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## The Politics of Return: Migration, Race, and Belonging in the Russian Far East

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**THE POLITICS OF RETURN:  
MIGRATION, RACE, AND BELONGING IN THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST**

A Dissertation Presented by

LAUREN WOODARD

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2019

Anthropology

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by

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## DEDICATION

To all my Russian friends, who welcomed, supported, and shared with me your perspectives, patience, and kindness.

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## ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS OF RETURN:

MIGRATION, RACE, AND BELONGING IN THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST

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This dissertation investigates the tensions between inclusion and exclusion in Russia's migration policies against a global backdrop of rising nationalism, populism, and anti-migrant sentiments in Europe and the United States. As Russian officials have sought to limit labor migration through the introduction of quotas and a Russian language exam, they have simultaneously made it easier for some to gain citizenship through the Resettlement of Compatriots Program. On paper, the compatriots program appears to be a white, Slavic solution to Russia's demographic crisis. However, 13 months of ethnographic research reveals that a diversity of participants qualify. I demonstrate how officials use the compatriots program to respond to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, integrate Central Asian immigrants who have already been living and working in Russia, and offer citizenship and free land to Old Believers who have "returned" from South America. In each chapter, I examine the histories and raciolinguistic locations of each group. I argue that by promoting the program as Slavic, Russian officials appeal to popular anxieties about migration while simultaneously responding to Russia's labor crisis and the needs of immigrants already living in Russia.

My research sheds light on recent anti-migrant rhetoric as it has shifted from the far right and populist to the mainstream. I explore backlashes against Soviet values of internationalism, demonstrating how they emerge not only on the outskirts of Russian nationalism, cultivated by the European and American far right, but within everyday Russian discourses. As the fourth largest immigrant-receiving country, Russians share Europeans' and Americans' anxieties about cultural differences. What is unique in Russia though are the legacies of Soviet ideas of Friendship of Peoples that continue to inform especially older generations' understandings of who are Russian compatriots and the state support to which they think compatriots should be eligible. Through ethnographic analysis, attentive to the role language and race play in debates about belonging, this dissertation contributes to the anthropologies of migration and race. As Russians grapple with the tensions between socialist values of diversity and growing nationalism, their debates offer insight into how officials, citizens, and immigrants alike respond to changing political landscapes.

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## CHAPTER 1

### MIGRATION, RACE, AND BELONGING IN THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST

In this dissertation, I examine the tensions between inclusion and exclusion in Russia's migration policies against a global backdrop of rising nationalism, populism, and anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe and the United States. Recently, we have seen how governments have sought to restrict migration through brash assertions of exclusion, including US President Donald Trump's Muslim ban in 2017 and responses to the "refugee crisis" in Europe that began in 2016. Accusations that immigrants drain resources and are dangerous are not just perpetrated by the political right. Politicians across party lines have seized onto anxieties about cultural difference, portraying immigration as a problem that threatens national identity (Stolcke 1995; Vertovec 2011; Grillo 2003; Gullestad 2002).

In Russia, the fourth largest immigrant receiving country, there has been a rise in anti-migrant rhetoric as well (Schenk 2018; Laruelle 2014, 2015a; Reeves 2013, 2016; Round and Kuznetsova 2016).<sup>1</sup> The Duma has passed laws to restrict the number of migrant workers from Central Asia and the Caucasus and to require immigrants to pass Russian language and history tests. However, President Putin's administration, through the Federal Migration Services (FMS) and more recently the Ministry of Internal Affairs

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<sup>1</sup> In 2017, Russia was the fourth largest immigrant receiving country in the world. According to the Migration Policy Institute, Russia's international migration population is 11.65 million immigrants. The top three immigrant receiving countries are the United States (49.78 million), Saudi Arabia (12.19 million), and Germany (12.17 million). Until 2015, Russia was the second largest immigrant receiving country, surpassed that year by Germany, who accepted a large number of refugees displaced by the war in Syria (see Migration Policy Institute (MPI) 2017).

(MVD), has simultaneously sought to attract immigrants and expedite citizenship in response to fears of demographic crisis. Drawing on Soviet ideas of citizenship as rooted not in the nation but across socialist republics and Russian language's status as a unifier, officials have offered financial support to those who broadly identify with the country's interests and encouraged them to immigrate to parts of Russia through the Resettlement of Compatriots Program.<sup>2</sup>

Introduced in 2006, the compatriots program recognizes ethnic Russians, Russian-speakers, and those who are "spiritually" and "culturally" linked to the Russian Federation as compatriots. Mobilized by Russian state discourses of homeland, ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers are "returning" to Russia through this program that promises financial assistance and a Russian passport in as little as three months. However, program participants—or as I call them, "returnees" (*vozvrashchentsy*)—cannot move anywhere they choose. Russian officials resettle them to areas deemed underdeveloped and strategic to the country, and officials select returnees based on whether one's profession is on the list of those "needed" (*nuzhnye*) by participating regions.

This dissertation places the perspectives and practices of government employees and immigrants involved in the compatriots program at the center of an ethnographic study. On paper, the compatriots program appears to be for ethnic Russians and other groups originally from western Russia and Europe, who are supposedly more culturally similar and, therefore, assumed more adaptable. Promotional materials and news

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<sup>2</sup> In Russian, *Gosudarstvennaia programma po okazaniiu sodeistviia dobrovol'nomu pereseleniiu v Rossiiskuiu Federatsiiu sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom.*

coverage of the program depict white, ethnic Russian, Ukrainian, and German families, “returning to their historic homeland.”<sup>3</sup> However, my ethnographic research on the compatriots program revealed greater complexity. I found that program implementation varied by region and that a diversity of applicants had obtained Russian citizenship through the program. In this dissertation, I focus on the ambiguity of who qualifies as a compatriot and the different opportunities such a definition provides to the diverse actors engaged in the program, including high-level officials in Moscow; mid- and low-level bureaucrats in Primorskii krai, my case study; and returnees who participate in the program.

My dissertation makes two key contributions. First, as an ethnography of a migration policy and the actors involved, it contextualizes the compatriots program within the contradictory relationships governments have with immigrants. As officials reposition their cities domestically and globally post-2008 (and post-1991), they often seek to limit yet attract immigrants as part of their revitalization efforts (Glick Schiller and Caglar 2011; Barber and Lem 2012; Schenk 2018). In this dissertation, I explore the unsettling ways in which pro-immigrant, development programs like the compatriots program can co-exist with broader national security and anti-immigrant rhetoric that calls for governments to restrict movement and close borders (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). I argue that Russian officials respond to popular anxieties about immigration through the compatriots program. Officials promote the compatriots program as a “Slavic” – or culturally similar – solution to Russia’s demographic crisis

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<sup>3</sup> This phrase, “returning (*vozvrashchaiut’sia*) to the their historic homeland (*na istoricheskuiu Rodinu*),” is a common one, quoted by politicians, picked up by journalists, and what, at times, seems to be a sincere statement by some compatriots.

and emphasize program participants as highly qualified, well-educated Russian-speakers who will contribute to regional economies.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, officials embrace the breadth and ambiguity of the term, so that they can address Russia's labor shortage and the real needs of immigrants already living in Russia, including the large number of families from Central Asia and the Caucasus.

My research highlights the diversity of actors involved in the compatriots program, including the competing political factions that have propelled it and the unlikely alliances that have sustained it. Indeed, I found that while the promotional materials featured white, ethnic Russians, most of the program participants in Primorskii krai, my field site, were refugees from Ukraine and immigrants from Central Asia. In this dissertation, I show how officials have adapted the compatriots program to meet the region's various needs, which includes addressing Russia's refugee crisis as a large number of Ukrainian citizens moved to the Far East in 2014 and 2015, providing citizenship to immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus who have already been living and working in the region, and offering citizenship and free land to ethnic Russian Old Believers from South America. I devote a chapter to each group, exploring each population's distinct history and its relationship with race, language, and representation.

Second, my research sheds light on how debates about immigration reveal anxieties about race and language in post-socialist Russia. As in Europe and the United States, anti-migrant rhetoric, couched in terms of "cultural difference," has shifted from

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<sup>4</sup> Slavs include Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, Bulgarians, Czechs, and Serbs, to name just a few.

the far right and populist to the mainstream in Russia in recent years (Stolcke 1995). Because of the Soviet Union's commitments to internationalism, concerns about immigration today in Russia play out in distinctive ways. I explore backlashes against Soviet values of diversity and the Friendship of Peoples (*druzhba narodov*), demonstrating how they emerge not only on the outskirts of Russian nationalism, cultivated by the European and American far right, but within everyday Russian discourses. I bring together anthropological literatures on race, which grapple with the American and Western European contexts, with scholarship on race and language in the late imperial, Soviet, and post-socialist periods to trace ethnographically how raciolinguistic features – skin color, eye shape, language, accent, clothing, family size, and location – influence people's experiences (Rosa and Flores 2017; Rosa 2016; Lemon 2000, 2002; Reeves 2013; Tolz 2014; Verdery 1993; Chari and Verdery 2009).

In post-Soviet countries, where there are robust discourses on nationalities (*natsional'nost'*, the term used in Russian for ethnicity) and diversity, developed by official Soviet anti-racism and anti-colonial positions, many might say that I am writing about ethnic differences and ethnic tensions. People rarely use the term race, *rasa*, when talking about Russia's diversity. Instead, they often speak of nationality or ethnicity (*natsional'nost'*) (Lemon 1995). Some even continue to deny that race is relevant in Russia, claiming that it is a foreign concept (Lemon 2002). As Michele Rivkin-Fish and Elena Trubina (2010) have noted, the analytical tools through which American and Russian social scientists investigate debates about cultural differences are themselves culturally embedded. As an American, I am especially attentive to race as a social category, shaped by what Rivkin-Fish and Trubina have identified as tensions between American legacies of slavery and narratives of liberal values (2010, 12).

However, racial categories, and the relationships they suggest, do exist in Russia alongside ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, and other categories that mark someone in place and time. The challenge is how to analyze these complex interactions and represent the multiple logics that contour people's experiences. To address this challenge, I utilize a raciolinguistic, ethnographic framework that recognizes the cultural specificity of racial and linguistic markers in Russia (Rosa and Flores 2017; Rosa 2016; Lemon 2002; Reeves 2013). I pay attention to how these markers have become linked historically and the relationships they index, including how people identify one another, position themselves within the compatriots program, and the strategies they adopt as they navigate the terrain of the program. I trace the histories and raciolinguistic locations of three populations who participated in the compatriots program in Primorskii krai – refugees from Ukraine, immigrants from Central Asia, and Old Believers from South America – based on my ethnographic fieldwork and analysis of how journalists and officials represented each group in promotional materials and media.

Ultimately, my work contributes to recent efforts to contextualize Russian debates about immigration and national identity within European and American concerns about cultural differences (Schenk 2018; Reeves 2013; Tolz 2014; Laruelle 2019; Laruelle and Radvanyi 2018). I find that the prevalence of anti-immigrant rhetoric in Russia is in line with that of Europe and the United States. As the fourth largest immigrant-receiving country, Russians share Europeans' and Americans' anxieties about diversity. What makes Russia unique, I argue, are the Soviet legacies of the Friendship of Peoples that continue to inform especially older generations' understandings of who are Russian compatriots and the state support to which they

think compatriots should be eligible. However, for others, the diversity embodied in the Friendship of Peoples makes less sense than it once did. As opportunities for travel and study outside the former Soviet Union have become more possible, younger generations orient themselves towards Europe, and, like their European counterparts, some see immigrants as a threat to national unity.

In this introduction, I first present my primary field site, Primorskii krai, as a compelling place from which to examine how migration policies intersect with efforts of regional development. Next, I lay out my theoretical framework that contextualizes Russia's Resettlement of Compatriots Program within larger discussions about migration and the politics of belonging as well as Soviet legacies of the Friendship of Peoples and Russian nationalism. Then I introduce the political context in which I carried out my fieldwork, my methods, and my approach to data analysis. In the final section, I outline the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

### **Primorskii krai and the Russian Far East**

I selected Primorskii krai and its capital, Vladivostok, as my primary field site because the region was one of the original 12 regions to accept compatriots. Primorskii – or as locals call it, Primor'e – means maritime or seaside region. The word "krai" in Russian means "edge" or frontier, and it is a term historically designated for territories that the Russian Empire acquired. Primorskii krai is indeed at the edge of Russia – the krai's southern border runs alongside North Korea and its eastern, with China (figure 1). Because of its strategic location, as well as Moscow's concerns about its distance – it's nearly 4,000 miles and seven time zones away from Moscow – Primorskii krai has been



Figure 1: Map of Russia, courtesy of the US-Russia Fulbright Program

the site of the Russian government’s efforts to attract people to move to the region, historically and presently.

When Russian officials founded Vladivostok in 1860, it was diverse, inhabited by merchants from Europe and America and Chinese, Korean, and Japanese locals, who had lived in the region generations before it became Russian. To solidify Russian power, tsarist officials introduced programs to attract Russians, Ukrainians, Old Believers, and Armenians to resettle to the Far East, offering free land and other incentives (Stephan 1996; Bassin 2006). Although responding to very contemporary concerns, the Resettlement of Compatriots Program as well as the recently (re)introduced Far Eastern Hectare Program (*Zakon o dal’nevostochnom gektare*) draw on these earlier resettlement

practices that predate but continued throughout Soviet times. Through the compatriots program, officials have offered Russian citizenship to Russian-speaking immigrants who are willing to move to region. Returnees receive a relocation allowance (*pod'emnye*): 220,000 rubles (approximately \$3,419) for the primary participant of the program and 120,000 rubles (\$1,865) for each accompanying family member dispersed over a period of three years.<sup>5</sup> Through the Far Eastern Hectare Program, Russian citizens can apply for one free hectare (about 2.5 acres) of land per person. So far, 11,500 hectares (28,417 acres) of land have been given out in Primorskii krai as of August 2018 (TASS 2018b).

I selected Primorskii krai and Vladivostok, its capital, because of the region's recent growth, and one of my research questions was about how initiatives to develop the Far East like the Far Eastern Hectare Program have intersected with the compatriots program. However, as the following ethnographic vignette suggests, in practice, officials' efforts to attract citizens and immigrants to the Russian Far East have often been met with challenges.

In March 2017, my partner Dan and I traveled to northern Primorskii krai, so that I could interview local officials and a group of refugees from Ukraine and Old Believers from South America, who had obtained citizenship through the compatriots program. We stayed two nights in Dal'nerechensk, a small city about two hours away from where I was to conduct my interviews and the only place that had a hotel where we could stay without imposing on our hosts. Through the website Couchsurfing, I met a local family

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<sup>5</sup> As of March 2019, the conversion rate was 64.35 rubles to 1 US dollar. The average monthly salary in Vladivostok was 57,923 rubles (approximately \$900 in March 2019) and in Primorskii krai, 49,156 rubles (\$758) (see Administratsiia Vladivostoka 2018).

from Dal'nerechensk, who showed us around their city. After getting dinner together, our hosts, Nita, Andrei, and Lena took us to an overlook.

We carefully climbed the ice-covered, concrete steps, and at the top, we looked out over the mouth of the Ussuri River, where the Malinovka and Bolshaya Ussurka Rivers joined. In the darkness, the rivers seemed empty though, a black space that extended into the distance until brightened into the skyline of a small city. Nita and Andrei told us that we were looking at the Chinese city, Hulin ("tiger forest"). While Russia was dark, China glittered less than a mile away. The sky though was the most striking. Suspended among shades of deep purple and navy, countless stars glimmered. We pointed out falling stars to one another, and I learned the word for a meteor shower in Russian, "*zvezdopad*," or "star fall."

Eventually, too numb to stay outside any longer, we returned to the car and drove to our last stop, the statue that commemorated the Soviet soldiers, who had died in 1969 when Soviet and Chinese forces had clashed on nearby Damansky Island. Nita told us that after the conflict, the Soviets replaced the region's Chinese names with Russian ones. The Soviets renamed Iman, the Chinese name for a small river that flows into the Ussuri, to Dal'nerechensk or "faraway river." Standing in the dark, sparsely populated Dal'nerechensk and looking across the river at the bright, more densely populated China at the memorial to the conflict, our hosts didn't express the common fear I had heard in Moscow that China would again seize parts of Russia. Rather, they regretted how challenging it remained to cross between the neighboring cities and wished that they, too, had benefitted from nearby development across the border.

The next morning, Dan and I drove two hours from Dal'nerechensk to Novopokrovka, the administrative center of the Krasnoarmeiskii region, named for the

Soviet Red Army forces who defeated the last supporters of the tsar, the White Army, in 1922 to meet with my interviewees, a family of refugees from Ukraine and a family of Old Believers from Bolivia. At the top of Primorskii krai, the region of Krasnoarmeiskii was rural and its economy was primarily dependent on mineral extraction (tungsten and copper), logging, and small-scale agriculture. It was early March and tall grass, frosted with a thin layer of snow, stretched across the landscape. Short, crooked trees crouched along the road and tall, thin birches stood out in contrast to the dark mountains in the distance. The road was quiet except for the occasional passing truck, loaded down with logs, or the lone taxi, bouncing over tire-sized, if not bigger, pot holes. Crossing through the mountains, we entered Novopokrovka, nestled in a valley. Small, wooden houses with bright-colored shutters lined the road. People rode bikes and women pushed baby strollers; children in knee-high rain boots chased one another, splashing through muddy puddles. We turned left at the grocery store, its windows covered with photographs of vibrant, exotic fruit, including pineapples and mangos. At the end of the road, Fyodor stood, waiting for us.

Fyodor was the local official who administered the compatriots program for the region.<sup>6</sup> He appeared to be older, white-haired, his face wrinkled, with a stout belly that hung over his neat, black suit. But he was only 55, he told us later. Originally from Dal'nerechensk, Fyodor was just five at the time of the Damansky conflict, whose memorial we had seen the night before, but he remembered it. Like many others we had met that year, Fyodor's parents were from Ukraine and had moved to the region during

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<sup>6</sup> Fyodor is a pseudonym. Throughout this dissertation, unless otherwise noted by including one's last name, I have assigned participants pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

his father's military service. Fyodor invited us into his office, lit only by daylight because the power was out again, he explained. We took a seat below a huge map of Primorskii krai that stretched across the entire wall with a pixelated picture of a Siberian tiger, native to the region, next to it. Fyodor had spread a table for us with different types of cookies, chocolate, bread, sausage, and juice. As we chatted and ate, Fyodor told us about "returnees" who had moved to the region through the Resettlement of Compatriots Program. They included 90 Old Believers from South America in Dersu, four Ukrainian families who worked in the mines in Vostok and in logging in Glubinnoe, and an Uzbek family in Roshchino. "

We receive more applications than we can accept," he explained. "The most important factor, as is written in the law, is profession. Here though—how do I say it?" he paused. "It is a little depressed. The population is decreasing. There are few jobs... People want to come here—it's beautiful here—but there isn't work. How can they fulfill themselves?"

Villages like Novopokrovka and small cities like Dal'nerechensk were the models for the compatriots program, a program intended to attract Russian-speakers from abroad to immigrate to less populous regions of the country. Economically depressed with shrinking populations, yet resource-wealthy and close to China (Novopokrovka was 37 miles; Dal'nerechensk, less than two), these were the places officials had selected as priority regions for the program. However, as Fyodor lamented, there were few jobs for anyone, locals and newcomers alike. If officials were supposed to select participants based on their profession, how could they accept anyone if there weren't any jobs?

In contrast to Dal'nerechensk's and Novopokrovka's remoteness, Vladivostok, where we lived in Primorskii krai, was a growing city on the Sea of Japan. A decade earlier, Moscow had tried to crack down on Vladivostok's auto business to protect the domestic car industry and two months of protests erupted, drawing thousands. In December 2008, the government flew special riot police the nine hours from Moscow to Vladivostok to break up the rallies (Levy 2009). Since then, prominent Russian officials, including President Putin, have regularly visited the city, bringing with them increased resources. In 2012, Vladivostok hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit, which led to a surge in federal funding to build two new bridges, an express train to connect the city to the airport, and a new university campus for the Far Eastern Federal University on Russian Island. Other projects to develop the city have included the opening of the Primorskii stage of the world-renowned Mariinsky Theater in 2012, the Center for Contemporary Art "Zarya" in 2013, and a branch of the Hermitage expected to open in the fall of 2018. The boardwalks in the city center were undergoing renovations when we were there in 2017. Tourism had boomed with cruise ships from China and Korea, and restaurants, coffee shops, and bars had proliferated in recent years.

However, the compatriots program did not allow returnees to select Vladivostok unless they were university students or, as of February 2019, their profession was one of the 39 listed as "in demand" by Primorskii krai's Department of Labor and Social Development (Administratsiia Primorskogo kraia 2019). Federal and regional officials wanted returnees to move to places like Dal'nerechensk and the Krasnoarmeiskii region, where local officials, like Fyodor, had to turn people away. In practice though, the compatriots program's location requirements didn't mean that returnees weren't living

in Vladivostok. The very first returnee I interviewed lived in Vladivostok, and of the 27 returnees I met in Primorskii krai, six of them lived in Vladivostok and only two of those six were students, legally permitted to reside there. The remaining had traveled to the neighboring city of Artyom to submit their documents and obtain Russian citizenship.

Nearly 12,000 people have immigrated to Primorskii krai through the program between 2008 and 2016, and 72% of them between 2014 and 2016 (Rosstat 2018). However, most people I met in Primor'e had never heard of the compatriots program or knew very little about it. In fact, when I told people about my project, I found that I had to specify which resettlement program I was studying because so many thought I meant the historical resettlement programs that had occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. When I clarified that I met the current Resettlement of Compatriots Program, many still did not know what I was talking about or if they did, they associated it only with the help refugees from Ukraine had received through the program after 2014. Very few realized that individuals from other ethnic groups and countries could obtain citizenship through the compatriots program or that local officials were trying so desperately to attract immigrants to their hometowns. Like earlier programs before it, as Fyodor's predicament reflected, it wasn't easy to incentivize migration when there were already such limited economic opportunities for locals.

### **Framing the Compatriots Program**

I suggest that the Resettlement of Compatriots Program emerged and has evolved at the juncture of three issues – global concerns about immigration and cultural differences; Soviet legacies of the Friendship of Peoples; and Russian nationalist backlash against Soviet values and connections to the European and American far right.

In this section, I contextualize the compatriots program within these issues and propose an approach to studying the program. In the first section, I demonstrate how Russians, too, share European and American concerns about how immigrants' cultural differences will affect Russian national identity. I argue that anxieties about migration and cultural diversity in Russia are also distinctive, arising from a unique set of historical circumstances. In the second section, I examine Soviet legacies of nationality and race alongside those of Russian nationalism. In the third section, I argue for a raciolinguistic, ethnographic approach that traces how assumptions about language, race, and belonging inform how people envision, implement, and transform Russia's compatriots policies.

### **Migration and the Cultural Politics of Difference**

This dissertation contributes to recent scholarship that characterizes Russian policies not as exceptional but as part of global efforts to control migration (Schenk 2018; Reeves 2013, 2016). Like many other countries, Russian officials respond to anxieties about cultural differences by rerouting some forms of migration—seeking those who are highly qualified, Russian-speaking, and culturally similar to Russians—into other forms, in this case the Resettlement of Compatriots Program. I suggest that it is equally important to examine the *incentives* governments offer to attract immigrants as it is to understand the *barriers* introduced to restrict migration.<sup>7</sup> I look at how low-level officials, embedded in their local communities, come to enact state power in decisions

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<sup>7</sup> For more on barriers, governments have imposed to restrict migration, see Sassen (1999, 2014), Brown (2010), and Fassin (2011).

about who should be eligible for the compatriots program as well as how returnees adapt to and navigate officials' assumptions (Reeves 2014, 2013; De León 2015; De León, Gokee, and Schubert 2015; Fuglerud 2004; Gupta 1995).

Russia is not the only country to navigate economic, political, and social tensions by pursuing strict migration policies while simultaneously relying on informal practices to transform immigrants into "more desirable categories" (Schenk 2018, 212). "Controlling" migration is not just about restricting population movement; it is also about creating incentives, choosing which policies to enforce, and leaving open loopholes to attract certain kinds of immigrants. For example, the American government has actively deported undocumented immigrants from Latin America in the last 18 years and militarized the US-Mexico border (De León 2015; S. Holmes 2013; Andreas 2000; D. S. Massey et al. 1994). Meanwhile, the government has also offered green cards to applicants from countries with low numbers of immigrants through the Diversity Immigrant Visa program (also known as the green card lottery) and special visas to those who have a profession deemed needed by the US government (H-1B visas).<sup>8</sup> Many other countries offer so-called highly skilled immigrants (usually defined as those with a college education) simplified paths to obtaining work permits or even permanent status. The UK and Denmark grant highly skilled workers temporary work permits then allow them to apply for permanent status after a certain number of years (five in the UK, seven in Denmark) (Ruhs 2013, 72, 76; Cerna 2016). Meanwhile, Canada, Australia, and New

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Trump's administration has challenged both programs.

