern China with the Soviet discourse of the border as a space of permanent defence against enemies of the "motherland of the proletariat".

While in the last years of the Soviet Union the image of "Russian" Harbin became intimate and well-liked, one semi-mythical Russian community from Manchuria was never accepted. They were Ataman Semenov's Cossacks – viewed as an eternal enemy of every Soviet citizen. During my childhood stories of that group appeared several times in the most unexpected contexts. Soviet specialists returning from Mongolia told stories about their meetings with Ataman Semenov's or Baron Ungern-Sternberg's Cossacks who retained their old way of life and far-reaching autonomy from the authorities of the Mongolian People's Republic and the Soviet contingent in Mongolia. My relatives from Transbaikalia used a mixed discourse in which Ataman Semenov's crimes mingled with admiration for him, semi-legendary intimacy with his family and the doubt about the communist version of the region's history. The variety of contexts, times and places created the illusion of social importance and immateriality of the phenomenon.

Growing up outside Transbaikalia I was not able to integrate these stories into a coherent whole and was treating them only as local folklore from the borderland areas. Many years later, when I began to conduct fieldwork in Transbaikalia, Mongolia and China, I realised they were completely fictitious. The local Russians in Mongolia in most cases did not have any links with the Cossacks, the Sino-Russians were a racially mixed group of anti-Cossack-oriented peasants, and the post-Soviet Transbaikalia hardly resembled the "Cossack Vendée".[2] Most communities associated with

1 This was the third episode of the series, "Eastern Frontier". The Cossack bands were described as the "border bands".

2 The term "Cossack Vendée" was used in the discourse of Russian emigration based on a sentence from the poem by Marina Tsvetayeva, "Lebedinyi stan", about the Don Cossack anti-communist uprising: "The last dream of the old world / Youth – glory – the Vendee – the Don". The translation of the sentence and the usage of the term can be found in *The Russian Civil War* (Mawdsley 2007: 85).

Semenov had no idea about the Ataman, barely remembered the Cossacks, and had at least moderate pro-Soviet attitudes. The Transbaikalian discourse regarding "Ataman Semenov's wild Cossacks" (the *semenovtsy*) was not only the ideological and emotional basis for decossackisation practices, but also the crucial lynchpin of Soviet mythology relating to the border as a place of symbolic and physical confrontation. This contribution of the legend to the symbolic instruments of the Soviet statecraft in the border areas was totally underestimated in the relevant literature.

Using the example of the Soviet (Russian) conceptualisations related to the two Siberian quasi-indigenous communities (the local Russians in Mongolia and the Three-River Delta Russians in China), this paper shows the links between the negative politicisation of quasi-indigenousness and the Soviet (Post-Soviet) conceptualisation of the "border as a bastion". The first group (Mongolian) was recruited from the Old-Settler peasants, Old Believers and local Buryats who had left their country because of the 1928 famine. In socialist Mongolia these people were discriminated against as a hostile group displaying a "non-Soviet lifestyle". The second group consisted of the Transbaikal Cossack immigrants to China, who wanted to avoid decossackisation practices. Most of them settled densely on the Derbul, Haul, and Gan river banks. This is from where the term "Three-River Delta" stems. In the 1950s the inhabitants of Cossack villages were resettled in large numbers in Kazakhstan and the Ural Mountains. Only in the 1990s did some of those people manage to come back from Kazakhstan to the town of Sen'kina Pad' in Chita Province.

