

**THE FRONTIER STAGES TYPOLOGY THROUGH THE PRISM  
OF GENDER INTERETHNIC RELATIONS: THE WILD WEST  
AND LOW VOLGA HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES<sup>1</sup>**

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The article analyzes the woman's role in the cultural dialog in different periods of frontier relations. The authors consider that the analyses of this role helps us to define different periods of frontier: early frontier, frontier and postfrontier, because her status is different in each period that means that her role in the intercultural communication is also different. The articles also shows some analogues in the frontier relations on the Wild West and the Low Volga region.

**Keywords:** early frontier, frontier, postfrontier, periodization, Wild West, The Low Volga region, women's role, intercultural dialog

**ТИПОЛОГИЯ ЭТАПОВ ФРОНТИРА СКВОЗЬ ПРИЗМУ  
ГЕНДЕРНЫХ МЕЖЭТНИЧЕСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ:  
ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЙ ОПЫТ НА ДИКОМ ЗАПАДЕ И НИЖНЕЙ ВОЛГЕ**

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В статье рассматривается роль женщины в культурном диалоге в разные периоды фронта. Авторы полагают, что анализ этой роли позволяет сделать вывод о существовании разных этапов или периодов фронта: предфронт, фронт, пост-фронт, так как в разные периоды изменялся статус женщины, а значит и ее роль в межкультурной коммуникации фронтного общества. Проводятся аналогии между американским фронтом и русским на Нижней Волге.

**Ключевые слова:** ранний фронт, фронт, постфронт, периодизация, Дикий Запад, Нижняя Волга, роль женщины, межкультурный диалог

In the history of humanity there were special territories defined as frontiers. Nowadays the term is used to define the vanguard of some science discipline: the frontier of chemistry, biology, medicine, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Статья выполнена по проекту ФЦП «Научные и научно-педагогические кадры инновационной России» «2012-1.1-12-000-3003-056» «Культурная память и культурное наследие фронта».

But we will speak about frontier from the historical and humanitarian points of view. For us frontier is mainly the space of cultural encounter, the place where different peoples and civilizations meet. So the frontier is a dramatic period in the history of some peoples or states of intercultural dialogs. In 1893 the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner defined his Frontier thesis that clearly stated that the American democracy was the result of special socio-cultural frontier phenomena that formed a character of the American [19].

Besides that F. J. Turner tried to outline main features of frontier. Due to his point of view and his predecessors, the frontier was a territory between wilderness and civilization. For the most Americans the frontier was the Wild West where a civilizer met a savage. For a long time the frontier thesis was one dimensional. For Turner and all Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Frontier was only depopulated territory, there was no place for the Native Americans, nobody counted them and nobody followed their natural rights for the land [2, p. 3]. Only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a new generation of scientists began to analyze the Frontier phenomena from different points of view. The Native American participation in the frontier was well documented and analyzed.

The same situation we may watch for the Siberian Frontier. It was a huge territory where Russian culture met local cultures, destroying, assimilating or adopting them. Unfortunately the Russian Historical science had no national scholar similar to Turner, but different Russian scientists looked at Siberia with the same patterns as most Americans. Siberia was an important for Russia development and one of them even predicted that “the future power of Russia would grow by Siberia” (M. Lomonosov). The perception of Siberian frontier in Russia was very close to that in the USA in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: The Russian colonization of Siberia brought progress for the local Siberian peoples. We find the same opinion in many scholar history manuals where authors explain that the Russian conquest of Siberian territory had positive influence for the local tribes. Their arguments are very simple: one of them tells the Russians taught Siberian tribes to till the soil and grow crops.

This anecdotic attempt to approve the colonization of Siberia has survived till nowadays and prevents from deep understanding of the Frontier processes in the territories like Siberia or Wild West of the USA. The postcolonial attempt to move our attention from the point of view of the conqueror to the view of the conquered only changes the positive sign to the negative and gives us nothing to our understanding the ways of the cultural dialogue on the frontier. Frontier is not a past phenomenon, it still exists in different parts of our planet. Of course there different types of frontier and there are different models of intercultural dialogues on these different frontiers.

So the main problems are to understand how this dialogue worked and continues to realize itself and to find out the main frames of different types of the frontier. Our hypothesis is that nowadays the term Frontier is used to the different events and different cultural and historical phenomena.

To clear up the situation we chose several markers through which we can underline the frames of the frontier dialogues.

Speaking about intercultural dialogue we have to keep in mind that this dialogue from the one hand is similar with endocultural patterns that always exist in the form of traditional interpersonal relations usual for homogeneous society, and from another hand this dialogue is usually heterogeneous due to the fact that it follows different exocultural patterns because both participants of the dialogue belong to different cultures. The main thing that combines them is the flow of resources that they exchange (peacefully or violently). A Frontier dialogue is impossible without the exchange of goods, resources, and sex.