Zealand offer “skilled” immigrants permanent immigration (as in non-temporary status), using a points-based system to select participants (Ruhs 2013, 75–76).<sup>9</sup>

Russia’s Resettlement of Compatriots Program, along with President Putin’s personal granting of Russian citizenship to high profile foreign celebrities such as Gérard Depardieu, Steven Seagal, and Roy Jones Jr., are other examples of incentive-based immigration programs. These programs intended to attract “highly skilled,” Russian-speaking immigrants as well as a few representatives of a wealthy elite, welcomed as dissenters of liberalism, exist alongside measures to restrict other forms of migration. While recent migration scholarship has focused on cultural anxieties about migration and the barriers states seek to restrict migration, I suggest that we examine these policies alongside those that seek to replace immigrants of one so-called group with another. As in Europe and the United States, tensions between inclusion and exclusion arise out of a diversity of political and economic interests, including a need for labor, anxieties about policing borders and national security, and an increase in anti-migrant rhetoric within larger global economic shifts (Basch et al 1994; Glick Schiller and Caglar 2011; Reeves 2013; Schenk 2018; Laruelle and Radvanyi 2018). Across Europe and the United States, public debates since the late 1970s and early 1980s have revealed how migration prompts cultural anxieties about difference and how politicians can harness these concerns, as recently demonstrated with Brexit in June 2016 and Donald Trump’s election to the US presidency in November 2016. From everyday conversations to news clips and official rhetoric, people have represented immigration as a problem, arguing

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the different kinds of programs states offer and their constraints based on quotas, industries, and demographics, see Ruhs 2013, 75–81.

that migrants' "cultural diversity" threatens imaginaries of national identity (Vertovec 2011; Stolcke 1995; Strathern 1995; Grillo 2002, 2003; Gullestad 2002).

Scholars of race in "multicultural" Europe and the US "melting pot" have traced how racism has taken on new forms of expression, reemerging in narratives of cultural difference during late liberalism (Brubaker 2015; Stolcke 1995, 1; D. R. Holmes 2001; Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010; Barker 1981; Grillo 2003). Coining the term "cultural fundamentalism," Stolcke argues that fears of the immigrant derive from an essentialized understanding of culture. She writes that immigration is constructed "as a *political* threat to national identity and integrity on account of immigrants' cultural diversity." She continues:

The nation-state is conceived as founded on a bounded and distinct community which mobilizes a shared sense of belonging and loyalty predicated on a common language, cultural traditions, and beliefs (Stolcke 1995, 8).

In Norway, Marianne Gullestad draws on Stolcke's work to argue that Norwegians perceive immigrants not as a socioeconomic threat but "as a threat to the imagined moral community and the Norwegian welfare state as the incarnation of this community." Because racism had become discredited during late liberalism, people focus instead on Norwegian ancestry, and the need to preserve Norwegian culture becomes the rhetoric of the right (Gullestad 2002, 59). Politicians draw on essentialized, bounded ideas of culture and binaries of "us versus them" to shape not only migration policies but also the institutions that deliver social services to immigrants and citizens alike (Vertovec 2011).

Grillo argues that cultural anxiety isn't just "veiled racism" but that it reflects concerns about loss of culture and authenticity in the context of neoliberal globalization

(2003, 166–67, 2002). Similarly, Gullestad attributes Norwegian cultural anxieties to economic restructuring and changes to the Norwegian welfare state (2002, 48). Barber and Lem (2012) and Glick Schiller and Caglar (2011) have made similar arguments from a political economy perspective. They have called for migration scholars to pay attention to how global processes of capitalist restructuring have pitted immigrants and working classes against one another even though the same economic forces have marginalized them, propelling immigration and increasing inequality (D. Harvey 2006; Glick Schiller 2012; Glick Schiller and Caglar 2011; Barber and Lem 2012; D. B. Massey 2005). My dissertation engages with this literature as it explores the experiences and strategies of both returnees, who move to peripheral regions like Primorskii krai, and local officials, who seek to attract people to reposition Vladivostok nationally and internationally.

Much of the scholarship on the politics of belonging analyzes an earlier period, known often as late liberalism. Over the course of my fieldwork, conducted between 2015 and 2017, concerns about race and immigration and expressions of racism shifted, moving to the forefront as Europeans responded to the sudden influx of Muslim refugees from Syria in 2015, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union in 2016, and Donald Trump won the 2016 US presidential elections on a campaign of xenophobia. This dissertation grapples with these changes, contributing to conversations about how we theorize race and racism and what we can learn from post-socialist experiences (Dzenovska and Kurtović 2018; Edwards, Haugerud, and Parikh 2017).

By examining the incentives Russian officials offer to compatriots over others, I argue that pro-immigrant programs like the Resettlement of Compatriots Program are just as racialized as policies intended to restrict other forms of migration. The Resettlement of Compatriots Program appears to appeal to applicants of a particular

socioeconomic strata, seeking to attract those who are well-educated, highly skilled (versus “low skilled”), and culturally similar (versus different). However, when we analyze how officials, scholars, journalists, and locals describe various groups, including the verbs, nouns, and adjectives they assign them, we see how class identifiers really mask racialized assumptions. Promoted alongside other programs for students and wealthy elite, I show that the compatriots program, like other immigration policies, are meant to respond to labor and skills shortages in the host country (Ruhs 2013, 27). Such programs continue to perpetuate comparisons, voiced and unvoiced, between immigrant groups by prioritizing one over the other (Silverstein 2005). My dissertation looks at how the Russian government uses both kinds of mechanisms simultaneously – to limit and encourage different types of migration – to respond to anxieties about cultural loss while addressing real labor issues. I argue that Russian officials try to assuage fears that immigrants will not adapt and Russian culture will be lost by drawing on Soviet conceptions of Russian language as a unifier and by promoting the compatriots program as for those who are culturally similar to ethnic Russians.

### **Russian Debates about Migration and Belonging**

Although Russian debates about immigration may appear similar to those playing out in Europe and the United States, they are also distinctive. They arise out of a unique set of historical circumstances that include mass displacement and upheaval after the Soviet Union’s collapse. The majority of Russia’s immigrants are fellow former Soviet citizens. As Rogers Brubaker described in the early 1990s, the dissolution transformed them from “internal migrants, secure in their Soviet citizenship, into today’s international migrants of contested legitimacy and uncertain membership”

(1992, 269). The 1990s was a period not only of mass economic upheaval but also of resettlement. In 1994 alone, 1.1 million people moved to Russia. While 60% were ethnic Russians, repatriating to Russia from other post-Soviet republics, many were also non-ethnic Russian refugees, fleeing conflict in the Caucasus, Moldova, and Tajikistan (Chudinovskikh and Denisenko 2017). By the end of the 1990s, annual migration flows had stabilized and the migration population had shifted from ethnic Russians pursuing citizenship to immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus seeking work (Schenk 2018; Pilkington 1998; Flynn 2004).

Responses to immigration have evolved as the makeup of Russia's immigrant population has changed. In Russia, too, some politicians and journalists have framed migration as a crisis. These discourses draw on post-socialist frameworks of crisis on which people have relied to navigate the political, economic, and social upheavals that accompanied the Soviet Union's collapse (Shevchenko 2008). They also reflect the stresses that large waves of migration, such as those displaced in the 1990s and in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, have placed on the social welfare system (Pilkington 1998; Flynn 2004). Issues around migration and race that emerged in the 1990s were not "new crises," as Alaina Lemon, who studies Roma in Moscow, argues. Rather, they "picked up where Soviet crises had left off (unmasking enemies of the people, detecting fictive marriage proposals, etc.)" and found "new points of articulation" during a period of economic and social changes (Lemon 2000, 72; see also Chari and Verdery 2009). I draw on Lemon and others from the anthropology of postsocialism to contextualize debates about immigration – and their underlying concerns about race – as complex and best captured through ethnographic approaches

that trace how people express their concerns, paying attention to the multiple sources from which they draw.

One such – and more recent – source is American and European discourses of migration as a crisis. Marlene Laruelle has demonstrated how Russian nationalists have increasingly identified as part of a “white Europe,” sharing European concerns that migrants not only threaten Russian culture but that Russian culture will entirely disappear as the number of “blacks” increase as the ethnic Russian population “dies out” (Laruelle 2010, 25). Meanwhile, Vera Tolz, Yuri Teper, and Sue-Ann Harding have demonstrated how Russian TV has utilized European and American images of the Muslim migrant to depict Central Asians not as Russian compatriots but as “aliens” (Tolz and Harding 2015; Tolz and Teper 2018). Recent imports of the alien, Muslim migrant as a threat coincide well with the genre of the Russian tragedy, a view that Soviet institutions were anti-Russian and sought to destroy Russian culture, which has gained traction since the 1990s (Oushakine 2009).

In this dissertation, I argue that the broad, ambiguous definition of the term “compatriot” that has emerged since 1991 is a product of the different political factions that have rallied for some kind of state support for Russian compatriots. Russian Communists and nationalists have played a leading role in pressing the Yeltsin and Putin administrations to offer expedited citizenship to Russian compatriots. However, given the ethnic diversity of Russia’s citizens, officials have been reluctant to narrow down the definition of compatriot and define it in ethnolinguistic terms alone. Thus, ethnographic research into the compatriots program also offers insight into Russian policymaking not as a linear process, led by Putin, but as contentious and messy. What is unique about the compatriots program is that it brings together pro-migration,

Russian liberals with conservative proponents of the Russian World (*Russkii mir*) concept. As ambiguous as “compatriot,” ideas of the Russian World, Mikhail Suslov (2018) argues, have evolved over the past 20 years. Initially, the term was used in the 1990s to signal ethnic Russians living outside former Soviet territories. Proponents of the term argued that Russian compatriots abroad were vital resources, untainted by Soviet institutions, whose preservation of Russian culture had the potential to revive post-Soviet Russian society. More recently though, the Russian World has come to signify a more irredentist stance that Russia offers an alternative to the West (Suslov 2018).

A diversity of actors, including liberals, members of Putin’s United Russia, Russian World supporters, Communists, and nationalists – each of which are an umbrella for a variety of other platforms – support the compatriots program even as their definitions of compatriot vary. For liberals, Soviet ideas of citizenship, melded with Western discourses of multiculturalism, are the basis for their belief that compatriotism is tied to Russian language. However, for proponents of the Russian World concept as well as some Communists and nationalists, they reject non-ethnic Russian definitions of compatriot because they perceive the Soviet Union’s diversity policies as having suppressed Russian culture and autonomy. In this next section, I explore how Soviet legacies of nation-building and the rhetoric of the Friendship of Peoples (*druzhba narodov*) as well as Russian nationalist movements that arose in reaction to them have impacted debates about citizenship, race, and belonging today in Russia.

### **A Friendship of Peoples**

In the contemporary US (as well as in much of Europe), the Soviet Union is often remembered for Stalin’s brutal policies, some of which resulted in attempts to ethnically

cleanse various ethnic and religious groups, including the Chechens, Old Believers, Cossacks, Koreans, Ukrainians, and Germans – to name just a few (Martin 2001). Shaped by Cold War narratives of “us” versus “them” and the practicalities of accessing archives beyond Moscow and Leningrad, many Western histories of the Soviet Union either focused on ethnic Russians or represented non-Russian nationalities as victims of “Soviet-Russian” rule (Hirsch 2005, 2). In the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, though, historians like Ronald Grigor Suny, Yuri Slezkine, Terry Martin, Francine Hirsch, and David Brandenberger undertook more nuanced studies that complicated this representation. Drawing on newly accessible archives, they argued that the Bolsheviks pursued policies that supported the development of nations. Relationships between national elites and intellectuals, and local and Russian scholars began to emerge during the late imperial period in Russia, gaining momentum and Bolshevik support after the 1917 revolution (Tolz 2009, 2011; Khalid 2015). The Bolsheviks, often with the support of local elite, sought to incorporate the peoples of the former Russian Empire by bringing them into the revolution and transforming them into socialist, Soviet, citizens.

In *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, Hirsch (2005) traces how Soviet officials worked with ethnographers to collect information about the diversity of peoples living on the territories of the Soviet Union to use in incorporating them into the socialist system. By producing censuses, assisting commissions with assigning national territories, and creating ethnographic exhibits and educational courses, ethnographers played a key role in shaping the structure of the Soviet Union.

Hirsch argues that, together, these activities facilitated a process of “double assimilation”: “the assimilation of a diverse population into nationality categories and, simultaneously, the assimilation of those nationally categorized groups into the Soviet state and society” (Hirsch 2005, 13). By taking censuses and creating borders, ethnographers introduced Soviet peoples to the language of self-determination, while also facilitating administrative consolidation and control of these “self-determined” groups. Not only did Soviet leaders like Lenin and Stalin promote the development of nationalities to woo national elites to support socialism. They also believed that “national consciousness” was a period, part of the historical progression towards internationalism, and that nationality was a product of capitalism (Martin 2001, 5). Therefore, as Stalin summed up, “We are undertaking the maximum development of national culture, so that it will exhaust itself completely and thereby create the base for the organization of international socialist culture” (Stalin quoted in Martin 2001, 5). In other words, the Soviets were creating nationalities to spur the progression towards communism.

To do this, they categorized the entire population of the Soviet Union into a hierarchy of levels of national consciousness. At the bottom were terms like *narodnost'*, people and “folk character,” and *plemia*, tribe, that were associated with “backwardness” (Hirsch 2005, 43). The goal was to identify and develop *natsii* (nations)—what Stalin described as “historically evolved [communities],” formed not by clans and tribes but “from a people of diverse races and tribes.” Citing examples of the French, German, and English nations, Stalin viewed a nation as united by “a common language, territory, and economic life” and its members were to share a “common mentality” (Stalin, “Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros” in Hirsch 2005, 43). *Natsional'nost'* (nationality) implied national

consciousness and reflected a “developed” culture. The hierarchy of national consciousness privileged “nationalities,” while denying clans and tribes republic-level status because they were perceived to lack “national consciousness.” New national territories and institutions integrated non-Russian peoples into a unified Soviet state. Soviet ethnographers and national elite zealously embraced their call to unearth each nation’s great writers – at times even appropriating national poets from other ethnic groups – and develop their own ballets, theaters, textbooks, and dictionaries (Slezkine 1994, 446–47). Meanwhile, the ethnographic museum and traveling exhibits provided experts and planners with material to disseminate into a “unifying narrative” that explained how the peoples of the Russian Empire became Soviet subjects. It emphasized the transformative aspect of Soviet power in developing and unifying its diverse population and educating people of different nationalities about one another’s cultures (Hirsch 2005, 14).

Another way to understand the Soviet Union, the components it consisted of, and their relationships to one another is through Slezkine’s metaphor of the Soviet Union as a communal (shared) apartment. As Slezkine famously wrote, “If the USSR was a communal apartment, then every family that inhabited it was entitled to a room of its own.” Everyone that is except for the Russians, who lived in the center of the apartment and had “a large and amorphous space not clearly defined as a room, unmarked by national paraphernalia” (Slezkine 1994, 434).<sup>10</sup> The Russians, unlike many

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<sup>10</sup> Jewish people, considered a nationality in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, also occupied an unusual position within the Soviet Union. Unlike other nationalities, they did not receive a territory until 1928 when Soviet officials reserved a territory in the Russian Far East for a Jewish settlement, intended to attract families from across the Soviet Union. Even then though, officials in 1934 deemed the region as the Jewish Autonomous National District (*Avtonomnaia*

others, did not receive the special privileges of other nationalities to develop their own culture because, as Slezkine writes, “they had possessed and misused them before” (1994, 434). Martin argues that the Soviet Union was the first empire to promote affirmative action policies to decolonize marginalized groups of the Russian Empire and build Soviet unity. The Soviets promoted the development of non-Russian nationalities, standardized their languages, provided educational opportunities, and at times favored non-Russian applicants over Russian ones. Russians could only be a minority outside of Russia; they didn’t have any special rights or opportunities over anyone else. Russia had its own national territory, but it never had its own Communist Party or National Academy of Sciences as the other republics did. Lenin was particularly concerned about “Great Russian chauvinism” and called for the party to differentiate between “the nationalism of oppressor nations and the nationalism of oppressed nations.” “In relation to the second nationalism, in almost all historical practice, we nationals of the large nations are guilty, because of an infinite amount of violence [committed],” Lenin wrote in 1922 (Lenin, “K voprosu o natsional’nostiakh,” 356–362 in Martin 2001, 7).

Soviet identity, towards which every group was striving, was obviously not a national identity, rooted in a nation. However, it later became more closely tied to ethnic Russian language, culture, and identity. In the 1930s, Soviet officials began to rehabilitate Russian culture and Russian national identity in what historian David Brandenberger (2010, 2002) calls the “search for a usable past.” Alongside new Soviet heroes who were Bolshevik revolutionaries, party leaders, and everyday workers who

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*Evreiskaia natsional’naia oblast’*) within the Russian Soviet Federative Republic rather than an autonomous republic (see Weinberg 1998; Gessen 2016).

embraced socialism, Communist Party officials began reintroducing legendary figures from the Russian imperial past such as Aleksandr Nevskii and Peter the Great (Brandenberger 2010, 727). However, Stalin's aim, as Brandenberger argues, was not to promote ethnic Russian national identity but "to foster a maximally accessible, populist sense of *Soviet* social identity" through Russian figures (2002, 4).

Officials increased the status of ethnic Russians within the Soviet Union in two ways – by promoting Russian culture within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and simultaneously by elevating the status of Russian language and culture throughout the Soviet Union (Martin 2001, 394). Russification existed in parallel with Soviet efforts of nation-building across the republics. By the end of the 1930s, all written languages of the Soviet Union had adopted the Cyrillic alphabet and all non-Russian schools required Russian as a second language. Meanwhile, more and more ethnic Russians were occupying positions of power in the Soviet Party and state (Slezkine 1994, 443). Soviet officials incorporated the Russian people into the Friendship of Peoples framework, at the top of the hierarchy. Russians became "the first among equals" as Soviet officials positioned Russian language and culture as something that unified the Soviet Union's diversity of peoples (Martin 2001, 454–55).

While the Soviets may have promoted the languages, cultures, and rights of all Soviet nationalities, this did not mean that they did so peacefully or with respect to the self-determination of the people they were categorizing. Often Soviet officials went about assigning nationalities and developing the cultures of these nationalities regardless of local wishes. For example, Hirsch writes about a 1924 expedition to the Gomel province of what would become the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). When Iakov Peters, a member of the secret police and later member of the Central Asian

Bureau, asked locals if they wanted to become part of Belorussia, their answer was no. “‘Why should I learn the Belorussian language?’ they asked him. ‘I can travel one sixth of the earth’s globe with the Russian language.’” Peters then noted in his report that the locals were indeed Belarusians but confused about their “true ethnographic origins” (Peters quoted in Hirsch 2005, 210). Meanwhile, in 1929 in the Uzbek SSR, the government announced that all members of the Central Committee and Supreme Court had two months to learn Uzbek language (all other officials were granted more time – nine months) (Slezkine 1994, 438). Like many other Soviet projects, nation-building was top-down, large-scale, resource-intensive, and linked to a specific rendition of decolonization intended to incorporate former peoples of the Russian Empire into the Soviet Union. The supposed beneficiaries of such projects, thought of as formerly colonized peoples, were often wary of the Russian – now Soviet – efforts.

Ultimately though, the notion of nationalities stuck. Perhaps even too much. Some scholars have argued that Soviet efforts to develop national cultures had the unexpected effect of fueling independence movements in most Soviet republics during perestroika and glasnost in the late 1980s – what Suny (1993) calls the “revenge of the past.” As Slezkine writes, returning to his metaphor of the Soviet Union as a communal apartment, when the country collapsed, the tenants of the communal apartment “barricaded their doors and started using the windows,” leaving the confused Russians wondering, “Should they try to recover their belongings? Should they knock down the walls? Should they cut off the gas?” (1994, 452). The Soviet Union’s sudden dissolution led to many unresolved issues, including how to deal with a refugee crisis as many fled

to Russia in the early 1990s and millions of ethnic Russians suddenly found themselves living abroad.<sup>11</sup>

Within Russia itself, ethnic Russian nationalist movements gained momentum during Gorbachev's reforms and in the post-Soviet period. Despite Russian language and culture's prominence within the Soviet Union, Russian nationalists lamented the absence of Russia's own Communist Party and a clear Russian identity, separate from the Soviet Union's. They mobilized popular support by arguing that the Soviet Union had marginalized Russian civilization, and they claimed that "Russia is for Russians" (Oushakine 2009; Laruelle 2009, 2010). In the face of the political, economic, and social transformations of the 1990s, more Russians began to reassess their history to determine what went wrong, often seeking to attribute their misfortunes to non-Russian, Soviet institutions (Oushakine 2009). They viewed Soviet nation-building and diversity policies as having destroyed Russian culture.

While these narratives became popular in the 1980s, they were not new assessments but ones that dated back to the post-Stalin period. After Stalin's death in 1953 and during Khrushchev's Thaw, a group of intellectuals criticized Stalin's repression and demanded agricultural reform in Russia. Known as the village prose writers (*derevenshiki*), their fictional and nonfictional accounts of life in the Russian countryside became popular throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and they received state support under Brezhnev during the late Soviet period (Brudny 2000, 17). Historian

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<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to determine how many refugees fled to Russia in the 1990s. Although 667,000 people were registered as refugees or forced migrants in 2000, as Timothy Heleniak (2002) notes, the number was actually much higher since many remained in Russia and obtained Russian citizenship.

Yitzhak Brudny argues that until Brezhnev's death in 1982, Soviet leaders attempted to co-opt the Russian nationalist intellectuals, and especially the village prose writers, into the Communist Party's ideological platform to gain new support for the regime. Ultimately though, Brudny concludes Brezhnev's administration failed. The village prose writers formed the foundation for liberal and conservative Russian nationalist groups that gained popularity during perestroika in the 1980s (Brudny 2000). A diversity of nationalist platforms emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s, reflecting Russians' varying opinions about the need for political and economic reforms, Russia's relationship to the West, the role of the Russian village, and Stalin's legacies (Brudny 2000, 11-12).

### **Soviet Legacies of Race and Ethnos Today**

While there is a robust literature on the diversity of the Russian empire and Soviet nation-building, the issue of race in Russia has been the subject of more recent research by historians and anthropologists. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russian scholars were in conversation with their European counterparts, exploring the concepts of nationality and race. Although the concept of "race" (*rasa*) did not appear in the Russian language until the 1850s and 1860s, Russian thinkers began engaging with European racial theories as early as the 1830s (Tolz 2014, 132-33). European theories of environmental variations as an explanation for racial differences as well as social Darwinism gained popularity in Russia too. However, as Tolz argues, race was never the predominant lens through which Russian scholars studied diversity (2014, 140). In fact, the St. Petersburg School of Oriental Studies, founded in the late 1880s, which laid

the foundation for early Soviet nationality policies, “claimed to be anti-racial,” Tolz writes (2014, 140, see also 2011).

Francine Hirsch has written about these same scholars, members of the new school of Russian Orientology, and their later role within Soviet efforts to challenge Nazi biological determinism and race science (Tolz 2009, 2011; Hirsch 2005, 2002). Hirsch argues that Soviet anthropologists understood races and racial traits, like the existence of nationalities, as characteristic of just one historical stage of development that would eventually disappear with the achievement of socialism. Hirsch quotes Soviet anthropologist Arkadii Iarkho’s writings on race:

The ‘relative isolation’ of peoples in ‘preclass societies’ had facilitated the formation of races; distinct physiological characteristics had developed ‘in response to geographical and climatic conditions,’ and in the course of a protracted ‘historical period’ had been ‘transferred from generation to generation’ (A.I. Iarkho in Hirsch 2002, 34).

Thus, peoples who appeared to be “backward” were not “underdeveloped” because of their race but from “historical circumstances,” including their exploitation under the Russian Empire (Hirsch 2005, 253).

In their definitions of race and rejection of race science, then popular not only in Germany but also Britain, France, and the United States, Soviet anthropologists drew on the works of Franz Boas, a German immigrant to America who helped transform American anthropology into the discipline it is today. Boas devoted his career to challenging scientific racism and then popular ideas of cultures as evolutionary. Arguing for cultural relativism, a central tenet of American anthropology, Boas believed that cultures could not be ranked on a hierarchy of development but should be studied

and valued in their own right.<sup>12</sup> Translations of Boas' studies appeared in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s, published in the journal *Etnografia*, and Soviet anthropologists curated an exhibit on Boas' work at the Moscow State University's Museum of Anthropology in the 1930s (Hirsch 2005, 265). Unlike their Nazi and European counterparts, Soviet anthropologists argued that "racial mixing" was a result of "sociohistorical development" and a sign of "an advanced society" (Hirsch 2002: 36).