Quasi-indigenousnes in Inner Asia in the twentieth century

The assumption of ethnic, confessional and political coherence of the borderland area has been crucial for the Russian (Tsarist) colonial experience in Asia, which was based on the agrarian use of nomadic frontier land and the forced expulsion of disloyal nomadic populations. This model of coherence included a special policy preventing frontier disloyalty based on reorientation of indigenous nomadic population towards Russia through control of transborder movement, separation of religious institutions from the authorities outside Russia, state support for migration and active militarisation of the indigenous population. In this context the "coherence" in the Siberian borderland area was understood as a Russia-oriented

agro-nomadic world in which military institutions and cultural domination by Orthodox communities played an essential role. Before the beginning of the twentieth century an "ideal border settler" was conceptualised by the Russians as a member of the military (Cossack) or cultural (Orthodox peasant) colonial formations. The mixture of three strategic areas of state policy (concerning the land suitable for agriculture, railroads, and border management) provoked strong pressure towards denomadisation and acculturation of the indigenous peoples of Transbaikalia. As a result, the mixed population of Southern Siberia could reproduce the Eastern European peasant style of living, participate in Russian culture and demonstrate the Eastern European identity of Orthodox peasants (Peshkov 2011).

In the late Tsarist time the main problem with the Transbaikal border areas was seen to be the cultural ambivalence of the local population. Travellers and researchers interpreted the disappearance of racial and cultural boundaries between newcomers and the indigenous population as racial degradation and cultural weakness on the part of the local Russians. The founding father of Siberian separatism, Nikolai Yadrintsev, wrote in his monograph *Sibir' kak koloniia* (*Siberia as a Colony*):

> that the racial stability of Russians in the East is not so strong as it has been expected, that the Russians in many cases were rather likely to obey the "inorodtsy" than to rule them, and that they borrowed more from the "inorodtsy" than they could offer them (2000: 56).[3]

The controversies regarding the mixed population of the Transbaikal border areas resulted from the model of Russian colonisation of Transbaikalia and the formation of quasi-indigeneity. The Russian conquest of the Transbaikal region led to the development of new forms of ethnic and cultural identity based on cultural syncretism and mixed marriages between Russians and the inhabitants of the region. These mixed communities are referred to as the "Old Settlers" (*starozhily*). These groups included: the Old Believers, Gurans (*gurany*), Sakhalars, Karyms (*karymy*), and the people living near the Kolyma (*kolymchanye*), Anadyr (*anadyrshchiki* or *anadyrtsy*), Angara, and Lena rivers (*angarskiye* and *lenskiye*). Their mixed origin has been at the core of the Old Settlers' identity: a sharp dividing line exists between the Old Settlers and the natives on the one hand, and the Old Settlers and the Russian newcomers on the other. Such communities consist of members imaginarily related

3 *Inorodtsy* is a legal term used in the Russian Empire to describe its non-Slavic population.

to the first Russian migrants to Siberia (until the late eighteenth century) (Buraeva 2005).

The most numerous mixed group in Transbaikalia were the Transbaikal Gurans, an offshoot of Transbaikal Cossacks. Transbaikal Gurans is a proper name applied to Transbaikal Cossacks of mixed Russian, Evenki and Buryat descent. The group had a status that concealed its ethnically mixed nature and existed simultaneously on the border of the military-administrative and nomadic-agrarian worlds. It was characterised by a multipolar identity structure including unique ethnic, racial, social and political components. The specificity of the Gurans lied in the simultaneous occurrence of acculturation and socialisation processes in the framework of the Transbaikal Cossack military units. In that context Gurans were not Mongolian, Buryat, Evenki or Chinese, although they might have been of such origin, had the command of a particular language or may even have been Buddhists or Shamanists. The Cossack status integrated different groups of *mestizos*. The basic identity indicator of this group was the abandonment of the actual history of their ancestors' origin and the creation of a founding myth describing the role their ancestors had played in the conquest of Siberia. The Russianisation and Westernisation of the past did not collide with the strong oriental elements of their culture (Peshkov 2008).