For many years there was a frontier aphorism that defined not only a common opinion but also some intellectual trends of many American scholars: frontier was “a country that was all right for men and dogs but a hell on horses and women” [6, p. 132]. Due to this common opinion the frontier territory was a Hisland as an American scholar Susan Armitage called it. This strictly male attitude to the frontier phenomena has been recently weakened by a great variety of women’s books on frontier where they demonstrated an impor-

tance of women's roles in the intercultural dialogue on frontier [1, p. 88–125; 3; 7, vol. 1–11; 8; 9; 10; 12; 13]. Analyzing the gender side of the frontier we came to the conclusion that the gender relations can be a very clear indicator of special frontier characteristics or better to say interethnic marriages and sexual relations are the indicator of certain stages of frontier development.

The gender dimension of intercultural communication is central on the frontier. The study of frontier gender makes it possible to identify clearly the main parameters in which this communication is done. On the basis of gender roles in frontier intercultural dialogue several stages can be identified: the prefrontier, the frontier and post-frontier. Each stage is characterized by a complex palette of relationships and various forms of intercultural dialogue.

In prefrontier dialogue interracial or interethnic marriage is seen by both sides as desired, since it gives the opportunity to all the participants of the dialogue to achieve maximum benefits, in the frontier period interethnic matrimonial relations are considered to be negative. During the prefrontier a native woman is seen as a giver of wealth, an owner of her natural rights over resources. On the American frontier, this function has been assigned to such Indian women like Pocahontas, Sacagawea, etc. That's why they have become a symbol of the intercultural dialogue. The Marriage of J. Smith with an Indian woman automatically gives the newcomers Puritans right of possession over an Indian land. During this period this institutionalized form of intercultural marriage is like a gift exchanged. It is approved by both societies and received like a benefit. The first progenitors of the new American nation are well received in the metropolis and the young "Native American princess" Pocahontas was invited with her husband to the royal court.

The woman during this period is a subject and an object of the intercultural dialogue. She is a guide to the new cultural and economic situation of intercultural relations. Being a part of a new intercultural marriage she belongs to both sides of the dialogue and looks for peace and prosperity for her family and for her people.

Barter is a main form during this period because all participants are interested in the continuation of exchange. And a woman is one of the central figures of this process of exchange. She is an object and a subject of this exchange, a liaison of two actors.

But the situation changed and the intercultural dialogue enters into a new stage. We called it a frontier phase. During this period, when the dialogue gets more confrontational forms the appeal to the law did not play any role and intercultural marriages are considered the least prestigious. A woman in this period changes her status and becomes an object of the dialogue. To keep her subject role of the dialogue she needs to move to the male status and express herself as a warrior. There is no more harmony between her two sides of existence: her subject/object realizations are in a situation of contradictions. As an object she is a victim and as a subject she looks for domination over other people. In the frontier literature the role of a woman as an object of intercultural relations is well documented. A great amount of books are devoted to the so called captive narratives where a white woman is described as a captive of the Native Americans [15; 4; 5]. Unfortunately there are not many books on a Native American woman as a captive, but her image is well describe through a status of poor squaw who is only a fade shadow of her white husband.

At the same time her role of a warrior is better documented and reflects the changing situation of new types of relations. The 19<sup>th</sup> century literature is full of shocking episodes of bloody combats where the woman is a victim or an enemy killer, a defender of her family.

An end of confrontational policy brings us to a new cultural situation where all gender roles again are reexamined and transformed into new forms. The previous bloody history is reevaluated and accents are changed. If we speak about the American frontier, this change in the perception of the past frontier history began very early due to the fact that different parallel phases of frontiers coexisted due to the fact that a frontier is not a stable line but a constantly moving zone. So in the case of the United States a new period of postfrontier was inspired in the Wild West by a situation in which the Eastern States (especially New England) had overlived the frontier phase long ago. In the end of the 19th century many Americans began to look at the frontier history from the critical points of view. The coloni-

zation of the American West and the destruction of Native Americans were not a glorious history but an inhuman policy toward these peoples.

During a postfrontier stage this role of an interethnic marriage increases again. They are no longer considered to be negative, and a woman returns her function of a giver of special spiritual or sacred values. She is again a liaison or a mediator between different cultures. She is a guide or a cultural translator who tries to construct cultural bridges between different peoples. She is an advocate and a teacher for her tribesmates and a cultural ambassador. She is again a subject and an object of this dialogue that doesn't contradict her statuses.

It is worth to mention that the frontier situation as a rule gives to a woman more opportunities to express herself. In a traditional society her role is reduced to daughter/mother/wife statuses. But the situation of frontier gives her a possibility to be more independent, liberate herself from rigid frames of traditional relations and achieve new goals for herself and her family.

At the same time the analyses of frontier gender relations is a good indicator for the evaluation of the society. For example the Russian frontier literature is very poor in the field of captive narratives. The Russian society had no interest in the fate of captives and paid almost no attention to the theme. We can't say that there are no such narratives at all but they are not numerous and didn't get any attention from the society. Russian scholars ignore the theme due to the lack of sources and due to the lack of social interest.