Later during the Cold War, Soviet officials would emphasize their commitment to racial equity in contrast to the racism of capitalist countries like the United States and the former colonizers in Europe. Indeed, between the 1920s and 1960s, prominent African American writers and activists, including Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Du Bois, Claude McKay, and Paul Robeson traveled to the Soviet Union, attracted by promises of greater racial equality (Baldwin 2002; Matusевич 2008). In 1961, General Secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, said that the Communist Party saw fostering Soviet-post-colonial ties as part of "its internationalist duty to help peoples that are on the way to gaining and consolidating their national independence, all peoples fighting for the abolition of the colonial system" (Katsakioris 2017, 539). Between the 1950s and 1989, hundreds of thousands of international students studied in the Soviet Union, the majority of whom were from post-colonial Africa.

While earlier visitors had traveled to the Soviet Union attracted by its ideology, the students came not for "the promised land of racial egalitarianism," Matusевич writes, but for the well-regarded Soviet universities (2002, 336). Despite this shift in

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<sup>12</sup> For more on Boas' work and his influence on American anthropology, see Wolf (1999). For those outside of anthropology interested in Boas' influence, see also *The New Yorker's* profile of him (Pierpont 2004).

intent, Soviet officials maintained a robust propaganda that depicted Western racism regularly in cartoons and articles in Soviet papers, juxtaposing these images of the morally decrepit West alongside images of African students in Moscow (Matusevich 2002, 336–37). However, as scholars have demonstrated, despite Soviet policies of anti-racism, international students did not necessarily have an easy experience studying in Russia. As Matusevich writes, many African students had greater freedom to travel and express political opinions than Soviet citizens, which made some students jealous and officials nervous (2008, 72–73). Although international students faced less systematic racism, many students still experienced everyday forms of discrimination despite official Soviet doctrines of antiracism (Hessler 2006; Matusevich 2008, 2002; Katsakioris 2017).

Today in Russia, ethnic profiling, racial slurs, discrimination, and racially motivated violence, as elsewhere in the world, persist (Round and Kuznetsova 2016; Mukomel' 2014). Lemon (1998, 2000), Sahadeo (2016), and Verdery (1993) have argued that racism in Russia and Eastern Europe isn't new. The circulation of racial slurs and experiences of intolerance had existed during Soviet times even if officials did not acknowledge racism (Lemon 2000, 2002; Sahadeo 2016). Although socialist discourses and policies attempted to promote ethnic diversity, they also reproduced notions of ethnic groups as bounded (Verdery 1993; Chari and Verdery 2009). The history of Soviet nation-building I described above may have empowered some, but it also shaped how individuals perceived various nationalities, including their ability to classify individuals based on their nationality. While the ethnographic exhibits, museums, and concerts spread awareness of diversity, they also essentialized ethnic identities, reducing them into a series of stereotypical features that people could list. For example, being Uzbek might mean that one is Muslim, eats plov (a rice dish), and engages in trade, and Uzbek

culture evokes images of silk and Samarkand, an ancient city famous for its Islamic architecture. More than 25 years after the Soviet Union's collapse, many of these assumptions about nationality and its links to "mentality" (*mentalitet*) continue to circulate, including the ability to guess someone's nationality and, thus, make assumptions about their national character.

The reproduction of ethnic stereotypes – and late Soviet and post-Soviet concerns about the survival of the Russian nation – also have their origins in Soviet ethnography, specifically in the concept of *ethnos*. In *The Patriotism of Despair*, anthropologist Serguei Oushakine traces the intellectual history of *ethnos*. Originally theorized by Russian ethnographer of the Far East Sergei Shirokogorov in the 1920s, Yulian Bromley, head of the powerful Institute of Ethnography, introduced the concept within Soviet intellectual circles in the 1960s (Oushakine 2009, 82–86). Bromley defined *ethnos* as the "essence" or the "sum total of stable ethnic features," which members of an ethnic group passed down across generations (Hirsch 2005, 313). In the post-Soviet period, it is Lev Gumilev's, a dissident historian marginalized during the Soviet era, work that has popularized the concept of *ethnos* beyond the academy into the public. Though rivals, Gumilev's concept of *ethnos* is similar to Bromley's but with a greater emphasis on the environment's role in shaping an ethnic group's essence (Oushakine 2009, 91). Oushakine explores the legacies of *ethnos* within what he refers to as the genre of the Russian tragedy, a framing that emerged in the 1990s and which reconstructed history

along ethnic lines to help people make sense of the mass upheaval that accompanied the Soviet Union's collapse.<sup>13</sup>

Oushakine writes that although Bromley warned against “direct biological essentializing of ethnic differences,” Bromley’s theories “provided enough room for such a move” (2009, 89). In the post-Soviet period, Viktor Kozlov, Bromley’s colleague and a prominent ethnographer, drew on Bromley’s work to recast Soviet history as anti-Russian. Defining *ethnos* as a “closed biological group that reproduces itself through transmitting language, culture, and ‘ethnic orientations’ to new generations,” Kozlov argued that the Soviet Union denied Russians the opportunity to reproduce their *ethnos* by denying them their own “national statehood” (Oushakine 2009, 106–7).

Scholars have examined the role Bromley’s and Gumilev’s work on *ethnos* has played in shaping Russian nationalist and Eurasianist movements in post-Soviet Russia (Oushakine 2009; Laruelle 2019; Suslov 2018; Bassin and Pozo 2017). Here I am focusing on a different legacy – the importance of *ethnos* for Soviet and post-Soviet understandings of ethnic groups more broadly and its influence on debates about migration in Russia, including how officials position the Resettlement of Compatriots Program within those debates. As Kozlov’s definition of *ethnos* above suggests, although analyzed through the lens of the ethnic, the ethnic is also about race. While the Soviet Union’s rhetoric of anti-colonialism and anti-racism were progressive for their time, within the Friendship of Peoples framework, scholars and officials still positioned ethnic groups on a hierarchy of self-awareness that corresponded to Marxism’s stages of

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<sup>13</sup> In my discussion of *ethnos*, I draw on chapter 2 of Oushakine’s *The Patriotism of Despair* (2009, 81–95, 104–9).

development. As I suggested above and examine in greater detail below, signs of group membership in Russia had become essentialized during Soviet times as the public and scholars alike sought to understand the underlying essence or mentality that joined individuals together into groups. Bromley's focus on "essence" and "stable ethnic features," disseminated to the public as "mentality," leads easily to racialization. As linguistic anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli has argued in her work on race and ethnicity in the US context, when "the emphasis is on natural attributes," in which ethnic groups are placed on a hierarchy, then discourses are not just about ethnicity but also about race (2013, 15).

### **A Raciolinguistic, Ethnographic Perspective**

Building on migration literature and the history of Soviet nation-building described above, I apply a raciolinguistic, ethnographic approach to the study of migration that is attentive to how ideas of race and language inform policies (Rosa and Flores 2017; Rosa 2016; Hall 1996; Lemon 2002, 2000; Reeves 2013).

In "Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective," Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores (2017) call for a raciolinguistic perspective that examines how language and race have become intertwined historically and presently. They argue that the concept of race emerged alongside ideas of languages as bounded and separate. Race and language were key components of European colonialism – racial Others and their languages were seen as inferior to white Europeans and European languages. Rosa and Flores argue that the relationship between language and race are not only key to colonial governmentality but to the nation-state today. They write that

“colonial distinctions within and between nation-state borders continue to shape contemporary linguistic and racial formations” (2017, 623).

Rosa and Flores examine the American case specifically, but I believe their framework applies to the Soviet case as well. Rosa and Flores take into account how historical legacies of European colonialism have shaped racial hierarchies, justified also through the values we place on different languages. As Tolz and Hirsch have demonstrated, Russian anthropologists and ethnographers have long engaged European racial theories even if prominent Russian scholars challenged Nazi race science in the 1920s (Tolz 2009, 2014, 2011; Hirsch 2005, 2002). In addition, although Soviet officials had a more progressive view of race and nationality than many of their European and American counterparts, European ideas of language and culture as bounded and territorial influenced early Soviet nation-building. As detailed above, the Soviets sent ethnographers across the former Russian empire to incorporate people into the socialist system. As Tolz writes, many of these ethnographers had been part of the new school of Russian Orientology that had emerged in the late 1880s, which included ethnic Russian and national scholars alike. Through academic training and exchange, the Orientologists had cultivated national intelligentsias in Siberia and the Caucasus, laying the foundation for early Soviet projects of nation-building (Tolz 2011, 2009). In conversation with their European peers, these ethnographers, influenced by Herder, assumed clear ties between one’s native language, territory, and ethnonational identity (Irvine and Gal 2000; Hirsch 2005; Tolz 2011).<sup>14</sup> This meant classifying people into national groups based primarily

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<sup>14</sup> For more on language ideologies and the challenges ethnolinguistic heterogeneity posed to European colonists and national elites, see Irvine and Gal (2000).

on language – a particularly challenging process in regions like Central Asia and the Caucasus where most people claimed multiple identities based not on the multiple languages they spoke but on their clan and tribe affiliations. Local elite seized on the opportunities Soviet nationalities policies – and resources – brought to their regions to contribute to their own projects of reform and nation-building (Khalid 2015; Hirsch 2005).

Later, in the 1930s, Russification positioned Russian language and culture as central to a shared Soviet identity. Although Soviet officials encouraged the study of each group's "native" language, they required everyone to study Russian. Meanwhile, ethnic Russian officials began to dominate the leadership of Soviet institutions (Martin 2001; Brandenberger 2002). Sahadeo (2016) and Lemon (2000) describe pressures non-Russian peoples, including Caucasians, Central Asians, and Roma, faced to assimilate into Soviet society. In oral histories, non-Russians told Sahadeo and his team of researchers that although Soviet officials took claims of racial intolerance seriously, to succeed in Moscow and Leningrad, they felt that they had to become "holier than the pope" and abandon their culture. University Komsomol meetings in Moscow and Leningrad were conducted in Russian, and universities and Communist party organizations did not accommodate Muslim practices or holidays (Sahadeo 2016, 821). Similarly, Lemon (2000, 70) found that although Roma were encouraged to learn and study Romani during Soviet times, they were expected to give up other parts of their culture. Unmarked Russian culture was the dominant Soviet culture, even though Russians, too, felt marginalized within the Soviet Union since they were denied their own Communist Party and other institutions, like the Academy of Sciences, available in other republics. After World War II, this dissent became more organized as Russian

nationalists rejected Soviet discourses, drawing on Russian scholarship on the concept of *ethnos* as well as European concerns about racial differences (Brudny 2000; Oushakine 2009).

Rosa and Flores write that physical markers of race influence how we hear someone before they even speak, or “People come to look like a language and sound like a race” (Rosa and Flores 2017, 631). They call for anthropologists to examine the intersection of race and language as a process of “raciolinguistic enregisterment.” Through raciolinguistic enregisterment, certain linguistic and racial forms are constructed as sets and markers for one another (Rosa and Flores 2017, 631). Rosa and Flores, as linguistic anthropologists, analyze “the minute features of language,” such as syntax, pronunciation, and grammar, and how they become interpreted together to signal racial categories (2017, 631–32). Rather, I draw on their raciolinguistic *perspective* to interrogate representations of Russian language and its status as a unifier within the compatriots program. I apply their focus on race and language in conjunction with Lemon’s and Reeve’s focus on racial practices.

Lemon asks us to pay attention to specific racial practices: how do people identify others? By accent? By passport? By physical appearance? And how are people recognized or misrecognized as belonging to one nationality or race rather than another? (Lemon 2002, 54–55, 58). Along with Caroline Humphrey (1996), Lemon also argues that the physical location of bodies shapes racial hierarchies in Russia. Lemon writes that racial hierarchies “are anchored to specific, familiar places” and that they shift “as the values and meanings of places shift” (2000, 58). Non-Russians, especially those from Central Asia and the Caucasus, are associated with trade and the black market, an assumption that predates the 1990s (Lemon 2000, 1998; Sahadeo 2016; Reeves 2013). The

most common racial slur is *chernyi*, Russian for “black.” Black refers not only to one’s skin color but also one’s talent for trade, “backwardness,” patriarchal values, and large, “oversized” family (Lemon 2002: 58). In the Russian context, as Lemon notes, “blacks” are often Roma or from the Caucasus and Central Asia and the color denotes their olive skin and dark hair and eyes.

In her work on Kyrgyz migrant workers in Moscow, Madeleine Reeves analyzes how “legal” and “illegal” in Russia become blurred and racialized. She writes that the ambiguity of legality maps onto bodies, so that people considered black or grouped as Central Asian or non-Slavic are seen as less trustworthy and more likely to have “fake” documents (Reeves 2013, 509). She argues that this ambiguity is not a side effect of the implementation of policies but the key to how migration governance in Russia really works. Not only does this intentional uncertainty prevent collective organization and legal recourse for migrants, but it also homogenizes various ethnicities, marking them as “non-Russian” and, thus, dubious and likely “illegal” (Reeves 2013, 512).

Throughout this dissertation, I draw on Rosa and Flores, Lemon, and Reeves to study the racial, ethnic, and linguistic representations at play in the compatriots program. I examine how physical, linguistic, and contextual markers – such as skin color, eye shape, clothing, family size, accent, and location – come together in a set of signs that index how people perceive belonging. I argue that ethnographic attention to word choice and behavior – calling someone an immigrant versus an illegal, characterizing one group as uneducated and another as highly-qualified, and using the informal “you” (*ty*) versus the more respectful “you” (*vy*) to address someone – reveal spaces in which assumptions about cultural similarities and Russianness, cultural differences and foreignness, appear. Furthermore, my ethnographic research among

officials and returnees also reveals the complexity of people's multiple identities and the role legacies of the Friendship of Peoples play in how they identify themselves and others.

### **An Ethnography of the Compatriots Program**

This dissertation is an ethnography of a migration policy – the Resettlement of Compatriots Program. While anthropologists have focused on how borders and migration governance reproduce and racialize notions of cultural difference, the policies themselves remain an important yet understudied subject of inquiry (Vertovec 2011). In my fieldwork, I draw on the methods and subject of inquiry from the anthropology of policy to examine how the compatriots program has unfolded in the Russian Far East (Shore and Wright 1997; Shore, Wright, and Però 2011). As my object of ethnographic analysis, I followed the compatriots program as it has moved between Moscow, where politicians, federal officials, and employees of various organizations designed the program, and Vladivostok, where regional officials have implemented it and returnees have immigrated to the region through it.

Two objectives guided my research: 1) to investigate how Russian officials were constructing and utilizing narratives of homeland (*rodina*) and return (*vozvrashchenie*) to attract immigrants to meet federal and regional economic goals; and 2) to understand how returnees were interpreting state goals and adapting to life in Russia. Throughout this dissertation, I highlight the stories of immigrants and government employees involved in the compatriots program to trace the relationships that emerge. I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork over a period of 13 months in 2015 and 2016–2017, dividing my time between Moscow (seven months) and Vladivostok (six months). Through this

multi-sited approach (Marcus 1995), I sought to study the compatriots program at the national and regional levels. This dissertation reflects the breadth of my fieldwork as I trace how government officials, together with three compatriot populations – refugees from Ukraine, immigrants from Central Asia, and Old Believers from South America – experienced the compatriots program.

In the following sections, I outline the political context in which I conducted my fieldwork, my methods, and data analysis.

### **The Political Context and Access**

My dissertation fieldwork was not the first time I lived in Russia. I initially studied in Moscow and St. Petersburg as a college student in 2010. In 2011, I received a Fulbright Scholarship to study Kazakhstani national identity and lived in Almaty for a year. Since those two formative years living in Russia and Kazakhstan, I have returned each year to the region, conducting Master's research in Almaty in 2013 and 2014 and beginning my dissertation project in Moscow in 2015. Friends and colleagues in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Almaty provided me with my initial contacts for this project, including friends of friends they knew who had either immigrated to or were from the Russian Far East. The Institute for Demography at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies at the Far Eastern Federal University in Vladivostok were my academic homes away from home, providing institutional support, advice, and contacts.

Two political moments shaped my research. The first was the war in Ukraine. I began my initial fieldwork in the 2014 aftermath of Crimea's annexation to Russia. I was living in Almaty, Kazakhstan when the war began in 2014. Although the compatriots

program began accepting applications in 2007, the crisis in Ukraine transformed the program as more than a million refugees from Ukraine fled to neighboring Russia, many of whom joined the compatriots program in order to receive refugee support (Myhre 2018; Schenk 2016). I watched news in Russian with my friends and colleagues in Almaty as the events unfolded. The conflict had the unexpected side effect of attracting not only a greater number of Ukrainian citizens but also ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers from Central Asia. Two of my friends from Kazakhstan moved to Russia through the program in 2015, one to Kaliningrad and the other to Novosibirsk. I learned of the program through them and decided to conduct preliminary fieldwork in the summer of 2015 in Moscow. One year later, the conflict had impacted people's lives in Russia too. Families, including my host family in Moscow, took in friends and family displaced by the conflict, either by the violence or political divisions that arose between Russia and Ukraine. Meanwhile, tensions between the US and Russia increased as the US introduced sanctions against Russia.

Our countries' strained relations escalated when I returned for 11 months of fieldwork in the fall of 2016. The 2016 US Presidential election was the second moment that influenced my fieldwork. A month after my arrival, Donald Trump won the 2016 US election and soon after, American intelligence agencies accused Russia of influencing the election. When locals heard my partner Dan and I speaking in English together in Vladivostok, they congratulated us on Trump's election at the bus stop, the grocery store, and at the university where Dan taught. Trump's election, viewed more favorably at least by the local administration than Barack Obama's presidency, may have affected my research access. At the beginning of November 2016, a friend of a friend with ties to the Primorskii krai administration sent an introductory email for me, requesting an

interview with those involved in the compatriots program. We didn't hear back. Then in mid-January, I received a phone call from someone who worked in the krai administration, telling me that I should reapply with an official letter from my Russian university at the end of January, any time after January 20, 2017, not an arbitrary date but that of Trump's inauguration. I submitted a letter the last week of January and a week later, I interviewed people in the administration connected to the program. Thereafter, my fieldwork became easier as I suddenly had contacts across Primorskii krai that I made through the administration.

The results of the US election not only influenced my fieldwork and the access I received in Russia but also the writing of this dissertation. A few months after I returned from Russia in August 2017, I moved to Washington, DC. During breaks from writing, I have often attended think tank talks and spoke with "top Russian experts" about my research. These experiences have undoubtedly shaped my work. However, I have also recognized how my view of Russia, Russian people, and especially Russian officials has differed from many around me in DC. I had the unique opportunity to spend time with officials in their hometowns in the Russian Far East, learning from them about how their cities have changed since the Soviet Union's collapse. These experiences, paired with conversations and participant observation I conducted in Vladivostok and Moscow among government officials, gave me a more locally grounded perspective. This perspective, which I share in this dissertation, often contrasts with how Russia is presented in the news and in public scholarship. News and think tank analyses tend to focus on Russia's role internationally rather than the domestic forces that also influence Russian politicians. They also analyze Russia as exceptional, rather than studying

Russian concerns about immigration, economic equality, and foreign policy alongside those shared by Americans and Europeans.

This recognition of the dissonance between my experiences studying in Russia and Central Asia as an undergraduate student and what I read in the news is what initially brought me to graduate school to study anthropology. My ethnographic research on Russia's migration policies comes out of my long-term commitment to understanding the region and offering an alternative viewpoint that began in 2010 when I first studied in Russia. My ethnographic fieldwork shows that policymaking in Russia, as in other countries, is a negotiation between a diversity of interests and that middle and lower level bureaucrats also shape the implementation of policies. My research contributes to a growing body of scholarship that reveals the complexity of Russian policymaking and the importance of Russia's regions (Schenk 2018; Laruelle 2019; Hemment 2015; Rogers 2015; Wengle 2015; Shevel 2011a; Laruelle and Radvanyi 2018; Tolz and Teper 2018).

### **Methods**

Over the course of my fieldwork, I interviewed 56 people, including 26 compatriots, nine immigrants, nine scholars, seven officials, and five locals, three of whom employed returnees (table 1). 39 of the interviews were in Primorskii krai and 17 were in Moscow. I recorded and transcribed 11 of these interviews. For those who did not want to be recorded, I took notes during the interview and then expanded my jottings into detailed fieldnotes as soon as possible afterwards (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011).

Country of origin	Nationality (ethnicity)								Total by country
	Russian	Ukrainian	Moldovan	Kazakh	Tajik	Uzbek	Korean		
Ukraine	6	8							14
Moldova			1						1
Kazakhstan	4			5					9
Tajikistan					4				4
Uzbekistan						3	1		4
South America	2								2
Europe	1								1
Total by ethnicity	13	8	1	5	4	3	1		

Table 1: Interviews with immigrants by country of origin and ethnicity

In addition to interviews, I also conducted participant observation among officials and returnees in Primorskii krai and Moscow. By spending extended time with and observing people's interactions with one another, I gained unique insight into the complexity of Russia's migration policies as officials and immigrants alike navigated and experienced them. I explain my participant observation in greater detail below, divided by my research location.

In Vladivostok, where I spent six months between October 2016 and April 2017, my fieldwork focused on the officials who implemented the program and the people who immigrated to Primorskii krai through it. Primorskii krai participates in the compatriots program, but compatriots are not allowed to live in Vladivostok unless they are students or have a profession deemed needed by the Department of Labor and Social Development. As I noted above, this does not mean, however, that they do not live there and I conducted interviews with returnees in the city. I also took day trips to Artyom, a small city immediately outside of Vladivostok, and longer trips to Ussuriysk and Dal'nerechensk, two other cities, and the Krasnoarmeiskii region, a rural region located in northern Primorskii krai near the border of Khabarovskii krai.

As an American scholar, I had to undergo two processes when I arrived in Vladivostok. First, as temporary immigrants to Russia, my partner and I had to register our residency with the migration police and submit proof to local authorities that we did not have tuberculosis or HIV as required by Russian law. While the process of establishing ourselves bureaucratically in Vladivostok was slow and frustrating, it was also insightful as I had opportunities to observe how officials interacted with other immigrants. As I waited in lines, I met immigrants primarily from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan and extended my networks beyond those of previous contacts I had made while living in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Almaty.

Second, in order to interview officials and some returnees, I had to obtain permission from the Primorskii krai's Department of Labor and Social Development, the regional agency charged with the compatriots program's implementation.<sup>15</sup> While I applied for permission in November 2016, I did not obtain it until the end of January 2017. Those I met with in the Department of Labor agreed to connect me to local officials in other parts of Primorskii krai. I then spent several full days in various offices in the Department of Labor in February 2017, explaining my project to bureaucrats, writing out a list of all possible questions I might ask other officials, drinking tea, and accompanying employees outside during smoke breaks for more informal conversations. Again, while at times exasperating, these days were rich for participant observation, giving me an

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<sup>15</sup> Some returnees requested that I share with them an official letter from the Primorskii krai administration or my local university before agreeing to meet. This was the case for my initial contacts with refugees from Ukraine in Artyom. Their concern, as well as that of local officials in Ussuriysk and Novopokrovka, reflected the refugees' precarious position as they awaited Russian citizenship as well as Cold War legacies of suspicion towards outsiders.

excuse to hang out in regional government offices and observe how people conducted their days.

After obtaining permission and letters of introduction in February, I then arranged a trip to the Krasnoarmeiskii region and began taking day and overnight trips to Ussuriysk, only two hours away by train from Vladivostok. In March 2017, I spent a day with the local head of the Center for Employment, Fyodor, in Novopokrovka, meeting with him in his office then driving around to visit compatriots in the local area. In February and March 2017, I made trips to Ussuriysk, only two hours away from Vladivostok. There I met Aleksey, the head of the Center for Employment. We spent several days together in his office and driving around the Ussuriysk region. Our routine was that I would arrive early in the morning by train. Aleksey would either pick me up or I would take the bus to the Center for Employment. Then we'd spend some time there if Aleksey had meetings with returnees to fill out paperwork or we'd visit different places where they worked. Aleksey would drop me off or accompany me, depending on his schedule and if the returnee owed him some documents. In the evenings, Aleksey would return me to the train station, and I'd head back to Vladivostok or I would stay overnight in a hotel.

Most days, in Vladivostok, Artyom, and sometimes also Ussuriysk, I would conduct participant observation and interview compatriots alone without officials. I met these returnees either through the online forum, *Domoi v Rossiiu*, also called Back2Russia, where potential participants would answer one another's questions about the program, or through friends of friends. Some days returnees and I walked along Vladivostok's boardwalk, or I followed them around as they did their errands, pushing baby strollers at banks and around grocery stores as we chatted. Other days, I drank

coffee and chatted with students at the fancy Far Eastern Federal University on Russian Island, shouting over loud music to learn more about their experiences immigrating to Russia through the program. I held babies at playgrounds and in preschools as I interviewed mothers about their experiences; drank tea at returnees' workplaces in flower shops, hospitals, hotels, and banks; and eat plov, my favorite Uzbek dish, at people's homes. I documented these interactions in fieldnotes that I analyze throughout this dissertation (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011; Schensul and LeCompte 2012). On slower days, I downloaded and scanned newspaper articles and promotional materials either at home, a local cafe, the Primorskii krai's Gorky Public Library, and at the Far Eastern Federal University (DVFU). I also met with local scholars and participated in events at DVFU, my local host.