After 1917 the Transbaikal quasi-indigenous groups dispersed as a result of red terror actions, showing an active resistance against Soviet authorities. The hostile attitude of the communist authorities to the Cossacks and the new socialist border regime led to devastating consequences for the everyday life of local communities. The first three decades of the new regime were particularly traumatic for these groups. Their mass migration into Mongolia and Manchuria began in 1918 and initially concerned only richer Cossacks escaping decossackisation practices. Over time, because of terror, starvation and persecution, they were joined by Old-Settler peasants, Old Believers and Evenki. The large numbers of Cossacks that comprised the first immigration wave established a long-surviving model for perceiving migrants to borderland territories (they were perceived according to their origin and political views). For many years Soviet propaganda defined both countries of exile as places of refuge of politically inactive (Mongolian) and active (Manchurian) White Cossack emigrants.

The first result of the decossackisation policy was the exclusion not only of the Cossacks, but of the cultural and racial hybridity of the area

more generally. According to Slezkine's proposal to view the ethno-political structure of the USSR as a communal apartment with separate rooms for particular nations (Slezkine 2006), the project of the Soviet Transbaikalia was based on the Russians and Buryats staying separate. Mass migration completely transformed the region's ethnic situation. The local and indigenous inhabitants still played a nominal role in the symbolic and political life of the region, but generally most people had a migrant origin and very weak ties to the non-socialist period of the region's history and culture. In this context socialist modernisation turned out to be a powerful historical circumstance shaping adaptation in accordance with the socialist model of social relations and transforming the model of border management. The second result was the psychological consequences of the new bordering practices. The people living in the borderland areas demonstrated a particular level of political loyalty. According to the Soviet "hermeneutics of suspicion" political loyalty was viewed as a broad concept. Their origin, the participation of their relatives in the Civil War and the financial status of their parents had a significant impact on the selection processes of the border residents. The internalisation process of the Soviet propaganda patterns and the development of self-disciplining habits provoked radical changes in the normative Soviet personhood and standards of normality of the social life in the border areas. The third result included the remilitarisation of the area based on Red Army structures and long-term domination of military institutions. Groups with Cossack status were liquidated for the same reasons they had once been established (to form a military and economic complex on the Russian (Soviet)-Chinese borderline).

The quasi-indigenous groups were destroyed both in Mongolia and China. Emigration and mixed marriages led to the appearance of two new ex-Old-Settler communities: local Russians in the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) and the Three-River Delta (TRD) Russians in China. Those communities differed from Russian immigrants in Inner Asia (i.e. the so-called Harbin Russians) with their village attachment, the local character of migration movements, the Old-Settler cultural background, and their erroneous perception as "Ataman Semenov's wild Cossacks". This situation provoked a negative politicisation of the groups as well as a tendency to perceive both the Soviet state and Soviet citizens as static objects.

The two groups had different historical experiences and socialisation paths in Soviet society. The TRD Russians experienced periods of cultural and economic domination in their area of inhabitancy (Lindgren 1938), the

genocidal policy of Soviet military troops in 1929 and strong repressions after "liberation" in 1945. The immigrants were integrated but maintained their own models of self-organisation. At the time of the Japanese presence (1932–1945) the majority of the TRD Russians were citizens of the state hostile to the USSR and they started to realise all the consequences of that situation: serving in the army and participating in public and cultural life. From 1945 until 1956, this community was the object of the sovietisation policy of the institutions in the borderland territories. The USSR turned Russian private schools into Soviet state schools, organised access to Soviet propaganda movies, and encouraged people to return "home". The sovietisation policy and access to citizenship did not guarantee political and cultural rehabilitation in the USSR (Ablazhei 2007).

The TRD Russians were treated by the state with hostile distance. Those who returned to the USSR before 1953 (Stalin's death) were sent to prison or exile, and after destalinisation they were forced to settle in Central Asia (Northern Kazakhstan). Nowadays, the number of Cossack descendants in the region is quite low. After 1956, mass migration to the USSR and Australia began. Those who decided to stay in China were mostly of mixed origin (Chinese and Russian) or poor and without relatives in the USSR. 1966 marked the beginning of the "black decade" (the Cultural Revolution) in the life of the community, since all the Russian (Orthodox) people were accused of believing in superstition and of spying for the USSR. Aside from the physical extermination of many of its members, the group experienced strict bans on speaking or using Russian (even at home) and on practising its religion. As a result most of the group members born in the late 1960s have problems speaking Russian or do not speak the language at all (Basharov 2010). The situation of the group improved considerably after 1978 and nowadays there is a special socio-economic support policy of Chinese local authorities concerning this community.