At the same time we can tell that the role of women on Russian frontier was also very high and we can find a lot of facts that prove the same situation as in the history of the American frontier.

After joining the Astrakhan Khanate to the Russian Kingdom in 1558, the Low Volga region formed a special area, which can be defined as the frontier[11]. The intercultural relations in this territory in this period may be characterized as sporadic confrontation of different political forces. This area was poorly populated by Russian troops in the wooden fortress of Astrakhan, not numerous Astrakhan Tatars, the Nogai and the Don Kazaks, who constantly invaded the territory.

For a long time the Low Volga was a distant frontier of the Russian Kingdom that developed under special rules and in special conditions different from other territories of the Russian Kingdom with the capital in Moscow.

Due to our hypothesis the gender or especially interethnic gender relations are like a special marker that can help us to understand better the development of the Frontier territory and define a special historical or cultural phase that characterizes better the local situation.

To our mind this phases are characterized by a complex stable features connected with resources usage, economic situation, forms of intercultural dialogue and personal safety. In this frontier complex gender relations are the most painful and less researched phenomena though may be it is the most vivid marker of the cultural dialogue as we could prove for the Frontier history of the United States.

But the case of the Low Volga we know almost nothing about gender role in interethnic communication, due to the fact that in the history or better to say He-story (in other words Male-story) there were not numerous facts about the position of women in that cultural dialogue and her role in it.

Russian society of that time was with a strictly male dominance and the position of women and especially from other ethnic groups was very low.

At the same time there are some narrative data that can help us to understand better the interethnic relations on the Low Volga frontier in that period. Some narratives describe a peculiar situation with gender roles in the region.

Adam Olearius, the secretary to the ambassador of the Duke of Holstein-Gottorp who visited Astrakhan in around 1630 was shocked by the slave market in Astrakhan, where he bought two little Tatar girls at the price of a loaf of bread in Germany. The fact that this situation didn't change till the end of the XVII century can be seen not only in the travelogues, but also in folklore sources.

A typical example of interethnic gender relations is the well-known Russian folk song "Stepan Razin". It tells us about an episode of the Astrakhan history when a famous Kazak leader Razin threw out a captive Persian princess from his boat into the Volga River. The story became known in two variants that differ only in motives of the Razin's deed. In the travelogue variant, written by a Dutch traveler Jan Struys, Stepan Razin threw his favorite captive as a sacrifice to the Volga [17, p.187]. But the song motive describes the event as the Razin's reaction for his gangmates' reproaches in his devotedness to Persian beauty. His gangmates considered that his attachment to the Persian beauty made him too feminized and he betrayed them. This frontier brotherhood had the highest value above other human feelings. An appearance of a foreign woman near their leader scares them.

The fact that the song devoted to this even was still popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the people did not see anything reprehensible in the attitude of the hero to the princess, killed at the whim of the chieftain. That allows us to make a conclusion, that the process of intercultural communication has undergone minor changes up to the XIX century.

By the way the mentioned Dutch traveler also mentioned some other facts of inhuman attitude of Stepan Razin to Russian women or to the women of other ethnic groups. At the same time we can see a great difference in the attitude to other ethnic groups of local Astrakhan citizens and Don Kazaks who came to the city sporadically. We think that the situation with the Persian princess killed by Stepan Razin was extraordinary situation. But at the same time the public opinion wasn't shocked by the event and even reworked it poetically.

At the same time the position of a woman in the region in the end of the 19 century was higher in comparison with female position in other parts of Russia. Women were economically and politically more independent in the region and demonstrated that to other people. Many travelers noted that fact in their travelogues. Women get here more possibilities for their existence and the frontier traditions didn't put her in rigid frames of social norms and patterns.

She was ready to be in competition with men in her eagerness to gain her strong economic position, to demonstrate her independence, liberty and power. She is able to rival the male dominance and gain her success in the traditionally male professions, for example like see fishery. She doesn't limit herself to common practice of cooking for fishers but goes net fishing and even drag-netting.

The analyses of female roles and statuses in the USA frontier demonstrate us the same situation. The frontier conditions may be very difficult for women but they gain from them all possibilities and demonstrate their high adaptive abilities.

At the same time all generalizations can only level all ethnic and local peculiarities. In Astrakhan there were a lot of different patterns of gender relations and even in the frames of one ethnic group there were several types of sex relations. As a rule this divide passed between the local parts of the ethnic group and the newcomers.

Even the traditional Turk nomadic groups changed their cultural sex patterns under the influence of different circumstances: economic, social, cultural, etc. A woman from these ethnic groups also changes her behavior, especially in the field of family statuses, widow statuses, etc.

At the same time there is a great difference between the frontier processes in the Low Volga and the USA frontier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

If in the situation of the USA there is a vivid division between frontier phases (frontier and post-frontier), in the Low Volga frontier we can observe the main characteristic features of both phases coexisting simultaneously.

The comparison of different frontiers (like Siberian, Low Volga, different Canadian and different Chinese frontiers can help us to understand better these intercultural relations in these heterotopic territories.

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