In Moscow, where I spent seven months, two months in 2015 and five months in 2017, my participant observation was moored in a different purpose. In the capital of Russia, I sought to analyze how policymakers envisioned the program and how a nexus of state and non-state actors promoted it. Through interacting with some of the employees of state-run and affiliated NGOs and by analyzing their promotional materials, I examined how organizations mobilized terms like homeland (*rodina*) and return (*vozvrashchenie*) to foster relations with the Russian-speaking diaspora and encourage compatriots to participate in the program. They included the website, Russian Century (*Russkii vek*); *Rossostrudnichestvo*; the Fund for the Defense and Support of the Rights of Compatriots (*Fond zashchity i podderzhki prav sootchestvennikov*); the Worldwide Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad (*Vsemirnyi koordinatsionnyi sovet rossiiskikh sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom*); the online forum, "Back2Russia" (*Domoi v Rossiiu*); and the more conservative Institute for Russians

Abroad (*Institut russkogo zarubezh'ia*) and Russian World (*Russkii mir*) Foundation. These organizations often publicized the compatriots program through news coverage of compatriots living abroad, videos and articles that showed families “returning” to Russia, and programming and grants to encourage the preservation of Russian language and culture. Drawing on Brubaker’s (2005) critique of the diaspora literature as too bounded, I analyzed how these organizations mobilized different definitions of the Russian diaspora (as ethnic Russians or Russian-speakers?) as a stance, tracing how definitions evolved over time.

I also met with Russian scholars and NGO employees who studied, and in some cases, helped design the compatriots program; attended events; and participated in several roundtables about Old Believers, a conservative group who began moving to Primor’e from South America in 2009. I chatted online with compatriots in Kaluga, Tver, and Vladimir, cities outside of Moscow, to get a sense of how the program varied in different regions. Our conversations continued with some of them in person at special events in Moscow for Ukrainian refugees and compatriots. Throughout my fieldwork in Vladivostok and Moscow, I also collected approximately 360 Russian news articles as well as journal articles, blog entries, forum posts, social media posts and memes, YouTube videos, and TV show episodes about the compatriots program. I coded these materials, along with my interview transcripts and fieldnotes, in MAXQDA, a qualitative and mixed methods data analysis software.

Over the course of the year I spent in Russia, I met with a variety of people representative of the diversity of actors involved in the compatriots program. In Primor’e, they included professors, members of the krai administration, city-level officials, and compatriots and immigrants from Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan,

Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, South America, and Europe. In Moscow, they included professors and migration scholars; officials from the Agency for the Development of the Human Capital of the Far East (ADHC); and employees of Russian Century (ruvek.ru) and the Solzhenitsyn House for Russians Abroad.

There were also important absences in my access. While Primor'e has a large compatriot population from Armenia and Azerbaijan, I never gained access to those communities, probably because I was not as well connected to them as I was to the Central Asian ones. I believe my experiences living in Central Asia and the large numbers of refugees from Ukraine in Russia made it easier for me to establish relationships with members of those communities. I also never received permission to interview officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) in Moscow or Primorskii krai. The MVD, along with the regional administrations, carries out the compatriots program, screening applicants and performing background checks. Although Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russkii Mir (Russian World) Foundation, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided me with contacts in Moscow via Facebook messages, their staff never responded to my requests for interviews. Despite these limitations, I had the opportunity to ask employees of many of these organizations my questions informally and to witness their interactions with one another at two conferences I attended about Old Believers in Moscow in the spring of 2017.

### **Data Analysis**

When I first designed my dissertation project, I was interested in the roles familial and collective memories played in the compatriots program based on preliminary interviews I had conducted with seven immigrants from Kazakhstan in the

summer of 2015. When I returned to Russia in 2016, I entered my fieldnotes, interview transcripts, promotional materials, news coverage (print and video files), blog posts, TV show episodes, and other data into MAXQDA while still in the field. I began preliminary analysis in January 2017 to identify recurring themes that were emerging across data, paying attention to how individuals conceptualized ideas of homeland (*rodina*) and home and how they linked them to everyday practices (LeCompte and Schensul 2012; Spradley 1979). I soon realized that memories played a lesser role in Primorskii krai than I had initially thought they might. Rather, descriptors people used to characterize different kinds of migration and different nationalities were appearing across my data. In the spring of 2017, I began to pay more attention to race and ethnicity (called *natsional'nost'*, nationality, in Russian) and how people evoked them (and tried not to) in the compatriots program.

When I returned to the United States in the fall of 2017, I created an inventory of all of my data and began data analysis. First, I open coded all of my interview transcripts and fieldnotes line-by-line. I did the same with an initial sample of approximately 100 news articles and promotional materials I had collected, balancing my analysis evenly by year and selecting items that appeared the most relevant. I formed a code book that included definitions to guide a second round of analysis of all of my data (LeCompte and Schensul 2012; Ryan and Bernard 2003).

Throughout analysis, I particularly paid attention to how people characterized one another, including the adjectives, nouns, and verbs they used to describe different groups. Common adjectives included uneducated (*negramotnyi, bezgramotnyi*), uncultured (*nekul'turnyi*), alien (*chuzhoi*), highly-qualified (*vysokokvalifitsirovannyi*), most desired (*samye zhelannye*), and Russian-speaking (*russkoiazychnyi, russkogovoriashchii*). For

nouns, I looked at how people classified someone: as a migrant (*migrant*), refugee (*bezhenets*), compatriot (*sootchestvoennik*), settler (*pereselenets*), repatriate (*repatriant*), native/immigrant (*vykhodets*), guest worker (*gasterbaiter*), etc.<sup>16</sup> I also tracked the use of the word “mentality” (*mentalitet*). Like the concept of *ethnos* (Oushakine 2009; Hirsch 2005), *mentality* has an essentializing quality. It evokes the mindset of an entire ethnic group and the indescribable qualities that make someone part of that group. It is not just a Russian term utilized in Russia but also one that I had heard in Kazakhstan. While individuals have mentalities that reflect their own upbringing, groups, too, have them, shaped by their ethnicity’s historical, cultural, social, and economic experiences. I think of *mentality* as a way to get at what is quintessentially Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, or Tajik, a term people fall back on when unable to be any more specific. In my interviews and conversations, I pushed people to clarify what they meant by *mentality* and often they couldn’t. As a result, I also coded for *mentality* to analyze the meanings people attributed to the term.

For verbs, I paid attention to how one’s immigration was described: did one arrive/move (*priekhat’*, *pereekhat’*), flee (*ubezhat’*), or return (*vernut’sia*)? When people referred to someone as of a specific ethnicity, such as Tajik or Uzbek, I asked them how they identified that person—by their language, accent, clothing, physical appearance, or family size? I coded these raciolinguistic markers as well. I also coded people’s reasons for immigrating (ethnic or linguistic discrimination, economic opportunities, to join family, etc.), problems people faced (long lines, finding housing, etc.), and how officials,

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<sup>16</sup> In Russian, the term *gasterbaiter* is a borrowing from the German word, “guest worker.” Faced with a labor shortage after World War II, the West German government created guest worker programs. Many of those who participated in the programs were from Turkey.

promotional materials, and journalists described the program's purpose, tracing words like homeland (*rodina*), return (*vozvrashchenie*), demographic crisis, and variations of Russian (*russkii*, *rossiiskii*).

Using the group comparisons and code frequency features of MAXQDA, I then analyzed how people's word choices in promotional materials, news coverage, and my interviews and fieldnotes aligned with various groups. Certain codes appeared to coincide with specific ethnic groups. In news articles and fieldnotes, for example, Russians spoke of Uzbeks and Tajiks interchangeably and grouped them together as Central Asians, regardless of their differences. Often, they characterized them as migrants and guest workers, uneducated, uncultured, and alien. Meanwhile, the descriptors people used to describe Ukrainians changed over time. In 2014 and early 2015, people described Ukrainians as refugees, highly qualified, and Russian-speaking. However, as the conflict continued and more refugees "fled" (*ubezhat'*) to Russia, they, too, shared some of the negative qualities previously associated with Central Asians, including being many-childrened (*mnogodetnye*). I explore representations of different groups throughout the dissertation, devoting a chapter to three prominent groups in Primor'e that emerged during fieldwork and data analysis. They include refugees from Ukraine (chapter 3), returnees from Central Asia (chapter 4), and Old Believers from South America (chapter 5).

### **The Chapters**

The following chapters of my dissertation substantiate my main argument that Russian officials respond to concerns about immigration as a threat by promoting the compatriots program as a "Slavic" – or culturally similar – solution to demographic

changes. At the same time, they utilize the ambiguity and breadth of who qualifies as a compatriot to perform different kinds of domestic work. I identify two consequences of the definition's breadth.

First, the broad definition allows officials to alleviate anxieties Russians have about immigration as they present compatriots as Russian-speakers, more easily able to adapt to Russia because of their shared cultural experiences. In **chapter 2**, I examine this dynamic in greater detail, homing in on the origins of the program from the perspectives of those involved in designing, promoting, and implementing the program – the migration scholars, politicians, journalists, NGO employees, and bureaucrats in Moscow and Primorskii krai. I trace the program's origins as a Slavic solution to demographic changes, envisioned in the 1990s and implemented in the mid-2000s, to its expansion as a "catchall" program in the 2010s. I also explain how the program works in practice, including how a group of organizations, governmental and non-governmental, promote the program, how compatriots apply, and how officials select them.

Second, I argue that the breadth of the term compatriot provides flexibility to regional officials to adapt the program to meet their region's particular needs. In chapters 3-5, I explore how the ambiguities of who qualifies as a compatriot work out in practice in Primorskii krai. I demonstrate how officials use the program as part of their response to Russia's 2014 refugee crisis (chapter 3), integrate Central Asian immigrants who have already been living and working in Russia (chapter 4), and offer citizenship and free land to Old Believers who have "returned" from South America (chapter 5). In each chapter, I examine representations of ethnicity and race in Russian media alongside the narratives and experiences of the returnees and government officials involved in the compatriots program.

In **chapter 3**, I demonstrate how Russian officials drew on the discourses and resources of the compatriots program to help resettle the approximately one million refugees who arrived in Russia from Ukraine in 2014 and 2015. While Russians initially welcomed the refugees and officials hailed their arrival as a solution to Russia's demographic crisis, relations have since cooled. Drawing on interviews with refugees, locals, and officials in Primorskii krai, I analyze how Russian responses to the refugee crisis reveal underlying assumptions about cultural similarities that are embedded in the compatriots program.

While chapter 3 examines how cultural similarities and Russianness intersect, in **chapter 4**, I turn to notions of cultural differences and foreignness in the experiences of the compatriots program's second largest population, those from Central Asia and the Caucasus. Building on Rosa and Flores' (2017) raciolinguistic framework and Lemon's (2000, 2002, 1998), Humphrey's (1996), and Reeves' (2013) work on race in the post-Soviet context, this chapter examines how physical, linguistic, and contextual markers—such as skin color, eye shape, clothing, family size, accent, and location—come together in a set of signs to index how people perceive belonging. I analyze three examples, two from my fieldwork and one from the Russian sitcom, *Kukhnia* (Kitchen).

In **chapter 5**, I investigate the unique case of Primor'e's Old Believers, who returned from South America in 2009, and Russian society's affection for them against a backdrop of renewed patriotism and fears of demographic crisis. Based on participant observation I conducted among government meetings about the group in Vladivostok and Moscow in the spring of 2017, I argue that debates about whether to resettle more Old Believers from South America reveal factions within the compatriots program. Like the compatriots program as a whole, the case of the Old Believers has attracted the

interests of a diverse group of people, including Russian liberals and supporters of the Russian World concept. United by an interest in addressing Russia's demographic crisis and helping Russian-speakers abroad, these groups came together in the debates I observed in 2017 in the context of anxieties about immigration, especially along Russia's border with China.

In chapter 6, I conclude by analyzing a conversation I had with friends in Vladivostok about the compatriots program. Our discussion highlights concerns about immigration and race that Russians and American share as well as our cultural differences. I return to the larger issues the Resettlement of Compatriots Program brings to light, including how incentives states offer to some immigrants over others is equally racializing and that they often co-exist alongside efforts to curtail other forms of migration.

### A Note on Terms

Because of the Soviet Union's commitment to developing the cultures of its diverse populations, people often identify themselves by ethnic group (known as nationality, *natsional'nost'*) and citizenship (*grazhdanstvo*). There are ethnic Tatars in Russia, ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, and ethnic Russians in Estonia – to name just three of the more than 100 nationalities that lived in the Soviet Union. When introducing someone, I often specify their nationality, country of origin, and citizenship as they identified them to me. When I write about larger populations, referring to Russians, locals, Russian society, or Russian media, I don't just mean ethnic Russians but the diversity of people who fall under the civic Russian term "*rossiiane*," those with Russian citizenship.

To denote different types of people who move to Russia either permanently, seasonally, or temporarily, I use the terms that either they describe themselves, others describe them, or how they are described in the media. I use “migrant workers” for those who work in Russia seasonally or temporarily. In Russian, they are often referred to as *migranty* (migrants), *gastarbaitery* (from German, guest workers), and sometimes *nelegaly* (illegals).

For those who participate in the compatriots program, it was much harder to determine how to designate them consistently. Often, they are referred to interchangeably as *pereselentsy* (or immigrants, settlers) or *sootchestvoenniki* (compatriots), the term used in the legislation of the program. However, both terms are not exclusive to participants of the compatriots program. Settlers (*pereselentsy*) also refer to those who have been resettled through other similar programs that pre-date the Soviet Union, including the Ukrainian peasants who moved to the Far East in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of a state campaign to secure the new Russian border (Bassin 2006; Stephan 1996). Meanwhile, compatriots refer not only to those who have taken the Russian government up on their offer to “return” to Russia but also the many more millions of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers, who officials consider to be part of the Russian-speaking diaspora. Likewise, ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks I met in Russia considered compatriots to be fellow Uzbek and Tajik citizens from their home country, though ethnic Russians from Kazakhstan didn’t seem to have the same feelings of closeness to either ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan or their fellow Russians in Russia.

With these complexities in mind, I either refer to participants of the compatriots program as program participants or “returnees,” a term used to describe compatriots who have returned (*vozvrashchentsy*), though used much less regularly than *pereselentsy*

or *sootchestvenniki*. Rather than writing out the full name of the Resettlement of Compatriots Program, which in Russian is even longer – *Gosudarstvennaia programma po okazaniiu sodeistviia dobrovol'nomu pereseleniiu v Rossiiskuiu Federatsiiu sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom* (the State Program of the Assistance for the Voluntary Resettlement to the Russian Federation of Compatriots Living Abroad) – I shorten it to the compatriots program, so as not to be confused with past resettlement programs.

Finally, the short name for Primorskii krai is Primor'e, meaning “by the sea.”

## CHAPTER 2

### THE COMPATRIOTS PROGRAM IN CONTEXT

In April 2005, Russian President Vladimir Putin described the Soviet Union's collapse as a tragedy:

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself (Putin 2005).

Since then, this over-cited quote has taken on a life of its own as journalists, Russian "experts," and politicians have evoked it to make sense of Putin's aims. The quote has reappeared in editorials and political analyses to explain a range of topics, including why Russia supports Assad in Syria (Aron 2015), how Russia is the EU's most dangerous neighbor (M. Wolf 2014), and most commonly, how Putin wants to restore the Soviet Union (Haltiwanger 2017). Often in these accounts, as Dorothy Horsfield points out, Putin has been mistranslated. Correspondents, academic commentators, and politicians quote him as saying that the collapse was "the greatest geopolitical disaster," rather than that it was "a major political disaster," presumably included with other major disasters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as World War II (Horsfield 2017, xxvii; Armstrong 2014).<sup>17</sup>

Often, though, Putin's statement, regardless of whether quoted correctly, appears as evidence of his intention to reassert Russian dominance in post-Soviet republics. In

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<sup>17</sup> Horsfield (2017) and Armstrong (2014) write that in addition to the incorrect translation of the comparative adjectives, "worse" and "worst," Putin, like many Russians, would most likely also include the Soviet Union's loss of 20 million citizens during World War II as a major disaster. Commemorating the Great Patriotic War has become an important rallying point for Russian citizens in recent decades (Hemment 2004; Fedor et al. 2017).

*Beyond Crimea: the New Russian Empire*, political scientist Agnia Grigas introduces the evolution of the term “compatriot” with the excerpt above of Putin’s 2005 State of the Nation Address. Grigas uses this quote as evidence for her larger argument that Russia’s compatriots policies, along with its humanitarian, passportization, and information warfare practices, are an “instrument of Russia’s neo-imperial aims” (Grigas 2016, 3). Grigas argues that Russia’s compatriots policies, including the Resettlement of Compatriots Program, have become a militarized weapon, used since the 2008 war in Georgia and 2014 conflict in Ukraine to reassert Russian influence.<sup>18</sup> She examines how each region of the former Soviet Union (the Baltics; Caucasus; Central Asia; and Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus) has responded to Russia’s compatriots policies through analysis of Russian state efforts to support compatriots and interviews with young Russian-speakers, who are eligible for the compatriots program. Grigas’ book was well-received, appearing on Russia reading lists (Haring 2018; Begley 2017), the Washington, DC think tank circuit, and in popular media (Legvold 2016; Trakimavičius 2016).

One of Grigas’ key contributions to the study of Russia’s compatriots policies is how a range of people, from scholars and officials to ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking youth, interpret these policies in each post-Soviet country and how their interpretations vary by country. However, one key post-Soviet country is missing—Russia. Grigas fails to take into account the perspectives of Russian state actors who have been involved in the design and implementation of the compatriots policies and how Russian citizens view these policies. As her acknowledgements and book structure reflect, she did research across the former Soviet Union and interacted with prominent

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<sup>18</sup> Dunn and Bobick (2014) also cite Putin’s quote in their discussion of how Russian officials have used their compatriots policies to create frozen conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine.

researchers from each country, except with those in Russia. While Grigas is attentive to the real consequences of Russia's actions in Ukraine and Georgia for the region, her book also reinforces popular narratives of Russian irredentism that fail to take into account the domestic forces that also propel Russia's policies.

In this chapter, I situate the transformations in Russia's compatriot policies and citizenship laws within political debates in Russia. I locate the Resettlement of Compatriots Program as a response to ongoing concerns about ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers abroad, a decreasing Russian population, and an increasing non-Russian, immigrant population, all of which emerged as issues in the 1990s. Russian politicians, journalists, and some demographers have framed these population changes as a "demographic crisis" (*demograficheskii krizis*), using the language of moral decay and catastrophe. As Rivkin-Fish has documented, in newspaper articles, journalists and officials have long warned of the Russian nation "dying out" (*vymiranie, ubyl*) and of depopulation (*depulatsiia*) and degeneration (*degradatsiia*) (2010, 710). Discourses of demographic crisis have intersected with histories of ethnotrauma as some blame their struggles on non-Russian peoples and claim that the Soviet Union was a non-Russian institution (Oushakine 2009).

In this chapter, I trace the creation of the compatriots program in 2006 as part of a proposed solution to the demographic crisis and as arising out of anxieties about cultural diversity. I ground my analysis in the perspectives of the Duma MPs, migration bureaucrats, scholars, NGO employees, journalists, and human rights activists involved in the implementation and promotion of the program, some of whom I interviewed and observed during fieldwork. I analyze Duma transcripts and newspaper articles about Russia's citizenship and compatriots laws to reveal the debates the program emerged

from and to show how Kremlin officials navigated different factions. I also rely on my fieldnotes and interview transcripts from 2015 and 2016–2017 to demonstrate how officials who implemented the program understood the program’s goals. During fieldwork, I interviewed six governmental officials, five in Primorskii krai and one in Moscow. They included a member of the Primorskii krai Duma, a former FMS director, the director of a prominent website that promotes the compatriots program abroad, an official from the Primorskii krai Department of Labor and Social Development, and two directors of Centers for Employment, who carried out the program in their respective regions of Primorskii krai. These last two officials, local bureaucrats, allowed me to shadow them at work for several days, in which I had the opportunity to observe their interactions with returnees and local citizens as well as get to know them as people.<sup>19</sup> Spending time with local officials and learning about how their hometowns had changed in the last 25 years presented a different perspective on the compatriots program than what is often presented in state-level depictions of Russia’s migration policies.

By foregrounding how politicians and bureaucrats from Moscow to Vladivostok interpret the program, this chapter offers another approach to studying Russian politics. It supports recent scholarship on governance that challenge narratives of Russian policymaking as top-down and driven only by Putin and United Russia (Schenk 2018; Shevel 2011a; Hemment 2015; Rogers 2015; Wengle 2015; Collier 2011; Laruelle and Radvanyi 2018; Tolz and Teper 2018; Laruelle 2019). Rather, I show that policymaking in

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<sup>19</sup> In addition, I also conducted participant observation at state-organized conferences about Old Believers who have “returned” through the compatriots program. At these meetings, I observed and interacted informally with officials from the Orthodox Church, Ministry of Far Eastern Development, the Agency for the Development of Human Capital in the Far East, and the MVD. I write more about these encounters in chapter 5.

Russia, as in other countries, is a negotiation between politicians and that middle and lower level bureaucrats also shape the interpretation of policies and how they play out.

First, I introduce the compatriots program, arguing that officials envision it as a Slavic – or culturally similar – solution to Russia’s demographic changes. Then I trace how definitions of compatriot have evolved in the past 25 years. Building on Oxana Shevel’s work on Russia’s compatriots and citizenship policies (Shevel 2011b, 2011c, 2011a), I demonstrate how the broad, ambiguous definition of compatriot is a product of political negotiation. Next, I explore the opportunities that the ambiguity of compatriot enables. I show how it allows a diversity of officials like President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov as well as mid- and lower-level bureaucrats to pursue a range of policies through the compatriots program, some of which have indeed been weaponized as Grigas (2016) and Dunn and Bobick (2014) have suggested. In the last section, I analyze how local officials utilize the ambiguity of who qualifies to use the program to help immigrants and revitalize their local communities.

### **A Slavic Solution to Russia’s Demographic Changes**

As Serguei Oushakine points out, there was little public reaction in Russia to Putin’s 2005 assertion that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster. Rather, Putin voiced a common opinion about the social, economic, and political turmoil that accompanied the Soviet Union’s collapse in the 1990s (2009, 80). The dissolution set off mass migration and displacement across the former Soviet republics. According to the 1989 Soviet census, 25.3 million ethnic Russians and 11.2 million Russian-speakers lived in Russia’s “Near Abroad” (*blizhnee zarubezh’e*), the countries of the former Soviet Union. By Russian-speaker, the census meant those who

were not ethnic Russian but who identified Russian as their native language (Shevel 2011b, 2-3). Although approximately six million people moved to Russia in the 1990s (Chudinovskikh and Denisenko 2017), many Russians and Russian-speakers remained in other former Soviet countries and their large numbers have reappeared in officials' and journalists' concerns about the fate of the Russian nation since the early 1990s.<sup>20</sup>

When Vladimir Putin became president in 2000, his administration faced two key issues: 1) concerns about Russia's decreasing population, framed as a demographic crisis, and 2) a popular backlash against labor migration. Interrelated, these concerns reflected a shift in the demographics of Russia's population: as white, ethnic Russians were aging and dying at earlier ages than in previous decades, younger, non-ethnic Russian immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus were replacing them. Faced with the paradox that the economy needed labor, yet many Russians were against immigration, officials saw ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers abroad as a solution to their problem. By encouraging ethnic Russians (later expanded to Russian-speakers in 2010 as I describe in the third section) to "return" to Russia, they hoped to address both issues (the demographic crisis and immigration) simultaneously. This section explores the demographic changes Russia was undergoing at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the context from which the compatriots program emerged.

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<sup>20</sup> There is also a more recent Russian diaspora outside of post-Soviet republics. In the past 25 years, a little over 600,000 Russians have emigrated to the United States; 500,000 to Canada; 800,000 to Germany; and one million to Israel according each country's statistics (Riazantsev and Grebeniuk 2014, 16, 21, 28; Suslov 2018, 331). While they too are considered compatriots, as I explain later, the Russian government has pursued a different relationship with them than that of the compatriots program.