In the case of the MPR the situation differed significantly. Most of the local Russians in Mongolia found themselves in the country because of the 1928 famine, which was not related to Cossack emigration. Before 1945 the community of refugees from the USSR to Mongolia was a small group of stateless peoples and Mongolian authorities were not interested in its situation. The second wave of Mongolia's sovietisation after 1945 complicated the lives of the local Russians. After 1971 those people had Soviet passports (but without the right to live in the USSR) and a generally Soviet identity (Mikhailev 2008), but were discriminated against as a hostile group displaying a "non-Soviet lifestyle". After 1991, mass emigration of

local Russians began, mainly to East-Central Europe. The local Russians were viewed by the Soviets as the mythical *Semenovtsy* who had escaped to hide in Mongolia; they did not understand the significance of the name and started using it as a proper ethnonym.

The rhetoric of the black legend: the Soviet border as ritual

The main discursive pattern of the border conceptualisation in Transbaikalia was the black legend about the hostility of Ataman Semenov's wild Cossacks. The legend had a counter-factual, virtual and exclusive nature. We are dealing here with the case in which decossackisation applied to groups that had no Cossack status and often were even in conflict with the Cossacks. In the Soviet period, the memory of the Civil War was managed by the state in many forms. In the Soviet narrative of the Civil War special attention was paid to the practices aimed at demonising the participants of anti-communist resistance in Central Asia. The principal anti-heroes of the propaganda were the so-called *Basmachi* in Central Asia and the Cossacks from Inner Asia (*Semenovtsy*).[4] They were described as backward, aggressive people and instruments of foreign intelligence. In Stalin's time, terms such as *Basmachi* or *Semenovtsy* were used by the propaganda and functioned only in juridical context. After the 1950s, the *Semenovtsy* transformed into fully mythological characters, and was used as an exclusionary term by ordinary people.

The inhabitants of Siberia talked about the eternal Cossack communities of Inner Asia (Mongolia, China, Transbaikalia) with their old way of life and strong anti-Soviet attitudes. These communities were perhaps "invisible" – the *Semenovtsy* features having merged into the local mixed communities of Transbaikalia, Mongolia and Northern China. This otherwise marginal Siberian group attracted attention because of its cultural closeness; it was already familiar (the Soviets played the role of European observers of an orientalised Russian subculture). Soviet citizens were particularly provoked by the group's apparent readiness to treat them with violence. Moreover, the propaganda vision of the past was transferred into the present. The features attributed to the *Semenovtsy* combined political, racial and social aspects: anticommunism, mixed ethnicity and bilingualism, as well as aggression and aversion for the Soviet people. In the context of the black legend, the public

4 *Basmachi* is a pejorative Soviet term that stems from the Turkish verb *basmak* meaning "to oppress, to violate" (Ritter 1985).

consciousness of the late USSR conceptualised alternative and less prestigious models of Russian culture outside the Soviet Union and relations of ethnic and political solidarity. Ideas of ethnic hybridity and anti-communism and the existence of islands of pre-Soviet Russian life were seen as absolute evil. This pervasive stereotype was extremely difficult to counter.

The popularity and multi-dimensional impact of that legend were based on a rich rhetorical content, which significantly exceeded Russian self-orientalisation practices and the Soviet asymmetry between ethnic and political solidarity. The ability of Soviet propaganda to create a transborder phantom network of "Cossack resistance" is a fascinating example of a confrontation myth playing a founding role in Soviet identity in Siberian borderland areas. The mythology of Cossack resistance served a number of functions: it cautioned against an enemy, connected people emotionally with the events of the Civil War, presented the Soviet view on transborder areas as a place of confrontation and integrated the people of the Soviet frontier against their eternal enemies behind the borders.

The discourse-oriented approaches to Soviet society underline the dramatic effect of communist language innovations on social life (Halfin 2002, Halfin 2009, Humphrey 2009). The complex state-governed way in which people learned to "speak Bolshevik" (Kotkin 1997: 220) largely determined the pattern of collective and individual self-perceptions and memory. In that context "the Soviet language" was not only characterised by its overpoliticisation and sectarian attitudes towards the external world, but also had a tendency to make "performative utterances" about cultural, ethnic and social divisions (Fitzpatrick 2006). The specificity of the "political" in the USSR significantly broadened the boundaries of political action. From the perspective of Soviet discursive practices the collective ability to create common narratives generated completely new historical, temporal and eschatological perspectives. Historical events, the relationship between past and future, as well as the strong influence of assumptions about a communist future were conceptualised mainly from the political perspective of permanent confrontation. If, according to Sheila Fitzpatrick, we can use the term Stalinism as "a shorthand for the complex of institutions, structures and rituals that made up the habitat of Homo Sovieticus" (Fitzpatrick 2000: 3), the main role of the black legend was to support that ritual of permanent confrontation in the Soviet border areas.

The influence of military mobilisation aesthetics on socialist modernisation practices was very strong and is widely recognised in the literature (Fitzpatrick 1976, Skocpol 1988, Vishnevski 1998), but the connection of the socialist

border to the outside world (non-socialist or with the wrong socialist country) provoked the "overmilitarisation" of social life in the borderland areas. In this context the socialist conceptualisation of the border (as a limitation of legal space and separation from the outside world) legitimised the military style of governance and the special policy of ritualising confrontation. The nature of this ritual is the legitimacy of an emergency by constantly referring to and recognising the enemy's presence and emphasising the necessity of defence. The mass production of virtual enemies in the Sino-Soviet border areas was based on complex exclusion discourses combining political, social and when possible – cultural (orientalisation) differences. Through this ritual the real quasi-indigenous communities became entangled with the virtual reality of the network of Cossack resistance, causing an "effect of realism" and the overlapping of myths, personal memories and the official version of the Civil War. From the perspective of the Soviet citizens it was an adaptation to the world of the Soviet propaganda and to the cultural and ethnic diversity of the border areas. From the perspective of the members of the stigmatised communities it was a Soviet collective madness having no basis in personal history. In that context, the mythology of Cossack resistance integrated the people of the Soviet frontier against their enemies and those from behind the Soviet border.

From the perspective of the ritual-supporting function of the black legend, the crucial element was the militarisation of the image of the stigmatised communities. The combination of Cossack features (the Soviet people described their contemporary *Semenovtsy* as the ones in the Cossack uniforms) and the expectation of physical aggression against the Soviets transformed the image of the quasi-indigenous communities into quasi-military formations. The transformation of the loyal Tsarist border guard into border bandits was conceptualised in that legend in the categories of Russian political mythology about the Cossacks' *volya* (freedom) as opposition to the legal state (Humphrey 2007: 6). The rule of the atamans (*Atamanshchina*) in Transbaikalia was described as criminal governance completely lacking international legitimacy. In the Soviet era, "Oriental cruelty" was the basic term used to describe the Transbaikal Cossack warlordism. Their crime was exaggerated and their "Oriental features" were emphasised. The authorities talked about them as Japanese collaborators, sadistic predators, separatists and political adventurists. The members of the stigmatised communities were viewed as representatives of the following political culture: the stereotypes about Cossacks were connected with stereotypes about "wild Mongols" and isolated Russian Old-Settlers. In this context, the discourse about the *Semenovtsy* had a

rather complicated structure, the main purpose of which was a ritual transformation of the border areas into the space of unresolved fighting with the enemies of the Soviet people.