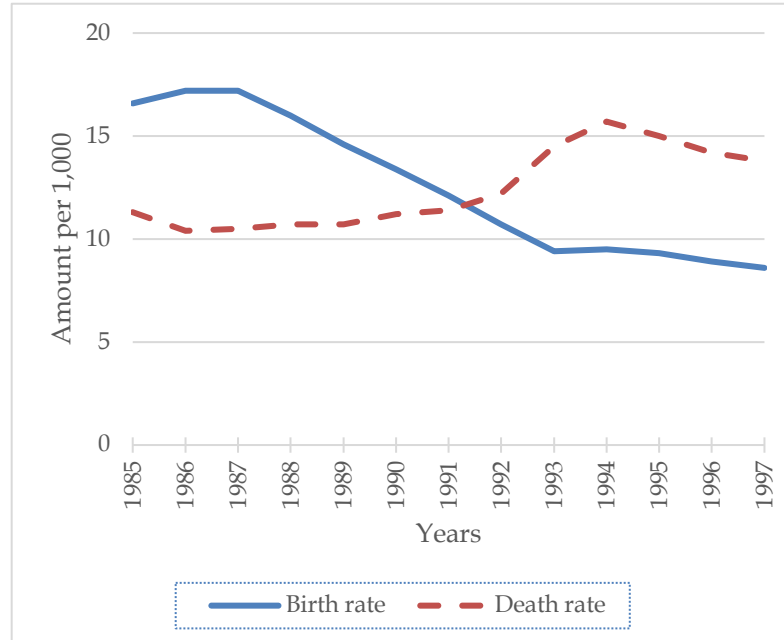


Figure 2: "The Russian Cross": Falling birth rates, rising death rates (World Bank Group 2018)

### The Demographic Crisis

Between 1992 and 2000, the Russian population decreased by six million people amidst the abrupt social upheaval and economic crisis that accompanied privatization (Flynn 2004). Fertility and mortality rates had declined in European countries over the span of several decades, but in Russia, fertility rates plummeted as mortality rates skyrocketed after 1991 (Field 1995) (figure 2). By 1994, mortality rates for men between the ages of 15 and 64 were twice as high as they had been just eight years earlier in 1986 (600 per 100,000 people versus nearly 1,100 in 1994), and the life expectancy for Russian men dropped from approximately 64 years in 1987 to 58 years in 1993 (in the United States in 1993, the average life expectancy for men was 72) (DaVanzo and Adamson 1997, 2, 4; World Bank Group 2018). While alcoholism was one contributing factor, deaths from violence, homicide, and suicide also increased (DaVanzo and Adamson 1997). More than a million people emigrated from Russia, primarily to Germany, Israel,

and the US (Heleniak 2002). Politicians and demographers have described these population transformations as a “demographic crisis.” In the 1990s, they became a “social panic,” leading to “imagery of an impending national catastrophe,” writes Rivkin-Fish (2006, 152). The Communist Party even went so far as to try to impeach Russian President Boris Yeltsin for his role in the “genocide of the Russian people” (quoted in Rivkin-Fish 2006, 152). Demographic indicators intersected with narratives of cultural loss as people reexamined history along ethnic lines to make sense of the tumultuous events of the Soviet Union’s collapse (Oushakine 2009; Humphrey 1996; Ries 1997).

In northern and eastern Russia (the Far North, Siberia, and Far East), the priority regions for the compatriots program, the demographic crisis has been even more pronounced. Since 1990, two million people have left the Far East and Primorskii krai has lost 360,000 people (Avdeev 2015). Known as the “western drift” (*zapadnyi dreif*), many residents have moved to western Russia because of the Far East’s low salaries and high living costs, which are above average for Russia. As is the case on the national level, immigrants from abroad are the only form of population growth the region has experienced, though the numbers are not high enough to prevent overall continued population decline as is the case in other regions of Russia (Khramova 2015). Most immigrants come from Central Asia and the Caucasus, but there are also temporary workers from China, North Korea, and Vietnam. This last migration flow is charged. As trade and transregional migration has increased between the Far East and China since the 1990s, journalists and politicians have often connected the demographic crisis with threats to Russia’s territorial integrity. They fear that densely populated China will seize parts of the sparsely populated Primorskii krai and the Far East to accommodate its

large population. Fears of Chinese migration have been an important impetus for initiatives like the compatriots program and the Far Eastern Hectare Program to attract Russian citizens to move to Russia's border with China (Ostrovskaya 2009; Zuenko 2015).

### **Migration**

In contrast to alarmist concerns about migration in Europe, migration has really been the only form of population growth Russia has experienced in the last 25 years (Zaionchkovskaya and Tiuriukanova 2010; Chudinovskikh and Denisenko 2017; Rivkin-Fish 2006). While earlier waves of migration to Russia were mostly ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers seeking citizenship, by the end of the 1990s, the population had shifted to those seeking temporary work from the Caucasus and Central Asia (Schenk 2018; Chudinovskikh and Denisenko 2017). The economic situation in Russia was volatile in the 1990s, but it was still worse in the Caucasus and Central Asia. For example, in 1999, a third of the population in Tajikistan lived on less than one US dollar a day (Denisenko and Chudinovskikh 2018). With the exception of the default crisis of 1998, salaries in Russia have been consistently higher than other CIS countries for the past 25 years (Chudinovskikh and Denisenko 2017). The opportunity to send money home, paired with a shared history, common language (Russian), and visa-free regime with Russia, have influenced many to migrate to Russia seasonally for work (Schenk 2018). Between 1995 and 2000, 106,000 to 186,000 work permits were issued per year; by the mid-2000s, more than one million were issued per year. While there were 1.5 million migrants

working in Russia illegally between 1998 and 2000, the number increased to between three and five million by the early 2000s (Chudinovskikh and Denisenko 2017).<sup>21</sup>

As Russian citizens read doomsday reports of demographic collapse, they saw their cities changing as more and more Central Asians and Caucasians moved to Russia for work. During her fieldwork on Roma in the 1990s, Alaina Lemon found that the Russian press depicted non-ethnic Russian immigrants as an invasion. “Blacks” “invaded” Russia, compelled not by economic reasons or Soviet ties but because of their greed and “hot blood.” As Lemon writes, these narratives ignored the roles Russia and the Soviet Union had played in the conflicts of the early 1990s that forced many to immigrate (Lemon 2000, 61). Another unfounded assumption was that “blacks” engaged in the illicit trade and crime that were impoverishing Russians in the 1990s. While Russians suffered, only non-ethnic Russians became wealthy, benefiting from privatization and the sudden flow of foreign capital. Again, these stereotypes failed to recognize how non-Russians had been excluded historically from obtaining residence permits and opening businesses (Lemon 1998, 46).

By the early 2000s, public pressure had mounted for the government to address Russia’s demographic crisis and curtail migration. Putin’s administration has implemented citizenship and migration policies simultaneously that have more clearly specified – and restricted – who is eligible for expedited citizenship and the requirements for obtaining a work permit. In 2002, two new laws were passed that limited naturalization and immigration, “On Russian Federation Citizenship” in May

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<sup>21</sup> While I use the term illegal here, as Reeves (2013) and Schenk (2018) have demonstrated, it is very difficult to reside and work in Russia legally given the complex migration procedures and corruption.

and “On the Legal Status of Foreigners” in July.<sup>22</sup> Although revised a year later to include compatriots, veterans, and students who graduated from Russian universities, the citizenship law restricted expedited citizenship procedures to only former Soviet citizens who were legally stateless or who were born on the territory of the Russian Federation (Schenk 2018, 4; Shevel 2011b, 22). Many believed that the 2002 citizenship law reflected post-9/11 concerns about immigration, escalated by Russia’s second war in Chechnya, which had begun in 1999 (Grafova 2016). Meanwhile, the foreign citizens law, also passed in 2002, was the government’s first attempt to regulate migration. It introduced quotas for temporary residence and work permits and required registration for all foreigners within three days of arrival (Schenk 2018:4). Putin’s policies to restrict access to citizenship and control migration marked a departure from Yeltsin’s more liberal policies.

It is within the context of attempting to control migration that the compatriots program emerged in 2006. Just months after announcing the new program, Russian President Vladimir Putin told a group of compatriots gathered in St. Petersburg:

We are both well aware that the overwhelming majority of Russians (*ruskikh*) and other ethnic groups of the Russian Federation living abroad are not there because they want to be. We are going to do everything to help those who want to return to their Motherland (*na Rodinu*).

Without pause, Putin continued, linking Russia’s compatriots policies to its efforts to curtail migration:

I would like to touch on the theme of labor migration (*trudovoi migratsii*), which to a large degree infringes on the interests of our compatriots from CIS countries. We will – I must say this, and I think that everyone will understand me – fight against illegal labor immigration. But at the same time we are going to simplify procedures so that those who are living

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<sup>22</sup> In Russian, the laws are *O grazhdanstve Rossiiskoi Federatsii* and *O pravovom polozenii inostrannykh grazhdan v Rossiiskoi Federatsii*.

and working on the territory of the Russian Federation can have the opportunity to work and live here legally (Putin 2006b).

Putin's speech reflects a general pattern in officials' discourses that links the compatriots program to the restriction of other forms of migration.

Once the compatriots program went into effect in January 2007, that same month, officials introduced quotas for work permits and banned immigrants from working in the market sector through the law "On the Status of Foreign Citizens" (Schenk 2018). Seven years later, in the wake of Crimea's annexation to Russia, the Duma passed legislation, fast-tracking the process of applying for citizenship for Russian-speakers from two years to just three months (Kalybekova 2014; Kremlin 2014). On that same day in April 2014, Putin also approved a bill that introduced a Russian language, history, and culture exam for migrant workers. In her work on migration governance in Russia, Caress Schenk (2018) argues that state actors have responded to popular anxiety about immigration by passing restrictive measures that have created "a scarcity of legal labor." As a result, these policies have pushed migrants into informal sectors, where they work without legal documents and become the targets of corruption schemes by regional elites and the migration police (Schenk 2018, 34; see also Reeves 2013).

Building on Schenk's work, in this dissertation, I argue that as Russian officials have made labor migration policies more restrictive, they have simultaneously made it easier for those willing to move beyond Moscow and St. Petersburg to other parts of Russia through the compatriots program. Russian officials seek to address concerns about a decreasing population by attracting immigrants. They promote the program as a Slavic solution to Russia's demographic crisis, depicting Russian and Ukrainian families "returning" to Russia. However, the definition of compatriot is much more ambiguous, providing different opportunities for how officials implement the program. I now turn

to the legislation of the compatriots program, explaining how it works, before returning to the ambiguity of the term compatriot and the different opportunities it presents.

### The Resettlement of Compatriots Program

In June 2006, Putin signed legislation to establish the Resettlement of Compatriots Program. As the presidential decree makes clear, the program's primary purpose was to resolve Russia's demographic crisis. The very first paragraph of the decree lays out the program as "directed at the unification of the potential of compatriots living abroad with the needs of the development of Russian regions." It continues:

2. The government program is supplemented by a system of measures oriented at the *stabilization of the population size (na stabilizatsiiu chislennosti naseleniia)* of the Russian Federation, above all on the territories that are strategic for Russia.

3. The creation of the voluntary resettlement (*sodeistvie dobrovol'nomu pereseleniiu*) to the Russian Federation of compatriots (*sootechestvoenniki*), living abroad (hereafter, compatriots), is one of the ways to *solve the demographic problem (odnim iz napravlenii resheniia demograficheskoi problemy)*. As those brought up in the traditions of Russian (*rossiiskoi*) culture, who know Russian language (*vladeiushchie russkim iazykom*) and do not desire to lose ties with Russia (*ne zhelaiushchie teriat' sviaz'*), *compatriots, more than others, are capable of adapting and quickly integrating in the system of positive social relations in the host community* (Putin 2006a, 4, emphasis added).

It is important to note that the compatriots program is envisioned not as one of repatriation (*repatriatsiia*) of ethnic Russians, as in Germany and Israel, but one of "voluntary resettlement" (*dobrovol'nomu pereseleniiu*) as the legislation emphasizes. As a resettlement program, the program is "one of the ways to solve the demographic problem." The government selects compatriots, defined broadly as those "brought up in the traditions" of a civic Russian (not necessarily ethnic) culture and who speak Russian,

because they are considered more “capable of adapting and quickly integrating,” compared to other groups.

The assumption that those qualities will ease adaptation and integration draw on Herderian notions of language and culture as territorially bounded. While scholars have studied recent narratives of immigrants as threats to national identity and governments’ attempts to restrict immigration (Vertovec 2011; Stolcke 1995; Gullestad 2002; Grillo 2003), we see something different here in the compatriots program. Rather, officials seek to attract people who are culturally *similar* to Russian citizens, assuming that their linguistic and cultural similarities will make integration easier. The compatriots program comes out of similar concerns about migration as those in Europe and the United States, but Russian officials seek to ease them by describing immigrants who arrive through the compatriots program as culturally similar, highly qualified, and instruments of the state, moving to Russia to help stabilize the population. Russia is not the only country to mobilize members of its so-called diaspora to “return” to the homeland and contribute to the Russian state. Germany, Israel, Greece, and Kazakhstan are just a few examples of states who have offered support to their “compatriots,” often broadly defined, to immigrate (Mandel 2008; Mylonas 2013; Diener 2009). Like many other resettlement programs, as the legislation of Russia’s compatriots program makes clear, the purpose is to benefit the state: “the social-economic development of the regions” and “the resolution of demographic problems” (see III. 7 b and v). Regional officials are to select compatriot-participants based foremost on their profession and



Figure 3: Map of participating regions (bolded) as of December 2018  
(Russian Century 2018)

whether it is considered “needed” in the territory as dictated by the legislation and confirmed by my interviews (see VI. 33 a and b).

To participate in the program, compatriots apply at Russian consulates abroad or at Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) offices in Russia to move to specific regions of the country. In 2006, only 12 regions participated in the program, but today, there are 66 regions out of a total of 85 federal subjects (see figure 3) (Vishniakova et al. 2018). The regional administrations and the MVD (previously managed by the Federal Migration Services until its dissolution in April 2016) approve applicants based on a range of factors, but based on my interviews with officials in Primorskii krai and other scholarship on the program (Kolesov 2014; Riazantsev, Pis'mennaia, and Khramova 2015), they prioritize the primary participant's profession (whether it is in demand and

whether jobs are available) and the number of children, preferring larger families as having more demographic potential.<sup>23</sup>

The program's focus on profession rather than ethnicity is an important difference from other state repatriation programs, as in Israel or Germany, as compatriot-participants, officials, and migration scholars alike emphasized to me. "We accept those who we need and reject those who we don't need," one scholar summed up after telling me of one family she knew who had been rejected in Amurskaya oblast because they didn't meet the educational requirements even though they spoke Russian fluently and had a successful local business. In 2014, then head of the FMS' compatriots program for Russia, Vitaly Yakovlev told *Kommersant* reporter, Polina Nikol'skaia,

The resettlement program isn't a program of repatriation, like in Israel or Germany. We never set ourselves the task of bringing compatriots from around the world to Russia. We're not forcing anyone to return, but we're ready to provide help to those who have made such a decision (Nicol'skaia 2014a, 4).

By emphasizing profession over other factors, Russian officials make it clear here that the compatriots program is one of economic development, intended to benefit the regions that receive compatriots and the compatriots who meet a particular region's needs.

At times, issues arise between different ways of addressing the demographic needs of the country. For example, what if a large family applies to the program, but they don't have the desired professions for that region? In these situations, it is up to the regional administration to decide. In chapter 5, I explore how competing priorities of large family size versus unneeded profession (farmers) played out in the case of

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<sup>23</sup> This is based on interviews with Primorskii krai administrators and the former director of the FMS in Vladivostok as well as informal conversations with MVD employees in Moscow.

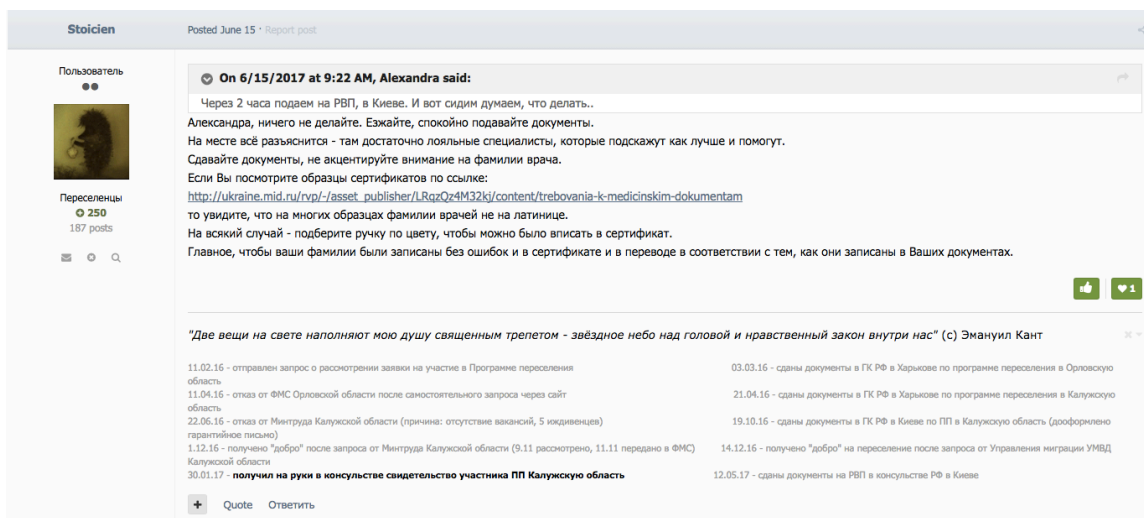


Figure 4: Example of signature from Back2Russia

Primor'e's Old Believers. In the end, first the Primorskii krai administration and later the federal government modified the program to include agricultural as a needed industry. Back2Russia, an online forum, in which compatriots ask one another questions, also offers interesting insight into regional variation and decisions people make. A common practice on the forum is to sign one's posts with a timeline of one's immigration to Russia. These "signatures" include from which country returnees applied, to which region, when they heard back, and when they moved to Russia (figure 4). Some users also include their rejections and re-applications to different regions. By analyzing these signatures and tracing users' posts in different sections of the site, it is possible to see patterns emerge as to which regions are "easier" to apply for or which favor some kinds of applicants over another.

Once compatriots are accepted as participants of the program, the federal and regional governments reimburse participants for their moving expenses and the cost of applying to the program (consular costs, translation fees, etc.). The government also provides temporary housing for up to six months if necessary. As a priority region, participants who move to Primorskii krai, as well as other regions of the Far East,

receive a financial bonus (*pod'emnye*): 220,000 rubles (approximately \$3,419) for the primary participant and 120,000 rubles (\$1,865) per accompanying family member dispersed over a period of three years (Vishniakova et al. 2018, 31).<sup>24</sup> The incentive that appeals most to compatriots though is that regardless of the region they select, they can apply for Russian citizenship in as little as three months after arrival (compared to the usual naturalization process that can take five years or more). While in reality it can take longer than three months to obtain citizenship, I consistently found in my interviews with compatriots in Primorskii krai that many had in fact received citizenship three to six months after joining the program.<sup>25</sup>

Initially, the program was not as popular as state officials had hoped. While officials had predicted that 300,000 compatriots would “return” to Russia in the first three years, only about 27,000 immigrated through the program (Riazantsev, Pis'mennaia, and Khramova 2015). However, there have been three turning points since then that have increased participation. In 2010, restrictions on one's residency at the time of application were lifted, so that one could apply from within Russia, not just from abroad. Then in 2012, the program was revised again, so that participants no longer needed to find a job before immigrating to Russia; they could apply on the basis of their profession alone. Finally, in 2014, faced with a sudden humanitarian crisis as almost a

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<sup>24</sup> As of March 2019, the conversion rate was 64.35 rubles to 1 US dollar. The average monthly salary in Vladivostok was 57,923 rubles (approximately \$900 in March 2019) and in Primorskii krai, 49,156 rubles (\$758) (see Administratsiia Vladivostoka 2018).

<sup>25</sup> The speed in which compatriots obtain citizenship in Primorskii krai is unusual. One of the key complaints of the program is how inefficient and complex the bureaucracy of the program is, which is true of most immigrants' experiences with the MVD (and earlier FMS). In news articles about other regions of Russia and conversations with journalists and compatriots in Moscow, Tver, and Kaluga, some people spoke of it taking years for compatriots to obtain citizenship through the program due to long lines.

### Number of Participants of the Resettlement of Compatriots Program by Year

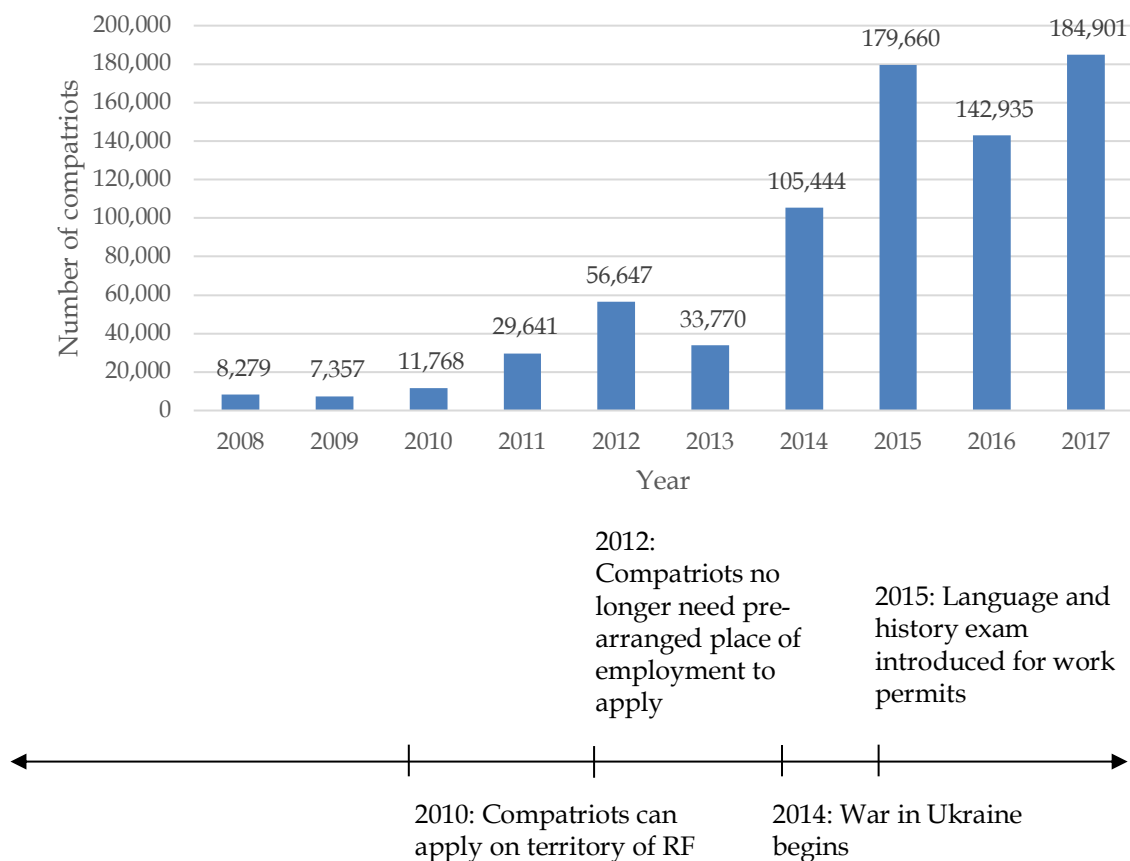


Figure 5: The number of compatriots by year with timeline (Rosstat 2018)

million refugees arrived in Russia from Ukraine, government officials revamped the compatriots' program to resettle refugees across Russia and offer them citizenship quickly. Since these changes, the number of participants has surged: in the past five years, more than half a million have received citizenship through the program (see figure 5).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Data on the number of compatriot program participants by year can be accessed online at the Russian Federal Services of State Statistics (Rosstat 2018).

Although the Far East is a priority region for the compatriots program, far fewer compatriots have moved there than to other regions of Russia. Between 2010 and 2016, only 6% of returnees moved to the Far East, compared to 44% who selected the Central Federal District (the region surrounding Moscow) and 17% who selected Siberia.

Although officials lament the Far East’s lack of popularity, low levels of participation are also not surprising given the region’s high rates of outmigration, economic challenges, and its distance from many immigrants’ countries of origin and Moscow (Vladivostok is nearly 4,000 miles from Moscow). Despite these challenges, the Far East and Primorskii krai have become more popular since 2014 (figure 6). Of the regions that are part of the Far East, Primorskii krai is the most popular, followed by Khabarovskii krai.