The strong symbol of continuity of anti-communist atamans' rule was the Three-River Delta, which was conceptualised as a space of extreme political hostility and reactionary models of living. Whereas the quasi-indigenous communities in Transbaikalia and the MPR were "silent" and masked, the TRD Russians were described as dangerous enemies awaiting an opportunity to attack the USSR. The negative mythology of the TRD gave the possibility to situate a part of the Cossack resistance network in a space beyond the control of the Soviet authorities, which in the Soviet view of the world automatically criminalised it. The key features of the Soviet description of that community were also transferred to Mongolia and Transbaikalia creating the permanent phantom presence of enemies along the borders. The mythological "Three-River Delta Russians", as a symbol of the reactionary past and anti-Soviet activity, played the necessary role of disciplining the inhabitants of Soviet Transbaikalia. That new virtual and unwanted frontier community was built in opposition to the ideal Soviet border community. The identities of the Soviet Transbaikalia and the Russian West Manchurians existed as mirror opposites (see Fig. 1).

Characteristics	**Soviet Transbaikalia**	**Russian West Manchuria**
Political orientation	communist	anti-communist
Dominated by	Non or Ex-Cossacks	Cossacks
Temporality	future-oriented present	past-oriented reactionary present
Frontier loyalty	loyal	disloyal bandits
Ethnic structure	Socialist nation (Russian, Buryat, Evenki)	Backward half-breeds
Characteristic feature:	Progressive	Reactionary

Fig. 1 Opposing features of Soviet Transbaikalia and Russian West Manchuria

In the virtual world of the legend a member of this semi-mystical community of *Semenovtsy* represented not only potential danger in the Soviet border areas, but also symbolised the limits of the Soviet state to control family life. From the perspective of this legend, the state proved completely powerless in the face of the modest resistance shown by the small rural Cossack population. This imaginary eternal Cossack community with its pre-revolutionary way of life represented the limit of the Soviet ability to enforce modernisation. From that perspective, the fear of the aggressive behaviour of the stigmatised communities only masked the deepest fear of facing what was perceived to be the opposite of "normal" Soviet personhood: a backward people intentionally avoiding the Soviet world.

Soviet society stemmed from the deep influence of socialist modernisation practices (their Stalinist version) in all spheres of the country's social and economic life (Starikov 1996). State interventions into people's family lives through politicisation of relationships between family members and forcing them to publicly deny their repressed relatives played a crucial role (Figes 2007), as did the family nuclearisation of urban Russians (Vishnevsky 1998). The preservation of traditional family values was perceived by Soviet Russians to be "Oriental" and therefore "backward". This cultural transition created the opportunity of perceiving non-Soviet village communities as examples of backward and half-Oriental subcultures. Alternative ideas of "Russianness" provoked aggression from the state and attempts were made to stigmatise these communities as politically hostile. The clear advantage of the Soviet version changed potential dialogue into hostile monologue and transformed "alternative Russianness" into a special feature characteristic of backward and antagonistic communities.

Practice of inclusion: the "silent enemy" and the group intentionally created for prosecution

The Three-River Delta Russians' repatriation to the USSR was similar to that of the Russians in Eastern Europe and the Balkans: a warm invitation to return was extended, followed by a difficult start in the new society. There was a lack of verifiable private history and basic social habits, as well as a lack of Soviet communicational skills. They had alternative views and the experience of an economy without starvation. This resulted in the treatment of the groups as hostile elements who should earn the right to return through hard work or imprisonment (Perminov 2008). This model of

negative inclusion, called "the repentance way", created a new subculture displaying selective socialisation and adaptation to Soviet culture. Political terms were eliminated from the group vocabulary, but the old model of family life, religion and a strong social network remained and the community maintained some autonomy. The group did not accept the Soviet version of the region's past and avoided the names and terms used by the propaganda.

The situation of the local Russians in Mongolia was more problematic. The Soviet presence in Mongolia changed the group into hostages of Soviet memory. These local Russians exemplified a group intentionally created for persecution. Given the non-political (economic) causes of its immigration and its participation in World War II, the group expected acceptance from the Soviet state and their own gradual adaptation into Soviet society. This never happened. The Soviet colonial institution in Mongolia used the mixed policy of preventive segregation and partial inclusion: on the one hand, KGB units warned Soviet specialists against the hostile group of Ataman Semenov's wild Cossacks while, on the other, the members of the community were included in basic Soviet institutions in Mongolia (Soviet schools, kindergartens, special shops, etc.).

The Soviet people, influenced by propaganda, identified this group with the *Semenovtsy*, on the basis of a mythology tied to real and fictional features: ethnic hybridity, physical aggression and bilingualism. The combination of the term *Semenovtsy* with selective elements of Soviet stereotypes was a sufficient proof of their hostility. Based on the memories of local Russians and Soviet specialists it can be postulated that Soviet specialists never stopped thinking about the local Russians in terms of the Semenov myth. The discriminatory discourse concerned primarily men, with women being seen only as potentially sexual objects (they never had names and are only described as the "Semenov girls" – *Semenovki*). Males, by contrast, were depicted as aggressive men or boys attacking "Soviet children" at school. The nature of the conflict lay in the connection of the "norms" with the stereotype: ordinary Soviet people were confronted with *Semenovtsy*, "pure" Russians were faced with people of mixed origin, and educated people were dealing with villagers.

The degree of the conflict is puzzling considering that the set of behavioural features attributed to local Russians (Stepanova 2008) were not unfamiliar to Soviet people (excluding the strong Mongolian language skills). Mongolia was an ideal territory for integration with the society – it

was isolated, dominated by Russians and had years of documented history. Nonetheless, the Soviet community continued its policy of rejection. The reasons for this hostility stemmed from a political neutrality perceived as a political stance (hence the accusation of a non-Soviet lifestyle). The community was seen as antipodal to Soviet society and a peaceful relationship with them was seen as impossible. Yet surprisingly, the local Russians were granted Soviet citizenship in 1971: a manifestation of a move to create Soviet citizens, even from a pariah group. However, this date has not appeared as a turning point either in the local Russians', nor in the Soviets' memories. They never noticed the change.

The TRD and local Russians had to conform both to their stigmatisation and to the inability to reconcile their version of history with the official one (shared by everyone else). This situation caused considerable adjustments in their collective memory and a selective Sovietisation of some private versions of the events. The two communities reacted to the political disciplinary discourse and to their rejection by other Soviet citizens in different ways. The TRD Russians stressed the fact that they were hard-working, and became distant and religious. By contrast, the local Russians in Mongolia became aggressive towards Soviet citizens, and developed an agricultural resourcefulness that led to profiteering in food production and other sectors. Their aggression towards Soviet specialists was a desperate reaction to their constant persecution, and their rejection by the MPR. New groups of negative identities appeared (the *Semenovtsy*) which were based on propaganda structures and had nothing in common with Civil War heroes. This new subjective Semenov-style subculture emerged from the Transbaikal Old Settlers' reaction to their marginalisation and to Soviet attitudes towards decossackisation. In this context, the negative inclusion of the non-Soviet constituted an element of transformation of the two groups into local Soviet subcultures which could be comprehended by Soviet society.

The black legend trapped in post-Soviet memory

The collapse of the Soviet Union and state propaganda machines radically transformed the political, emotional and economic condition of the region's life. Changes in state responsibilities caused the end of the "modernity era" in Transbaikalia and provoked "post-socialist backwardness" processes with uncontrolled mass migration to the western part of Russia and a long-term social crisis (Humphrey 2002a). This resulted in numerous

attempts to idealise Soviet times and defend the legacy of the Soviet Transbaikal border areas. The power of the Soviet interpretation of the past has also been strengthened by academic writing and institutional continuity with the previous period. The Soviet version continued in the post-Soviet time in a more complex context of coexistence with discourses of Cossacks emigration and anti-communist historiography. Paradoxically, both the communist and anti-communist versions continued to involve the rhetoric of the black legend.