The majority of those who participate in the compatriots program move to Russia from other former Soviet republics (figure 7). Very few move to Russia from the Baltic countries – Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia – that joined the European Union in 2004 and even fewer from other countries. In 2015, for example, only .11% participated

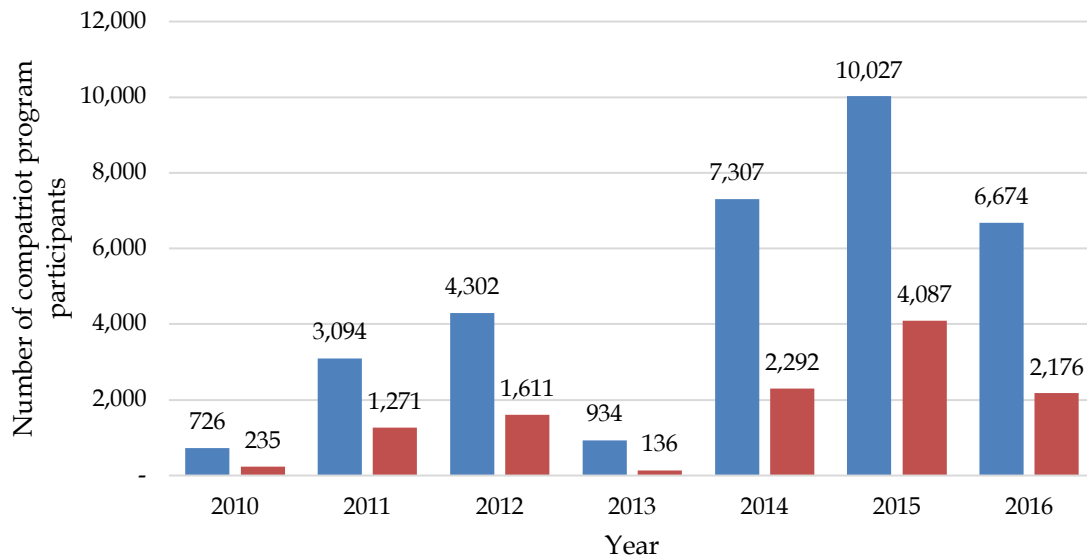


Figure 6: Number of compatriot program participants to Far East by year (Federal’naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki 2016)

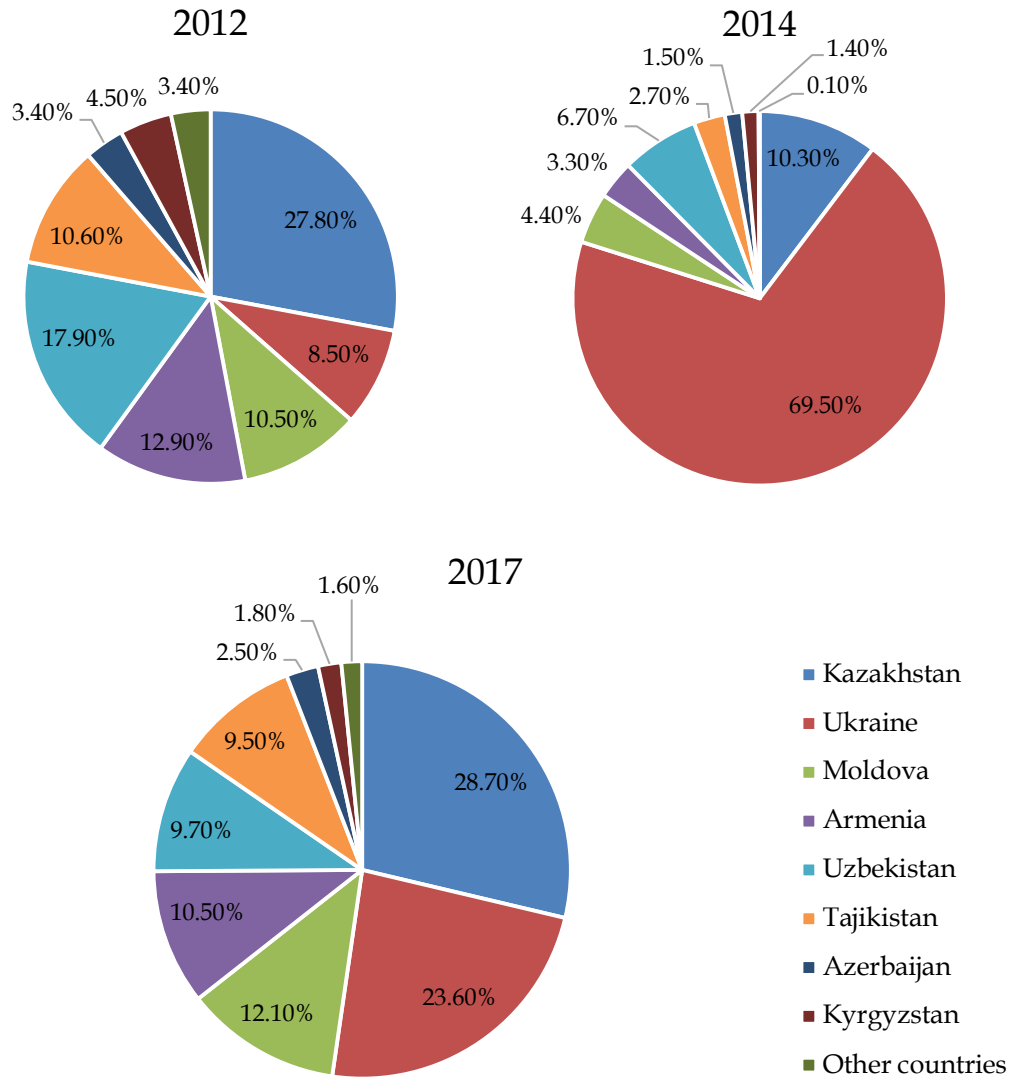


Figure 7: Percentage of compatriots by country of origin during the 4th quartile (MVD 2018)

in the program from the Baltic countries and only .1% from other countries.<sup>27</sup> However, those who have participated from Europe have received outsized attention. For example, in March 2017, the daily newspaper, *Izvestia* published an article with the

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<sup>27</sup> “Raspredelenie uchastnikov Gosuadrstvennoy programmy po okazaniyu sodeistviya dobrovol’nomu pereseleniyu v RF sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom, postavlennykh na uchyt v territorial’nykh organakh FMS Rossii v 2015 godu, po grazhdanstvu,” obtained through personal correspondence. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) reports compatriots by country of origin

headline, “Russians (*rossiiane*) disillusioned (*razocharovalis*) with Europe are returning home (*vozvraschchaiutsia domoi*).” Under a close-up shot of a woman pinning a ribbon of the Russian flag to her coat, the authors wrote, “Approximately 150,000 compatriots (*sootchestvennikov*) returned from abroad to Russia in 2016,” according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*MVD*) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*MID*). The article claimed that 30,000 of them had returned from Europe, pushed by “anti-Russian sentiment” (Laru, Baikova, and Zabrodin 2017). Published during my fieldwork, the *Izvestia* article appeared everywhere, picked up by other newspapers like *Komsomol'skaia pravda* without further investigation. Meanwhile, migration experts questioned the article’s accuracy. Dmitry Poletaev from the Center for Migration Research posted publicly available statistics from the MVD’s website on his blog. He suggested the journalists were mistaken and had perhaps cited the number of Russian citizens arriving in Russia on their Russian passports, rather than those obtaining new Russian citizenship (Poletaev 2017).

In contrast to the *Izvestia* article’s claims, most returnees come from former Soviet countries. With the exception of 2014 and 2015, the most common country of origin for participants has been Kazakhstan – 28% in 2012, 29% in 2017, and even 10% in 2014 when the program became more restricted to prioritize refugees’ applications from Ukraine. After Kazakhstan, many participants have emigrated from Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (MVD 2018). It is important to note that Russian

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only in quarterly reports rather than by year. Thus, these percentages reported here only give a snapshot of the countries of origin for the fourth quartile of 2012, 2014, and 2017. They do not represent the total per year, which is not reported regularly. To access each quarterly report, see the MVD site (2018).

officials only track citizenship, not one's nationality, such as whether someone is ethnic Russian emigrating from Kazakhstan or ethnic Kazakh.

In Primor'e, information about returnees' citizenship was unavailable. The krai shared with me and regularly published information about the ages and education levels of participants – 44% were between the ages of 30 and 45, 50% below the age of 29; 75% had a professional education (Nekrasov 2016). However, krai officials only listed countries of origin without percentages, stating that most returnees came from Ukraine, Tajikistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Of the 172 news articles I analyzed about the program, only one – Polina Nikol'skaia's 2014 article that specifically focused on Central Asians' experiences in the compatriots program – included pictures of those who weren't ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, or Germans. However, from conversations with officials and migration experts in Moscow and Vladivostok I know that the number of non-ethnic Russians is much higher than what the news coverage portrays.

One indicator of how many Central Asian and Caucasian immigrants apply to the program is to look at the number of applications submitted on the territory of a region. Between 2007 and 2016, 71% of returnees applied from Primore, 41% of whom were refugees from Ukraine (the government has tracked the number of refugees in recent years). The official suggested that the remaining 59% were those who had already been living and working in Primore – in other words, immigrants. Migration experts in Moscow who study the compatriots program confirmed that this percentage was

reasonable; they estimated that depending on the region, 40–60% of those who participate in the program are those who originally moved to Russia to study or work.<sup>28</sup>

The obfuscation of returnees' nationality and the depiction of program participants in Russian media as ethnic Russian families reflects officials' awareness that many Russians are uncomfortable with non-ethnic Russian immigration. Thus, the compatriots program serves as a means through which Russian officials respond to concerns about immigration by limiting some forms of migration while simultaneously encouraging others. Officials promote the compatriots program as a Slavic solution to Russia's demographic crisis by portraying returnees as highly qualified, well-educated, and culturally similar to ethnic Russians. At the same time, they transform immigrants already living and working in Russia into more socially acceptable forms – Russian-speaking compatriots eligible for citizenship.

In the next section, I turn to ambiguity within Russia's compatriots policies at the level of design. I argue that while officials are aware of the ambiguity and utilize it, the ambiguity of the definition also emerges from the diversity of political interests that have shaped Russia's compatriots policies and program.

### **Ambiguity at the Level of Design**

More than a decade after Putin's controversial statement, State Secretary and Deputy Foreign Minister, as well as Chair of the Government Commission on Compatriots Living Abroad, Grigory Karasin provoked controversy, referring to

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<sup>28</sup> Information about the number of returnees who applied in Primor'e rather than abroad was obtained through personal correspondence in February 2017.

compatriots not as ethnic Russian but as Russian citizens. At a celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, Karasin told his audience,

About 30 million Russian compatriots (*rossiiskikh sootchestvennikov*) now live outside Russia as a result of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's upheavals. They are scattered in all regions and corners of the world, and many of them try to maintain ties with Russia and to preserve their identity (Karasin 2017).

In a post-Crimea context, in which Russian officials have justified military intervention in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea based on Russia's Right to Protect its compatriots (Dunn and Bobick 2014), Karasin's use of the civic *rossiiskikh*, rather than the ethnic *russkikh*, alarmed Russia's neighbors. *Rossiiskii* is the more civic, non-ethnic Russian group identity that can also refer to citizens of the Russian Federation, whereas *russkii* refers only to ethnic Russians. Russia's neighbors interpreted Karasin's ambiguous reference to include more than just the ethnic Russians who lived in their countries but potentially those of other ethnicities as well. Meanwhile, his audience – self-proclaimed representatives of the Russian diaspora, who had gathered in Moscow for the triennial Worldwide Conference for Compatriots – welcomed his speech. Founded in 2006 and organized by the Fund for the Support and Defense of Compatriots Abroad, the conference brings representatives of *rossiiskoi* (non-ethnic Russians) “scientific and intellectual elite” and “activists” from around the world to discuss the potential of compatriots abroad and their suggestions for the “modernization” of Russia, according to the program's website.<sup>29</sup> The conferences attract high profile visits from Russian officials, including keynote speeches by President Vladimir Putin and former President Dmitry Medvedev.

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<sup>29</sup> See *Vsemirnye konferentsii. Vsemirnyi koordinatsionnyi sovet rossiiskikh sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom*. <http://vksrs.com/vsemirnye-konferentsii/about/>, accessed September 21, 2018.

Karasin's reference to the 30 million Russian compatriots abroad was not unique, nor was his word choice unusual. In news articles and public statements, I often found that officials slipped between referring to compatriots as *russkie* (ethnic Russian), *russkoiazychnie* and *ruskogovoriashchie* (Russian-speaking), or *rossiane* (the civic term). While the looseness of the terms can be instrumental in the application of Russia's compatriots policies abroad, they also reflect the indeterminacy of who is included as a compatriot for Russian officials as definitions have changed since the 1990s (Shevel 2011c; Laruelle 2015a). While some fear references to compatriots are a weapon Russian can mobilize, Suslov writes that they are rather:

scattered legos, requiring much ingenuity to connect them together and attach to the Kremlin's purposes. This is because differences among various categories of 'compatriots' are by far more important than their nebulous cultural sameness (2018, 331).

This is especially evident when officials, from former head of the FMS Konstantin Romodanovskii to President Putin, pause as they carefully select their adjective before using the word compatriot in their responses to journalists' questions about the compatriots program. Officials hesitate because they recognize that who is included – and more importantly who is excluded – as a compatriot has not only important ramifications for Russia's relationship to its so-called diaspora abroad but also for its relationship to minority groups within the Russian Federation (Shevel 2011b, 2011c).

As Rogers Brubaker argues, how countries define and manage their diaspora are political projects, "used to make claims, articulate projects, formulate expectations, mobilize energies, [and] appeal to loyalties" (Brubaker 2005, 12). Russia's relationships to its compatriots are indeed political projects, aimed not only at mobilizing and appealing to the loyalties of compatriots abroad but also to those of a domestic audience. Like the English "compatriot," the Russian *sootchestvennik* includes the prefix for "with"

("com-" in English, "so-" in Russian) and contains the root for fatherland or homeland (*otechestvo*). Literally, *sootchestvennik* translates to "with one's homeland." Similarly, compatriot in English means "with one's fellow countryman." Debates about who should be included as a compatriot are also about who should be included as one's fellow citizen and part of one's homeland. This section turns to the important political work diaspora-building does domestically. I draw on Oxana Shevel's (2011c, 2011a, 2011b) scholarship on the relationship between Russia's citizenship and compatriot policies to trace how legal definitions of "compatriot" have evolved since 1991 and how they have informed the compatriots program. Shevel argues that officials embrace the ambiguity of the term compatriot as a way to navigate and gain the political support of a diversity of actors involved in debates about national identity in Russia.

### **Debating Compatriots, Defining Citizens**

Initially, in the 1990s, Russian citizenship was extended to almost any former Soviet citizen who wanted to move to Russia and many took advantage of this opportunity (Shevel 2011b; Schenk 2018). Nearly six million people immigrated to Russia from former Soviet republics, propelled not by cultural affinity, but necessity. More than a million of them were refugees and stateless peoples displaced by conflict in the Caucasus, Tajikistan, and Moldova (Chudinovskikh and Denisenko 2017). Given the mass upheaval of the Soviet Union's collapse and the sudden influx of people to Russia, Yeltsin's early policies towards Russia's compatriots were aimed at encouraging them to stay in their home countries while simultaneously pursuing dual citizenship policies with CIS governments, as was laid out in Presidential Decree No. 1681 on the Guidelines on the State Policy regarding Compatriots Abroad (see table 2 for an overview of how

Russia's compatriots policies have evolved over time) (Yeltsin 1994). Yeltsin's efforts at establishing dual citizenship for Russian compatriots (undefined at this point as to who were included) were largely unsuccessful though—only Turkmenistan and Tajikistan agreed, and in 2003, Turkmenistan withdrew its support (Grigas 2016).

Despite Yeltsin's reluctance to commit to Russia's compatriots abroad, by the mid-1990s, there was increasing pressure within the Duma and in the media for Russia to offer protection, especially to ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia, who were denied citizenship based on their inability to speak Estonian or Latvian. While the Duma, led by the Communists, had passed an earlier declaration in 1994 in support of Russia's compatriots, this decree was largely symbolic rather than offering compatriots any practical support abroad.<sup>30</sup> In 1995, faced with increasing pressure from the Communists and nationalists, including Sergei Baburin, Konstantin Zatulin, and Dmitry Rogozin, who I describe in greater detail below, the government passed the first "Declaration of Support for the Russian Diaspora and for the Protection of Russian Compatriots." This was the first document to define compatriot, and it included any person born on the territories of the Soviet Union or Russian Federation and their descendants, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or language.<sup>31</sup> Soon after, though, the Russian government realized how difficult such a policy would be to enact. In 1997, when the Duma sought to define which compatriots' rights the Russian government

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<sup>30</sup> The Duma decree was entitled "On Measures for the Defense of the Rights of Russian Compatriots (*O merakh po zashchite prav rossiskikh sootchestvennikov*), and it was supported by the presidential decree, "On the Principal Directions of the Federation's State Policy Toward Compatriots Living Abroad" (*Ob osnovnykh napravleniakh gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v otnoshenii sootchestvennikov, prozhivaiushchikh za rubezhom*). See Laruelle (2015a, 92) and Grigas (2016, 68–70) for details on the debates surrounding the introduction of the compatriots program.

<sup>31</sup> *Deklaratsiia o podderzhke rossiiskoi diaspori i o pokrovitel'stve rossiiskim sootchestvennikam*. See Laruelle (2015a, 92) and Grigas (2016, 70–71).

would protect, debates pitted the Communists and nationalists against the liberals. Ultimately, Yeltsin vetoed the bill, arguing that it would interfere with CIS countries' domestic affairs (Laruelle 2015a, 93).

Year	Law	Description
1994	Guidelines on the State Policy regarding Compatriots Living Abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First attempt to establish policies towards Russia's compatriots abroad.</li> <li>• "Compatriot" undefined.</li> <li>• Broadly encouraged compatriots abroad to remain in their home country.</li> <li>• Russian government to pursue dual citizenship policies with CIS states (Grigas 2016, 69).</li> </ul>
1995	Declaration on Support of the Russian Diaspora and Protection of Russian Compatriots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compatriot as "all the natives of the USSR and Russia and all their descendants regardless of their nationality and ethnicity, language, religion, gender, occupation and place of residence and other circumstances, who are not citizens of the Russian Federation but explicitly declare their spiritual, cultural, and ethnic ties with the Russian Federation" (Grigas 2016, 71).</li> </ul>
1999	On the State Policy of the Russian Federation Concerning Compatriots Abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compatriots as those "who were born in one state" and who "share a common language, religion, cultural heritage, customs, and traditions" and their direct descendants (Shevel 2011c, 192).</li> <li>• Excluded descendants of members of titular nations of CIS countries (Grigas 2016, 68).</li> </ul>
2006	On the Measures for the Assistance of the Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad to the Russian Federation (the compatriots program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presidential decree establishing Resettlement of Compatriots Program in 12 regions.</li> <li>• Compatriot defined as those raised in traditions of Russian culture, Russian-speakers, and those who do not want to lose ties with Russia.</li> <li>• Participants selected based on profession and whether needed in region.</li> <li>• Government reimburses participants for moving and application costs in addition to relocation allowance (<i>pod'emnye</i>) (60,000 rubles for primary participant, 20,000 for each family member).</li> </ul>
2010	Revision to On the State Policy of the Russian Federation Concerning Compatriots Abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1999 definition, plus "people living outside the border of the Russian Federation who made a free choice in favor of spiritual and cultural connection with Russia and who usually belong to peoples which have historically lived on the territory of the Russian Federation" (Duma 2010).</li> </ul>

Table 2: Legislative changes to definition of compatriot<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Here I draw on Grigas (2016, 68-70), Shevel (2011c, 192), and Laruelle (2015a, 92) as well as the legal website, Konsul'tant Plius ("Konsul'tant plus: nadezhnaia pravovaia podderzhka" 2019),

In 1999, the Duma passed “the Federal Law on the State Policy of the Russian Federation Concerning Compatriots Abroad No. 99-FZ, which restricted the 1995 definition. Between 1999 and 2010 (when the law was again revised), compatriot was defined as those “who were born in one state,” who shared “a common language, religion, cultural heritage, traditions and customs” and their direct descendants. Importantly, the 1999 definition excluded the “descendants of the titular nations of foreign governments” (Duma 1999, 3). In other words, under this definition, one could be ethnic Ukrainian born in Soviet Ukraine, and therefore, a compatriot, but it did not include one’s Ukrainian children born after 1991. However, if one was ethnic Russian in Kazakhstan, one’s children born in post-Soviet Kazakhstan were also compatriots. This was an attempt by officials to respect the domestic affairs of Russia’s post-Soviet neighbors.

However, responding to domestic pressures from politicians and journalists, the Duma once again revised the definition of compatriot in 2010 to its current version. It included the previous categories as well as those:

living outside the borders of the Russian Federation and related generally to the peoples (*k narodam*) historically living on the territories of the Russian Federation, who having made a free choice (*sdelavshie svobodnyi vybor*) in spiritual (*dukhovnoi*), cultural and legal (*pravovoi*) ties with the Russian Federation (Duma 2010, 2-3).

This expanded definition included compatriots as defined by the 1999 legislation but also anyone who had been born in the USSR and received citizenship in another post-Soviet country as well as emigrants (*vykhodtsy*) and their descendants, who had

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that allows one to compare legislative changes over time. See Laruelle (2015a, 92) and Grigas (2016, 68-70) for details on the debates surrounding the introduction of the compatriots program.

emigrated from pre-Soviet Russia, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (that existed from 1917 until 1922 when it was merged into the USSR), the Soviet Union, or the Russian Federation. Laruelle has described the 2010 legal definition of compatriot as operating “in a concentric way.” At the core of the circle are ethnic Russian or Russian-speaking emigrants. Then the circle expands to a larger group of those “culturally and spiritually oriented towards Russia,” which would include pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine or Old Believers in South America. Finally, it broadens to include anyone whose descendants lived on the territories of the Russian empire (which would then also possibly include Alaska, Finland, or Poland) or the former Soviet Union (Laruelle 2015a, 94).

### **Ambiguity as a Compromise**

Grigas (2016) and Dunn and Bobick (2014) have argued that the expansion of who is included as a compatriot in the 2000s has turned compatriots into potential resources of the Russian state, a group that Putin can use at will to justify intervention. In the next chapter, I analyze how Russian officials drew on the discourses and infrastructure of the compatriots program during the Ukrainian conflict. However, building on Shevel and Laruelle, I argue that using compatriots as a foreign policy tool is only a secondary effect to the domestic work a broad definition carries out. My research supports Shevel’s argument that the breadth of the 2010 definition of compatriot allows officials to avoid commenting on “emotionally charged debates” that evoke nationalist understandings of compatriot as ethnic Russian, while also pursuing an array of compatriots policies that at times appear contradictory (Shevel 2011c, 195). Indeed, Russian officials have simultaneously encouraged compatriots to remain in their country

of residence and maintain ties with the Russian government, pressured foreign governments to protect the status of Russian language, and incentivized compatriots' "return" to Russia through the Resettlement of Compatriots Program (Shevel 2011c, 195).<sup>33</sup> The following example demonstrates the political tensions around the term "compatriot."

There are five interpretations of who should be considered a compatriot, some of which have gained and lost traction over the last 25 years. Two of these definitions are territorial: 1) compatriots as all former Soviet citizens and their descendants, including those living abroad, or 2) as all peoples currently residing on the territory of the post-1991 Russian Federation. The other three are based on ethnocultural criteria: 3) compatriots as ethnic Russians by blood; 4) as Russian-speakers, regardless of their ethnicity; or 5) as Eastern Slavs, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, who share similar Slavic languages and are traditionally Orthodox Christians (Tolz 2001; Shevel 2011b). I return these definitions throughout this dissertation as I highlight how different people I met defined compatriot.

Since the 1990s, communists, nationalists, and Eurasianists, ranging from Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov to former Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and Patriarch Kirill, have consistently called for more restrictive definitions of compatriot that privilege the Russian ethnicity or Eastern Slavs.<sup>34</sup> Konstantin Zatulin, head of the

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<sup>33</sup> In recent years, the Russian government has especially devoted its attention to promoting Russian language abroad through grants and competitions and cultivating ties with youth through programs that bring Russian heritage speakers to Russia for exchange programs.

<sup>34</sup> Their supporters have included Communist leader Gennadii Zyuganov; General Alexander Lebed, secretary of the Security Council and later governor of Krasnoyarskii krai; Sergei Baburin, leader of Russian All-People's Union and former Duma MP for Rodina (Homeland); Konstantin Zatulin, first deputy chairman of the Duma's committee for the CIS and relations with Russians abroad and persona non grata in Ukraine and Azerbaijan; Dmitry Rogozin, former MP and persona non grata in Moldova for his nationalist views; Sergei Glazyev, advisor to Putin on

influential Institute of CIS Countries, has devoted his career in the Duma to introducing proposals to simplify citizenship procedures for Russian compatriots. He has been backed by Dmitry Rogozin, former head of the Homeland Party, and Sergei Baburin, a member of the Duma with nationalist leanings. These outspoken nationalist advocates have drawn a great deal of attention from commentators in the US, but, as Marlene Laruelle (2015a) has argued, their impact is less than many assume. The creation of the Resettlement of Compatriots Program in 2006 is the group's only success in influencing Russian foreign policy since the 1990s (Laruelle 2015a, 93). However, even the compatriots program has proved disappointing to them because they would like to limit the definition of compatriot to Orthodox Eastern Slavs only (the fifth definition from above).