In today's Russian debates the main perception of the memory of the Civil War still has a Soviet origin. Ex-soldiers' internet sites in Russia are filled with memories of their confrontations with the Semenovtsy in the MPR and Transbaikalia during the Soviet era. Even today the Russian community in Ulaanbaatar is divided into ex-Soviets and local Russians. In 2008 an elderly lady in the Chita Historical Museum told me: "You look like a Semenovets from Manchuria". In the same year, Transbaikal Cossacks tried to organize an ethnographic expedition to the TDR, aiming at investigating Cossack culture in a completely decossackised area (Peshkov 2010a).[5] The stigmatised communities still remain in the shadow of the black legend and Soviet border rituals. From the post-Soviet perspective the stigmatised people remain members of enemy formations and the weakening of political discrimination is slowly being replaced by a "concern" about racial and religious purity of these communities.

These excluding practices have been so popular after the collapse of the USSR because of the temporal dualism in today's perception of the Russo-Chinese border. After 1991, the Soviet border model lost its former visibility but continues to have an influence on regional images of "bordering" and borderland. The experience of the new model of open border space coexists with the habits of the Soviet border regime. This invisible Soviet border has remained the basic social institution of the border areas, which defines what is "our own" and what is "other people's". This virtual institution also symbolises the meeting place with the semi-forbidden past of the border areas, still seen in Soviet terms (Peshkov 2010b). Thus, the collapse of the Soviet border regime and the lack of a political basis for discrimination changed the status of the stigmatised communities only to a limited extent. On their symbolic return to Russia they still face the Soviet border with the rituals of confrontation and the Soviet version of the region's past.

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5 After the year 1956 most Russians in Inner Mongolia were regular peasants of no Cossack origin.

In contemporary Russia, there are two main discursive practices aimed at changing the status of the stigmatised communities. The common feature of these practices is the effort to partly rehabilitate these people without deconstructing the black legend. The first attempt is the depoliticisation of the stigmatised communities through cultural exoticisation. This community is recognised as the keeper of pre-revolutionary Transbaikal traditions and an instrument for justifying contacts with the "formerly forbidden history" of the region (Kurto 2009). The depoliticisation discourse has a special connection with the black legend, namely its emphasis on the Cossack legacy in the area and assumption about the unchanged cultural attributes of this community (Zenkova 2007). The second discourse concerns the frontier loyalty to the USSR on the part of the emigrants from the TRD. Historical fiction, memoirs and stories told by respondents from China reveal the tragic fate of Russian immigrants loyal to the Soviet state (Aprelkov 2009, Perminov 2008). In the context of the post-Soviet model of border perception this discourse has an enormous symbolic value and power. Frontier loyalty to Russia (the USSR) is the only way a stigmatised community can "cross the Soviet border".

Instead of an open dialogue about the past we have seen attempts to conceptualise the frontier zone as an area of difficult choice, in which the choice of the homeland (the USSR) is tragic, but the only one possible. Despite a certain moral ambiguity (the 1945 repressions against the inhabitants of the region were strongly based on intelligence data) this perspective ideally suited the modern perception of Russian history which, despite widespread sympathy with White Guards, assumes that after the Civil War the truth was on the Soviet side (Peshkov 2010b). In the situation of the Soviet-induced amnesia of regional history only the discourse of frontier loyalty will be able to start the process of integrating stigmatised communities into Russian society. From this perspective the black legend transformed from a propaganda phantom into a crucial part of the local mentality and an element of the Soviet border legacy in Transbaikalia.