There are good reasons why the nationalists' constructions of the Russian nation as ethnic Slavic have not been more eagerly picked up. Officials in United Russia, Vladimir Putin's political party, have recognized the challenges of defining compatriots as ethnic Russian, Slavic, or even Russian-speaking and their consequences for inter-ethnic relations within Russia. If compatriots were defined based on ethnocultural criteria alone, such a definition could then lend justification for non-Russian minorities, including the Tatars, Chechens, or indigenous groups, to secede (Shevel 2011b). Hence, Putin's reluctance to speak of Russian identity in ethno-nationalist terms (Shevel 2011c; Schenk 2018). As a result, as Shevel (2011c) has argued, government officials have

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development of Eurasian Union (sanctioned by US) and former co-organizer of Congress of Russian Communities in 1990s; Natalia Narochnitskaya, director of Paris-based Institute of Democracy and Cooperation and consistent organizer for Orthodox groups; Yuri Luzhkov, former Moscow mayor; Andrei Alksnis, leader of nationalist Great Russia party; and most recently, Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill, who has argued for the introduction of the Russian World (*russkii mir*) concept. For more on nationalists involved in the development of Russia's compatriots policies, see Laruelle 2015a, 91 and Shevel 2011c.

navigated these issues by institutionalizing the ambiguity of who is included as a compatriot, so that they can pursue a range of policies while not committing to any particular one. At the same time, they have absorbed leading nationalists like Zatulín and Rogozin into United Russia, adopting some of their views (their focus on the nation and patriotism) but also tempering them, so that they are more mainstream (Laruelle 2010, 2015a). At the time of writing this dissertation, Zatulín was a member of United Russia and an adviser to the chairman on the State Council on the Republic of Crimea. Rogozin was the director of Roscosmos, Russia's space program. As both men have become closer to the Kremlin, and as with other nationalist figures like Aleksandr Dugin, their nationalist movement has lost steam as United Russia has taken on and mainstreamed some of their ideas on Russia's relationship to its compatriots. As Laruelle has pointed out in her work on the Russian right, co-opting and then neutralizing other parties' discourses is a common strategy Putin's administration has deployed to negotiate power and dominate discourses throughout his presidencies (Laruelle 2010).

My dissertation builds on Shevel's work to argue that the ambiguity of who a compatriot is allows different opportunities for officials at different levels of government. The next two sections illustrate how this works in practice – at the national, regional, and local levels. Not only does the broadness of who qualifies as a compatriot allow Russian officials to avoid engaging in debates about immigration, but I also found that it provides flexibility to regional officials.

### Ambiguity at the Level of Implementation

In speeches and statements, officials often emphasized two qualities of compatriots. First, they have insisted that the definition of who qualifies as a compatriot was intentionally broad, so as to include not only ethnic Russians but also the multinational character of the Russian diaspora. Second, that the selection of program participants was based on their profession and language skills, rather than their ethnicity and citizenship. High-level officials from Putin and Lavrov to the heads of the MVD and FMS have reiterated these qualities – the non-ethnic identity of compatriots and the emphasis on their profession – in discussions of the compatriots program that have occurred in the past ten years. Putin has argued for the non-ethnic definition of compatriot since the beginning of his presidency. In 2001, for example, he described the term compatriot as “not a legal category...but a spiritual self-identification” (Putin quoted in Shevel 2011c, 194).

Other officials in charge of the compatriots program, from high level Federal Migration Services (FMS) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) officials to low-level government employees who implement the program, have echoed Putin’s careful word choice. For example, in 2007, in an interview with a Radio Free Europe journalist, Andrei Demidov, then head of the FMS department in charge of the compatriots program, responded that the program was designed to “correct (*popravit*) the demographic crisis.” He continued, defining compatriots not only as former Soviet citizens and their children, but “those who know Russian language, understand and accept Russian (*russkie*) traditions,” then he paused correcting himself,

...*rossiiskie* (civic Russian) traditions and want to live in the Russian Federation. It’s a fairly broad concept, which can refer to people who have lived on the territory of the entire post-Soviet space and those descendants of those who at some point went abroad. The only

requirement or criterion is the knowledge of Russian language and acceptance of *russkoi* (ethnic Russian) culture, *russkikh* (ethnic Russian) traditions (Torocheshnikova 2007).

Demidov acknowledged the broadness of the definition of who qualifies as a Russian compatriot. He then argued that the only requirement was that one knew Russian language and accepted – then he slipped between ethnic and civic – Russian culture. In 2008, head of the FMS, Konstantin Romodanovsky defined compatriots as those “who have desirable professions, who know Russian language and who respect our traditions and culture” (Shevel 2011c, 193). Sergei Lavrov, head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in an address to the Duma in June 2016, said, “I think that [the program] is also a source of the nation’s conservation (*sberezheniia*): residents of Soviet republics are moving to us, who see our country as their own, who know the language, the history...” (Lavrov 2015).

Officials I met during my ethnographic research made similar statements. For example, when I met with Sergei Panteleev, who ran the website Russian Century (*Russkii vek*) that promotes the compatriots program, he asked about my preliminary findings on the compatriots program. When I told him that most of the people I had met in Primore were not ethnic Russians but Tajiks and Uzbeks, he responded:

Who do we understand as part of the term compatriot? In practice, more than anything, we understand [compatriots] as ethnic Russian (*russkie*), ethnic Russian culture (*russko-kul'turnye*), Russian-speaking (*russkoiazychnye*), that is people who are directly connected with Russia, who belong to the peoples who have traditionally lived on the territories of the Russian Federation, and that is of course above all ethnic Russians (*russkie*). First of all.

But this term [compatriot] is rather large and interpreted quite broadly and within this definition representatives of other peoples (*narodov*) can fall. Here it is understood that there is a demand for Russian citizenship by different peoples, who never lived in the Soviet Union. But there is a very clear marker, which roughly speaking can divide compatriots from non-compatriots. This is of course the knowledge of Russian language and belonging (*prinadlezhnost'*) to Russian culture (*k russkoi kul'ture*). That

is, the compatriot must identify oneself with Russia, with Russian culture, and must possess Russian language as if a native language.

Like Putin, Romodanovsky , Lavrov, and other officials in the FMS, MVD, and MID, Panteleev understood the term compatriot to be anyone who identified with Russia and Russian culture and who had native proficiency in Russian language.

Marina Ivanovna, a Primorskii krai official who helped administer the program, provided a more concise and formal answer to my question about who qualified as a compatriot:

There are two categories of citizens (*grazhdan*). They can be citizens of the Russian Federation, who for a long time lived outside the borders of the Russian Federation, who want to return back to their historical homeland. [The second category] is foreign citizens, citizens from – let's say – Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, etc. who want to move to the territory of the Russian Federation, obtain citizenship of the Russian Federation, who live here already.

While Marina Ivanovna's response was less detailed and more distant than Panteleev's, it shared a focus on choice – people *choosing* to obtain Russian citizenship. It was also notable that she selected Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, the three republics considered more European and perhaps most culturally similar to Russia. Ukraine and Belarus, like Russia, are Slavic and Orthodox. Similarly, when I asked her for the contact information of compatriots I could interview, she sent me an Excel spreadsheet with a list of three students who had obtained citizenship in Vladivostok through the program in 2016. All were women and either ethnic Russian or Ukrainian (Marina Ivanovna had marked their citizenship). However, there was also a second tab in which all 30 student-compatriots were listed for that year. This more expansive list included male students as well, the majority of whom were Tajik and Uzbek.

I met with students from both spreadsheets, and it immediately became clear why Marina Ivanovna had selected these three particular students, who she would have

known personally through her work with the program. I met each young woman either at the Far Eastern Federal University or at a trendy coffeeshop in downtown Vladivostok. Reserved and put-together, they were all model students and responsible daughters, who had helped their parents navigate the bureaucracy of the compatriots program. In contrast, the young men I contacted by text message on WhatsApp from the other tab were more difficult to track down. I met one for coffee at a café I selected. A navy enthusiast from the landlocked country of Tajikistan, Ermat had moved to Vladivostok to study maritime law. Many times throughout the interview, I struggled to understand Ermat's Russian and when the waitress ordered our drinks, she too could not understand him. Meanwhile, I startled the mother of another compatriot-student, who responded on her son's phone to my text messages requesting an interview. The WhatsApp profile picture was of a young man with dark eyes, thick eyebrows, and a short beard, wearing a traditional blue Uzbek skullcap. Immediately, three dots appeared on the screen, signaling that he was writing. The message I received though explained that this was the student's mother and that her son had moved back to Uzbekistan. Based on my experiences with students from both tabs, it appeared Marina Ivanovna may have been screening students for me, selecting the most "ideal" student participants of the program—ethnic Russian and Ukrainian women as opposed to the Central Asian men in the second tab.

Marina Ivanovna's examples of Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus and then her selection of young, female Ukrainians and Russians for my interviews, reflects the confusion around the compatriots program. Often when I told people in Moscow and Vladivostok that I was studying the compatriots program, only those who followed the news closely had heard of the program. It was only when I gave the example of refugees

from Ukraine who had obtained citizenship through the program that people would nod and respond that they had heard of it. In newspaper articles and TV clips I collected, very rarely did media feature ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks who had obtained citizenship through the program. Instead, they reported them in the MVD/FMS statistics that only track country of origin and not nationality. Even I, who had started this project while living in Central Asia, did not expect to meet so many non-ethnic Russians in the Far East. Like others, I had assumed from media coverage of the program that most participants were ethnic Slavs – Russians or Ukrainians – from Central Asia. I suspect that these gaps between the promotion of the program and the reality of who obtains citizenship, like Marina Ivanovna’s Excel spreadsheet tabs, were perhaps intentional. They appealed to popular anxieties about immigrants from the CIS as officials passed more restrictive labor migration laws. At the same time though, they masked major groups of people who were actually moving to Russia through the program – non-ethnic Russians from Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Although politicians and government employees may argue for an inclusive definition of compatriot that prioritizes a person’s profession, not everyone agrees. Many of those involved in earlier legislation on the rights of compatriots, including communists and nationalists, have continued to press for a more restrictive definition of compatriot tied only to people of “Slavic nationality.” However, these attempts (in 1998 led by Zhebrovskii and in 2016, Zhirinovskii) have failed and Zatullin’s current attempt (as of June 2018) is also expected to fail (Shevel 2011b).<sup>35</sup> Rather, as Shevel argues, the

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<sup>35</sup> Zatulin’s proposals for changes to the compatriots program can be viewed in Russian on his website, <https://zatulin.ru/programma-zakonotvorcheskoj-raboty.html> (last accessed September 2018).

current legislation's flexibility not only allows the Russian government to pursue two foreign policies simultaneously – encouraging compatriots to stay in their home country while also encouraging those who want to “to return” – but it also gives flexibility to Russian authorities to determine who they want to target as part of the program (Shevel 2011c, 196–97). A side effect of this broadness is that it pits different groups against one another as it institutionalizes the tension between understanding the program as one of repatriation versus one of resettlement, which I explore in chapter 5.

Overall though, as Shevel has argued in her work on Russia's citizenship laws and compatriots policies, by defining compatriot broadly, officials on the ground can use the three qualifications – self-identification with Russia, native proficiency in Russian, and profession – at will. As Shevel writes, this also includes limiting the “ethno-cultural composition if it wants to without formally committing (or admitting) to such a policy” (Shevel 2011c, 198). The law does not require a compatriot to be ethnic Russian, but it also does not prevent officials from prioritizing ethnic Russians' applications. Just as Putin and Demidov's statements can be read as a slippage between ethnic and civic Russian or Marina Ivanovna's selection of Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova but not Tajikistan or Uzbekistan as accidental, they can also be read as an unstated preference for ethnic Russians and those of Orthodox faith (Shevel 2011c). Indeed, although Putin has continued to emphasize the broadness of who qualifies as a compatriot, since 2014, in speeches about compatriots, references to the Russian World (*Russkii mir*) and the role of the Orthodox Church in bringing compatriots together have increased. The sample application provided on the MVD and Ministry of Foreign Affairs websites is that of an ethnic Russian, male, Orthodox compatriot. However, as Shevel notes and my research confirms, this preference for ethnic Russians or Orthodox Slavs is

never stated openly. In fact, as the next section demonstrates, mid-level bureaucrats who implemented the program in Primorskii krai embraced the multinational definition of compatriot. They used the broadness of who qualified to adapt the program to the population that applied as well as to help those who they perceived as tied to Russia because of shared Soviet experiences.

### **Resettling Compatriots in Primor'e**

In his mid to late 40s, Aleksey was pale with peppered hair and narrow wire-framed glasses. Always curious, he added his own questions to mine when I met compatriots in Ussuriysk. I had spent time with officials and compatriots in other parts of Primore, in Artyom, Dal'nerechensk, and Novopokrovka, and no other official was as well-respected or as visible as Aleksey. I met Aleksey in February 2017, simultaneously by phone and online. At the end of January 2017, a Primorskii krai official gave me the phone numbers of the government employees who administered the compatriots program across the region. Meanwhile, I had also sought my own contacts online on forums like Back2Russia and social media sites like Vkontakte. On Back2Russia, I started writing back and forth with a user named "Consultant" (*konsul'tant*), whose profile picture showed Ussuriysk's flag, a wheat sheaf against a red backdrop with Primorskii krai's Siberian tiger in the top left corner. I had noticed the Consultant answered many of the questions of prospective compatriot-participants on the forum, sharing job advertisements and information about the cost of living, the timeframe for obtaining citizenship, and enrolling children in school. When I wrote, asking for an interview, the Consultant responded, "I will answer all of your questions today," which confused me since I had not yet scheduled an interview with him.

The next day I sat in a cafeteria in Ussuriysk near the train station, interviewing Tatiana and Vladimir from Kharkov, Ukraine, who had moved to Ussuriysk in 2014 after Googling (*proguglili*) “the quickest way to obtain Russian citizenship.” I had met Tatiana through another compatriot I had interviewed in Artyom. Two years after arriving, they were now moving to Nefteyugansk in central Russia; Vladimir had been approached by an oil company that would pay for the family’s resettlement costs and provide them with housing. As they described their plans to work there for a couple of years and save up to buy a house here in Ussuriysk, my phone rang. It was Aleksey, who I had not yet met in person, asking if I had arrived yet and needed a ride. Tatiana, realizing from my conversation that it was Aleksey, interrupted, telling me to say hello for them. “Aleksey Viktorovich is a good guy,” she said, giving the thumbs up. When I told Aleksey that Vladimir and Tatiana said hello, he asked me to pass the phone to them. A few seconds later, it was resolved that Tatiana and Vladimir would drive me to the Center of Employment to meet Aleksey. It was only once we were in the car, driving to Aleksey’s office, when Tatiana spoke of how Aleksey had helped them find an apartment and Vladimir a job before arriving in Ussuriysk did I realize Aleksey was also the Consultant from Back2Russia.

Tatiana and Vladimir were not the only compatriots I met who knew Aleksey Viktorovich; everyone knew him, and he knew everyone. Often, I would only need to say that I was meeting Anastasiya from Kazakhstan or Natasha from Ukraine and he would know exactly who I was talking about, even though their names were common and Ussuriysk had nearly two thousand compatriots, many of whom he had interacted with through his job at the Center for Employment. Aleksey’s fame extended beyond Ussuriysk; Marina Ivanovna from the Primorskii krai administration told me that he

was an excellent specialist and even when I was in Moscow, Lidia Grafova, a prominent journalist, who had never even met Aleksey, spoke of how she had heard there was an active employee (*aktivnyi chelovek*) in Ussuriysk who had assisted hundreds of compatriots personally. Online on Back2Russia, I observed how Aleksey as the Consultant posted job advertisements in Ussuriysk and answered people's questions, posting his phone number and encouraging people to reach out to him directly. Several compatriots I interviewed in Ussuriysk told me that he had connected them with employers, at the hospital, schools, and local companies, before they even left their home countries, so that they had jobs lined up when they arrived. Aleksey's popularity revealed not only the small, dense world of compatriots, interconnected with one another, but also his remarkableness as a caring, active Russian official.

Just as Aleksey helped compatriots in Ussuriysk, he helped me with my research, introducing me to numerous compatriots and their employers in Ussuriysk and answering all of my questions about the compatriots program, Ussuriysk, and the Far East. Aleksey, too, was a compatriot in a sense. His parents had served in the Soviet military in Ussuriysk when he was a child and they remained afterwards. As I shadowed Aleksey for several days, observing his work with compatriots, he emphasized what he saw as three important points about Ussuriysk and the compatriots program – compatriots contributed to the city, they moved to Russia for their children, and they fit into Ussuriysk because of the city's diversity. Although Aleksey's experiences were specific to Ussuriysk, I found in my interviews and participant observation in Artyom and Novopokrovka that these three traits proved true in other regions of Primorskii krai as well. In the remainder of this section, I will examine in detail Aleksey's arguments about the compatriots program, connecting them to

moments I observed during participant observation and conversations I had with other officials.

### **Compatriots as the Future**

Aleksey, like other officials I interviewed, viewed compatriots as a resource to small Russian cities and rural areas. Later in March, I returned to Ussuriysk to shadow him while he was at work at the Center for Employment. One day I followed him around the city as he checked in with compatriots, obtaining their signatures on various forms, processing payments, and ensuring they had received all the possible benefits that Russian citizenship granted them, such as maternity capital vouchers (for families with more than two children), grants for those who had opened small businesses, and the newest incentive, one hectare (about 2.5 acres) per Russian citizen through the Far Eastern Hectare program. After each stop, once we were back in the car, Aleksey would emphasize the positive qualities of whoever we had just met—how active Natasha was in starting her own sewing company, how Anya would be such an excellent English teacher once her Ukrainian license transferred, and how Bakhodir provided life-saving emergency care to the small village outside of Ussuriysk.<sup>36</sup> “See, their eyes light up,” he told me after we left the four-roomed hospital, lit only by sunlight as the power was out once again. “You see how active they are, how positive!”

The second trait of the compatriots program Aleksey repeated throughout our interactions was that compatriots moved to Russia for their children. When I asked him

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<sup>36</sup> In a twist of fate, Bakhodir was a family friend and the physician in Dushanbe, Tajikistan of Ermat, the student-compatriot and naval enthusiast who I interviewed in Vladivostok. Both men chose Primorskii krai because of the region’s close Tajik community. Many of the compatriots I interviewed knew of one another, either meeting in their countries of origin or once they arrived in Primor’e.

how they selected people and whether they favored families, he responded, “Of course if it’s a family with children, then it’s better for the territory. Children go to school; they receive an education here.” My interviews with families confirmed that one of the determining factors that prompted their move was their children’s future. As ethnic Russians or Russian-speakers, parents saw their children as having more opportunities in Russia than in their home countries. They wanted their children to grow up speaking Russian and study in Russian schools, rather than Ukrainian or Kazakh ones. Tatiana and Vladimir from Kharkov decided to move after the war began in Ukraine. “We realized there wouldn’t be stability, that there wasn’t a future for Russians in Ukraine... We moved here for our children, so that they would become Russian patriots (*russkimi patriotami*),” they told me. I wasn’t sure how serious they were about the last part, their children becoming Russian patriots, since Tatiana laughed and Vladimir gave me the thumbs up. While I assumed they were joking, it is also quite possible that they were not. In one region of Russia, Ulyanovsk’s governor, Sergei Morozov, has awarded prizes to couples who “give birth to a patriot (*rodi patriota*)” on Russia Day every year for more than 10 years (Levine 2008; Ol’ dina 2017).

Regardless, Tatiana and Vladimir’s desire for their children to be in Russia was similar to what other compatriots told me. Anastasiya, an ethnic Russian returnee from Kazakhstan, told me that when their son started preschool in Astana, they did not have as many choices for Russian-speaking schools as they had had just two years earlier when their older daughter started school. Natasha, who owned a successful sewing shop in Ussuriysk, moved from L’viv, Ukraine before the war began in 2012 because she was ethnic Russian, born in Primorskii krai during Soviet times. Although her husband was Ukrainian, they spoke Russian at home and wanted their children to go to

university in Russia. Most compatriots either moved for their children or their ethnic Russian spouses, citing either outright discrimination (as was the case with another compatriot, Alla's, Russian husband in Moldova) or limited opportunities as Russian-speakers in post-Soviet republics. By moving to Russia, they hoped to have better opportunities than in their home countries.

### **Compatriots as Diverse**

However, one of Aleksey's strongest points of pride about Ussuriysk was that it was multiethnic (*mnogonatsional'nyi*) or diverse – those who lived there were from all over the former Soviet Union and were of different nationalities. Because of the city's diversity, he believed that it was easier for compatriots to adapt because they fit right in. As Aleksey gave me a tour of the city, showing me around the main streets, the university, a school, a mechanic's shop, and a hospital, he narrated what we saw, pointing out the diversity of those who lived in Ussuriysk. As we walked around an indoor market, we talked about the online forum and how the program had grown in recent years:

If they know that everything is good, then they leave and begin to settle down gradually. The network of those on the forum help each other and support each other... regardless of their nationality: a Kazakh helps a Ukrainian, a Ukrainian helps a Belorussian.

While my conversations with Central Asians about their experiences immigrating to Russia revealed a different story about cross-national help, Aleksey's description of international support for one another reflected his view that compatriots who were moving to Ussuriysk, regardless of their country of origin or nationality, were resources to the city, contributing to the city's diversity as well as its local economy.

When I asked him about the large number of Tajiks and Uzbeks who obtained citizenship in Ussuriysk through the program, he responded:

No, this is the category called “migrant workers” (*trudovye migranty*). They are those who cannot realize their potential (*ne mogut realizovat' svoi vozmozhnosti*) on their territory, in their country. They come here, and seeing here that you can find a job, you can earn money and raise children, give your children an education, they decide to participate in the program, already from Russia, on the territory of settling (*vseleniia*). The resettlement program gives them a range of benefits, one of which is a simplified system for obtaining citizenship. If one becomes a participant of the program on the territory of settlement [already in Russia], then within six months, he can get citizenship. He can get citizenship, start a family, or bring his family, and live, raise his children.

Aleksey’s description of migrant workers was unique compared to how other Russians and journalists often represented the group. He argued that they move to Russia because they “cannot realize their potential” in their home country, an unusual word choice for those often dehumanized in Russian media. Once they come to Russia and realize that it is possible to earn a good income and raise a family, according to Aleksey, they decide to either bring their family or start one. The compatriots program is the easiest way for them to obtain citizenship.

Pantelev, who I mentioned earlier in this chapter, who ran the website *Russian Century*, also spoke of the diversity of people who can obtain citizenship through the program:

... Because, for example, in Siberia, far away, in a small city, I met resettlers (*pereselenetsev*) from Kyrgyzstan, ethnic Kyrgyz, who possessed a sum of knowledge that was needed in the given region. For example, if the person is a surgeon, received a good education, gained experience, for example, in Germany, then he will naturally be accepted with a hurrah in the Russian (*rossiiskoi*) backwoods. If he’s there and ethnic Kyrgyz, what’s the difference? A person is a person. ...If the idea is the unification of people, then it’s understood that more than anything we mean ethnic Russians (*k russkim*). If it’s a labor potential, a resource, then it’s a different approach.

As Aleksey's and Panteleev's responses demonstrate, officials focused on labor potential rather than nationality, as long as the person contributes to the economy. Aleksey and Panteleev, as well as Marina Ivanovna and Fyodor (from the introduction), are all government officials, charged with implementing the compatriots program. Although the staff who carry out the program are probably more diverse in terms of age and nationality than I interacted with during my research, the majority of the officials I met shared similar traits. They were all ethnic Russian or Ukrainian and at least middle-aged if not older. All the officials I interviewed saw the goal of the program as to attract people to move to Russia. Every official I interviewed or observed seemed to genuinely believe in their work, the value of compatriots, and an expansive understanding of who qualified. Throughout our interactions, they always emphasized that as long as a person speaks Russian and contributes to the local economy, they should be able to receive Russian citizenship through expedited measures.<sup>37</sup>

In Aleksey's and Fyodor's tours of Ussuriysk and the Krasnoarmeiskii region, both men continuously emphasized the contributions compatriots had made to the local economy and how they were replacing those who were leaving. When I told them about my initial interest in the program as someone who had lived in Kazakhstan and had friends who had moved to Russia as compatriots, Aleksey and Fyodor reminisced about their own travels during Soviet times to places like Issyk Kul, a lake-side vacation spot in Kyrgyzstan, popular during Soviet times, or their studies or military service alongside

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<sup>37</sup> When one official, Dima, asked me how I liked the Far East, I joked that I, too, wanted my hectare. My response was popular, and officials in Moscow started introducing me as the American who wanted to move to the Far East. At meetings in Moscow about the Old Believers in Primorskii krai, Dima would tell the other attendees that with my Russian skills and my husband's Russian heritage, we, too, could be compatriots and move to Primorskii krai. In fact, we could even be featured in a RT documentary. I began to fear that Dima hadn't interpreted my answer to his question as a joke.

people from across the Soviet Union. At the very least though, it seemed that officials believed in the program because they saw it as a solution not only to Russia's demographic crisis and changing migration patterns but also a response to the Soviet Union's breakup and the real effect its dissolution had on people living outside of Russia. Their memories of Soviet-era Friendship of Peoples mirrored what their peers said at higher levels.

### Conclusion

In 2013 at the annual question and answer session with the press, an Estonian journalist asked President Vladimir Putin whether the compatriots program was enough to support the millions of people outside of Russia who wanted to return. Putin responded, revisiting the controversial remark he had made in 2006 when he had described the Soviet Union's collapse as a tragedy. He said the backlash he had received was "nonsense;" what he had meant was the "humanitarian component" of the collapse and what it meant for people who suddenly found themselves outside of Russia when the Soviet Union collapsed. He continued:

But then it happened that people woke up one day – and nobody asked them – and there was no country [Soviet Union]. And suddenly they realized that they were abroad. ... They found themselves in a rather difficult situation, often without work, without opportunities (*bez perspektiv*)...

We have a lot of problems with our migration policies, but if anyone wants to return (*vernut'*) to Russia, of course Russians (*ruskikh*) and anyone who wants to live in our country and feels part of Russian culture [first he says, *russkoi*, then expands to *rossiiskoi kul'tury*], regardless of their ethnic origin. There are a lot of such people in the post-Soviet area, even those who aren't Russian (*ruskikh*) based on the ethnic component of their blood. And of course, more than anything, I think we need to focus on those who want to and are a natural part of our cultural (*kul'turnogo*) space, [our] language space (*iazykogo*) (*Press-konferentsiia Vladimira Putina* 2013).

Putin's answer to the Estonian journalist's question sums up how officials I met understood compatriots as I've explored in this chapter.

First, Putin emphasized that the program was designed for those who wanted to return (*vernut'*) – the Russian government was not trying to force anyone to move to Russia who didn't want to. Government-sponsored organizations like Rossotrudnichestvo, formed around the same time as the compatriots program in 2008, were intended to coordinate the government's relationships to those, primarily based in North America, the Baltic countries, and European Union, who had not expressed a desire to return to Russia. Second, Putin said that "of course [ethnic] Russians (*russkikh*)" and then anyone "who wants to live and feels part of Russian culture" were welcome to return through the program. His word choice – first, saying *russkoi* (ethnic Russian), then pausing and adding *rossiiskoi* (civic Russian) culture – reflected either a slippage that Putin associated compatriots foremost with ethnic Russians and ethnic Russian culture or it was an intentional expansion of the definition that emphasized compatriots were also anyone who identified with Russia. Regardless of which it was, the blurring of *russkii* and *rossiiskii* often occurred in how officials discussed compatriots as I've demonstrated in this chapter. Finally, Putin emphasized the linguistic connections compatriots have to Russia. Being a compatriot was not just one's connections to Russia's "cultural space" but also its "linguistic space," two themes that I pick up in the next chapter as I explore Russian reactions to the war that began in Ukraine in 2014.

Defining belonging based on language rather than culture marks a shift in how politicians and some intellectuals have defined compatriot and diaspora. In reports by think tanks and universities, commissioned by the Russian government, that I have collected, by the mid 2010s, the Russian diaspora was no longer described as the ethnic

Russian (*rusaskaia diaspora*) but the Russian-speaking diaspora (*russkoiazychnaia* or *ruskogovoriashchaia diaspora*) (Riazantsev and Grebeniuk 2014; Riazantsev, Pis'mennaia, and Khramova 2015; Dezhina et al. 2015). Meanwhile, organizations devoted to cultivating relationships with Russian-speakers abroad have in recent years focused on promoting Russian language, either by pressuring to protect its status as a secondary language in former Soviet republics or trying to fund Russian language programs and youth exchanges worldwide. While some have interpreted Russia's efforts to promote language and diaspora ties with Russians as signs of a more assertive Russia, we can also see these newer policies as lessons learned from the democratic encounter (Hemment 2004). Like American programming and British Councils, Russia's self-promotion and increase in exchange programs is a common foreign policy tool of soft power meant to cultivate ties worldwide.

The next three chapters of this dissertation turn to how the ambiguities of the compatriots program worked out in practice in Primorskii krai. I look at how regional and local officials like Marina Ivanovna, Aleksey, and Fyodor have adapted the program to meet the region's needs. This includes responding to Russia's refugee crisis (chapter 3), integrating Central Asian immigrants who have already been living and working in Russia (chapter 4), and offering citizenship and free land to Old Believers from South America (chapter 5).

## CHAPTER 3

### A COMMON CULTURE, A COMMON LANGUAGE:

#### RESETTLING REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE

In February 2014, Ukrainian President Yanukovich suddenly disappeared after months of protests and violence. In Almaty, Kazakhstan, where at the time I was conducting my Master's research at an environmental organization, I watched with my colleagues news clips of crowds of Ukrainian citizens wandering around the grounds of Mezhyhirya, Yanukovich's lavish estate. We, too, were curious like the spectators, laughing at the garish decor while also disgusted by the expensive lifestyle of whom one colleague decried "yet another Soviet dictator." Soon after, we crowded around the computer to watch a report online that announced the Ukrainian parliament had banned Russian language (the vote was later overturned) (MacFarquhar 2014).

"This isn't possible!" exclaimed Zhenya, a middle-aged woman with short, red hair. Like many of my colleagues, who were ethnic Russian or Ukrainian and Kazakhstani citizens, Russian was her native language. Days later, "friendly little green men" seized Crimea and then in March, Crimea voted to join Russia and Putin signed a bill, annexing it (Yurchak 2014). As the snow melted and the red tulips native to Kazakhstan bloomed, we streamed Russian news constantly. Pro-Russian supporters seized government buildings in the eastern cities of Donetsk and Luhansk and declared independence, and the Ukrainian government sent troops. As the crisis escalated, my colleagues and friends in Almaty drew parallels between Ukraine and Kazakhstan. In contrast to American coverage of the war, or Georgian, Baltic, and Ukrainian perspectives I would hear later, they did not fear Russian aggression but rather Kazakh

nationalism. What if nationalists were to ban Russian language in Kazakhstan? By May 2014, when I left Kazakhstan for Russia, it seemed that everyone around me, at work and among my friends, discussed whether to immigrate to Russia through a new state-sponsored program, the Resettlement of Compatriots Program.

The compatriots program was in fact not new. Putin had introduced it through a presidential decree in 2006. As my Kazakhstani friends' sudden interest suggested though, before the war, the program had not been very popular. The conflict transformed the compatriots program. As more than a million refugees arrived in southwestern Russia, Russian citizens found themselves hosting family members and friends, squeezed into small apartments. For refugees without families in Russia, who crossed the border into regions neighboring Ukraine, government officials and volunteers repurposed old military barracks, schools, and other buildings into temporary housing with poor insulation. Refugees would have to move elsewhere before winter.

Faced with a refugee crisis that received little international attention outside of Russia, Russian government officials responded quickly. There were issues, including reports that officials resettled some refugees without offering them any choice, telling families hours before or even on the plane that they were headed to villages outside of Yakutsk, Cheboksary, and Irkutsk in Siberia (Nicol'skaia 2014b). The government's coordination across regions and levels of government to resettle Ukrainian citizens was unexpectedly smooth despite Russia's complex and often contradictory migration policies (Schenk 2016; Myhre 2018). The Ministries of Finance, Transport, and Federal Migration Services (FMS) worked together to transport refugees to 300 different points of temporary accommodation across 69 regions of Russia (Schenk 2016). Russian officials

didn't just offer refugee status, permanent residency, or citizenship to anyone though. They offered permanent residency and citizenship only to those willing to move to strategic areas of the Russian Federation – through the Resettlement of Compatriots Program (Myhre 2018; Schenk 2016).<sup>1</sup>

I suggest that the case of the refugees from Ukraine is just one example of a broader strategy by federal and regional officials to utilize the compatriots program to accommodate national and local needs. The crisis bolstered the compatriots program, providing opportunities for regional officials to obtain more resources from the federal government and to gain greater attention for the program. At the national level, officials drew on the program's resources to disperse refugees across the country, easing the strain felt on the regions bordering Ukraine while also meeting their own goals to attract Russian-speakers to move to strategic areas like the Far East. They provided temporary housing, covered transportation costs, and, most importantly, offered Ukrainian citizens a pathway to permanent residency and Russian citizenship. They also amended the legislation, expanding the number of participating regions and shortening the length of stay required to apply for citizenship through the program from six months to three.

As part of an intensive media campaign that called for Russians to defend ethnic Russians displaced by the war (Tolz and Teper 2018), news coverage at the national and local levels showed images of refugees arriving across Russia, greeted by politicians and locals, who had collected what they could to help them (RIA Novosti 2014; Veka 2014). Russian news sources abroad reported these images along with promotional materials

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<sup>1</sup> In 2014, 5,789 refugees from Ukraine applied for asylum, but only 241 of them received full asylum. Russian officials preferred to grant temporary asylum. In 2014 and 2015, 377,707 refugees received temporary asylum (Schenk 2016; Myhre 2018; Nikol'skaia 2014b).

about the compatriots program. As a result, an unexpected side effect of the Ukrainian crisis was that not only did more Ukrainian citizens obtain citizenship through the program but a greater number of citizens from other countries did as well. As figure 5 on page 79 demonstrates, since 2014 more than 600,000 people have received Russian citizenship through the program, four times more than those who had participated between 2008 and 2018 according to the Federal Service of Statistics (2016).

This chapter examines how the compatriots program mobilizes myths of cultural similarity to encourage immigration. I analyze how assumptions about historical ties between ethnic Russians in Russia and Ukraine played out in officials' statements, news coverage, and the experiences of refugees I met in Primorskii krai. In my analysis, I situate Russia's "refugee crisis" within European and American concerns about immigration as a threat to national identity (Stolcke 1995; Gullestad 2002; Grillo 2002, 2003; Vertovec 2011). Initially, Russian officials hailed the refugees' arrival as an opportunity for demographic and economic growth. Government officials across Russia emphasized the refugees' cultural similarities to Russians, arguing that they would more easily adapt than other immigrants and that, therefore, their applications for participation should be prioritized. In line with the compatriots program's professional focus, officials also argued that the refugees and other immigrants from Ukraine were highly educated specialists and would contribute to local economies.

However, my ethnographic research suggested that Ukrainian citizens' experiences were more complex. Though favored over other groups, refugees and immigrants from Ukraine struggled to adapt to life in Primor'e, and ultimately, they, too, faced discrimination. In this chapter, first, I introduce Russia's refugee crisis and trace how the conflict in Ukraine transformed conversations about national identity in

Russia. Next, I examine how the conflict played out in Primor'e. In Primorskii krai, locals initially welcomed the refugees, celebrating their shared Ukrainian heritage and recalling Primor'e's settlement by Ukrainians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the time I conducted my dissertation research in 2016 and 2017 though, relations had cooled. I compare the experiences and receptions of Ukrainian citizens in Moscow and Primor'e to demonstrate how despite narratives of a shared heritage, the Ukrainian conflict has exposed rifts between Russians and Ukrainians. Like other compatriots groups, citizens of Ukraine have struggled to adapt to life in Russia, demonstrating that Russians and Ukrainians are more different than Russian officials initially imagined and why assumptions about cultural similarity and integration are problematic.

### **Representing Russia's "Refugee Crisis"**

In 2014, Russia was the world's largest recipient of asylum seekers, surpassed only a year later by Europe's own "refugee crisis" (S. Holmes and Castañeda 2016). Unlike many Syrians though, refugees from Ukraine had once been part of the same country, the Soviet Union, less than 25 years earlier. Journalists, media personalities, and prominent politicians framed Crimea and Russia's "refugee crisis" as a moment of patriotism, in which Russians proudly defended ethnic Russians stranded abroad and welcomed refugees to return to their homeland (Tolz and Teper 2018). On April 18, 2014 when Crimea formally joined the Russian Federation, President Putin returned to a concern he has expressed consistently throughout his presidency. Describing the collapse of the Soviet Union, he told the audience,

Millions of people went to bed in one country and awoke in different ones, overnight becoming ethnic minorities in former Union republics, while the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders (Putin 2014).

He then described how residents of Crimea had said that “they were handed over like a sack of potatoes.” Too weak until now, the Russian state could do little about the situation in the 1990s even though “we all knew in our hearts and minds” that “Crimea is historically Russian land and Sevastopol is a Russian city” (Putin 2014).

Though used to defend Russia’s actions in Ukraine, Putin emphasized a concern nearly every compatriot, including refugee-compatriots, I interviewed expressed: their experiences and concerns about their futures as ethnic Russians or Russian speakers and minorities in post-Soviet countries. As I watched the events unfold on Russian TV in Kazakhstan with my friends and colleagues, they responded to the coverage as Russian compatriots. Putin’s speech reflected some of their own experiences as ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan, many of whom had family members in Russia. Though many of them didn’t feel that they experienced outright discrimination in Kazakhstan as Russian-speakers, they were concerned about their futures, especially job opportunities as people who did not speak Kazakh.

In Russia, the Ukrainian crisis had major implications for national identity, citizenship laws, and the compatriots program. Just months earlier, before the conflict, Russian officials had often emphasized the cultural similarities that bound Russians and Ukrainians together. In September 2013, Putin urged Ukraine to reject an EU deal because Russia and Ukraine had a “common tradition... [a] common culture.” “We have very close languages (*blizkie iazyki*),” Putin told the audience.

And in this respect, I would like to reiterate that we are one people (*my odin narod*)... This is a part of our large Russian world (*rossiiskogo mira*), the Russian-Ukrainian world (*rossiiskogo-ukrainskogo*)” (Putin quoted in Ryazanova-Clarke 2017, 450).

Only months later, after the annexation of Crimea, Ukrainian was no longer a close language to Russian but an alien (*chuzhoi*), aggressive one (Ryazanova-Clarke 2017, 451).

Many welcomed Crimea as a moment of “reunification,” though there was also some who opposed the annexation. TV personas and Russian officials, including Putin, likened Crimea to a ship “returning home” (Teper 2016, 6). Russian media celebrated the reunification, showing images from Crimea of people waving Russian flags and local militia wearing Russian St. George ribbons (Teper 2016, 6). They also portrayed Russia as the defender of compatriots abroad, a justification Russian officials, themselves, used. In his first two terms as president, Putin had carefully maintained a neutral standpoint on issues around national identity and nation-building, in a policy that Shevel has described as “purposefully ambiguous” (Shevel 2011c). Even Putin though adopted the rhetoric of ethnic Russian nationalism after Crimea’s annexation (Teper 2016; Tolz and Teper 2018).

In his research on Russian nationalism, political scientist Yuri Teper (2016) writes that two of the lasting impacts of the Ukrainian crisis have been the ethnicization of Russian identity and the creation of new divisions between Russians and Ukrainians. Challenging Ukrainian national identity was nothing new in Russian media, but what was different was the characterization of Russophone Ukrainians as *russkie* (ethnic Russians) (2016, 14–15). Russian language had become the primary marker of compatriotism (Teper 2016; Ryazanova-Clarke 2017). By emphasizing the differences between Russians and Ukrainians and claiming Russophone Ukrainians as ethnic Russians, journalists and politicians presented the conflict as polarized. Official discourses presented Russian language (and to a lesser extent Orthodoxy) as the primary identifier of compatriots and refugees from Ukraine were ethnic Russians and

Russian-speakers – not Ukrainians or Ukrainian-speakers (Wanner 2014; Teper 2016; Ryazanova-Clarke 2017).

### **The Refugees**

Who were the refugees who moved to Russia and how did locals receive them? While official discourses presented Russian language (and to a lesser extent Orthodoxy) as the primary identifier of compatriots, in practice language and religion proved more confusing. In the aftermath of Crimea, Catherine Wanner, an anthropologist who has conducted fieldwork in Ukraine for more than 20 years, found that most Ukrainian citizens, ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians alike, spoke Russian and Ukrainian, regardless of where they lived and their ethnicity. Wanner argued that language preferences had become “malleable” in the last 25 years (2014, 428). Similarly, in my fieldwork in Primorskii krai and also in my encounters with refugees in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the summer of 2015, my initial assumption was that refugees I met would identify as ethnic Russians and Russian speakers. However, I soon realized how wrong I was as my Russian host family’s stepdaughter from Kiev spoke Russian to us and then Ukrainian on the phone to her mother. Later in Primorskii krai, when I would ask refugees their nationality and language, I received mixed responses. Some, like Sveta who I feature later in this chapter, clearly identified as ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers, though they also spoke Ukrainian. When Sveta fled to Russia, she began to hate Ukrainian: “In that moment [when her family fled], I started to hate Ukrainian language even though I had loved it so much before – its softness, the songs,” Sveta told me. Others identified as ethnic Ukrainian but had familial ties to Russians. When they moved to Primor’e, they continued to speak Ukrainian at home. And still others

shrugged off my question, saying they were a mix or didn't think the designation was meaningful to them.

Regardless of refugees' self-identification, Russian officials, tasked with assisting the refugees and resettling them, emphasized that the refugees' linguistic and cultural similarities to Russians would allow them to adapt quickly. Konstantin Romodanovskii, then head of the FMS, told journalists,

This is not only about the Ukrainians' wish to temporarily leave the conflict zone, but also [their wish] to stay forever in Russia. This is logical. The Ukrainian migrants do not need complicated adaptation and integration since we have common cultural and historical values and similar (*simmetrichnye*) understandings (*podkhody*) of education and professional qualifications (Domcheva and Panina 2014; quoted in Myhre 2018, 1028–29).

Meanwhile, long-term advocates of the compatriots program and those concerned with Russia's demographic crisis embraced refugees as preferable to Central Asian migrants (Myhre 2018). By emphasizing Russians' and Ukrainians' shared "cultural and historical values," officials and migration experts codified what Stolcke (1995) has called cultural fundamentalism. She argues that cultural fundamentalism underlies popular notions of culture as bounded and territorialized (as primordial in the Herderian sense). However, what is unique in the Russian case is that officials draw on essentialized notions of culture not to argue that refugees were a problem but to assert that they were the solution to Russia's problems. Claims of Ukrainians and Russians' common language and history, which also erased past policies of inequity and repression under the Russian empire and later the Soviet Union, would supposedly help immigrants and refugees from Ukraine adapt to life in Russia. In the next section, I investigate assumptions of cultural similarities and differences more closely as Primor'e welcomed its own refugees from Ukraine.

### “Our Most Beloved Relatives”: Primor’e’s Welcome

In August 2014, 33 refugees arrived on Russian Island in Vladivostok, where they would live temporarily in university dorms until resettled more permanently. Others arrived in Ussuriysk and Artyom, cities north of Vladivostok, where they stayed in hotels and holiday resorts while they searched for jobs and more permanent housing. Sergey Pushkaryov, the first director of the FMS for Primorskii krai and director of the Commission for Migration Problems and Interethnic Relations of Primorskii krai’s Public Chamber, met many of the refugees upon arrival at the airport and train station, welcoming them and sharing his cell number should any issues arise. A year later at a conference about refugees, Pushkaryov told attendees, “We were simply lucky that Ukrainian refugees came to us. They are the most desired (*samye zhelannye*) immigrants for us. We must accept them like our most beloved relatives (*samykh dorogikh rodstvennikov*). After all, it was Ukrainians who settled our Primor’e a century ago” (Grafova 2015).

Pushkaryov’s speech reflected how many officials in the Far East responded to Russia’s refugee crisis. They portrayed the crisis as an opportunity to attract immigrants to Primor’e, helping refugees while simultaneously meeting regional goals to grow the population of the Far East. They often described the refugees from Ukraine as “the most desired immigrants” because of their supposed cultural similarities to Russians and as highly qualified specialists. Officials drew connections between those who were arriving now and the Ukrainian peasants who had settled Primorskii krai during Russia’s imperial expansion in the late 1800s. Officials evoked Ukrainians’ cultural similarities, professional promise, and ancestral ties to Primor’e throughout articles I collected from

2014 and 2015 at the height of the refugee crisis. For example, in another article from March 2014, right after the conflict had begun, the Minister for the Development of the Far East Aleksandr Galushka told reporters that Ukrainians had the potential to become “a reserve of personnel” (*kadrovym rezervom*) for the region. He claimed that “In the Ministry, in the course of expert discussions, we had considered such options [of attracting Ukrainians] long before the events that are currently occurring in Ukraine.” He then reminded reporters that before the Russian Revolution of 1918, 52% of those living in the Far East were immigrants (*vyxodtsy*) from Ukraine. “And here the historical continuity may become one of the additional [forms of] support and assistance in determining [the refugees’] place of residence,” Galushka concluded at a March 2014 press conference (Nikol’skaia 2014b).

What underlies Pushkaryov’s, Galushka’s, and other officials’ statements was an assumption that cultural similarities make integration easier for immigrants. They assumed that Ukrainians and Russians were culturally similar – for example, Russian and Ukrainian are Slavic languages and Russians and Ukrainians are Orthodox Christians – and that these similarities, plus Primor’e’s Ukrainian heritage, would make adaptation for Ukrainians easier. There was also a racialized undertone to these kinds of claims about cultural similarity, shared heritage, and Slavic brotherhood. Often, officials position Ukrainians in contrast to Central Asians. For example, Myhre quotes a 2014 RIA Novosti article in which so-called experts on migration commented on the refugee crisis. “If all these people [refugees] will stay with us, it will be good. We have always welcomed the migration of Russian-speaking, Slavic migrants as an alternative to migrants from Central Asia,” they said (Myhre 2018, 1029).

In Primor'e, Pushkaryov, in particular, justified his preference with claims that Ukrainians, like Koreans and Chinese, had historical ties to Primor'e and should have priority for resettlement over Central Asians. 25 years after the Soviet Union's collapse, Russians and Central Asians had less in common than they did earlier:

In the past 20 years in the republics of Central Asia, a new generation has grown up that doesn't have any kind of common Soviet past, that doesn't speak Russian, that doesn't aspire for any kind of integration or adaptation beyond making a living. So, in the cultural, mental sense, immigrants from Central Asia don't have any advantages over our Far Eastern neighbors. Moreover, Primor'e does indeed have a historical experience of interaction and mutually beneficial coexistence with Chinese and Koreans. In the end, unlike labor migrants from China or South Korea, those from Central Asia come here with their whole families and just give birth to more children here (Pushkaryov quoted in Shipilova 2013).

While new immigrants from Central Asia supposedly didn't share a Soviet past with locals to Primor'e, Pushkaryov and other officials romanticized the Old Believers from South America *because of* their lack of a Soviet past. Didn't young Ukrainian refugees and youth in general across Russia also lack a "common Soviet past"?

Two years after this article was written, when I met in person with Pushkaryov and asked him these questions, his tendency to perpetuate stereotypes hadn't changed. He continued to argue that Ukrainians, Koreans, Chinese, and Armenians were preferential to Central Asians because these groups had historical ties to Primor'e. "During Soviet times, at least when I was working, there simply weren't any [Central Asians]. There were very few of them. But those from the Caucasus, for us in general, they're ours," he said, laughing. He then listed groups that had been in Primor'e during Soviet times – Ukrainians, Poles, and Armenians. Returning to the subject of Central Asians, he paused. "Uzbeks, Tajiks... Those who left for here... They're different from us. Even more, with those Muslim communities... Therefore, be careful. You, yourself,

understand. People go to Pakistan,” he said, his voice trailing off. After pausing, perhaps wondering whether I really did understand, he continued with his main point about the kinds of people who come from Central Asia. “Those who don’t go to Kazakhstan, Novosibirsk, come to the Far East. I mean... not the best (*ne samye luchshie*).”<sup>2</sup>

While Pushkaryov’s preference for communities with historical ties to the region may appear to be logical and not race-based, it has several gaps. It is important to note that Russians’ own ties to the region do not go deep. Many Russians didn’t migrate to the contemporary territory of Primorskii krai until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tsarist officials sought to attract Russians, Ukrainians and other groups, including Old Believers and Armenians, to move to the Far East as part of an imperial strategy to populate the Russian borderland. The 1882 South Ussuri Resettlement Law provided free land and passage by boat from Odessa to Vladivostok (a 46-day journey) with the goal of resettling peasants from the overpopulated southwestern Russian Empire to the Far East. Between 1882 and 1907, nearly 250,000 people took advantage of the program, with 64% of them ethnic Ukrainian (Stephan 1996, 65). The peasants lived alongside Chinese and Korean farmers and Japanese traders. However, once the Soviets had secured eastern Russian cities in the early 1920s, they closed the Soviet border with China, expelled the East’s Chinese and Korean residents, and prevented the circulation of peoples and goods across the border (Stephan 1996). Therefore, while there may not have been Central Asians during the late Soviet period when Pushkaryov was working in Vladivostok, there weren’t any Koreans or Chinese either.

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<sup>2</sup> Pushkaryov names Kazakhstan because the country has become a regional attraction for labor migration after Russia.

Pushkaryov's second concern about Central Asians – as Muslim immigrants, who are different from Russians – echoed larger post-Soviet discourses. Laruelle (2010) has argued that Russian nationalists have drawn on the discourses of the European Right to situate Russia within the global “war on terror.” Popular narratives in the media and on the streets perpetuate stereotypes of Muslim immigrants, especially young men, from Central Asia and the Caucasus at best as uneducated, at worst as terrorists (Abashin 2012; Mukomel' 2014; Round and Kuznetsova 2016; Reeves 2013). Although Pushkaryov considered those from the Caucasus as “ours,” he named only Armenians as a group with historical ties to Primor'e. Many Armenians, like Ukrainians, are Christians, and he did not mention the large Azerbaijani diaspora in Primorskii krai, many of whom whose members were Muslim and who also had ties to the region from Soviet times.

In European discourses of the “refugee crisis,” alarmist news coverage has represented Muslim, male immigrants as threats to European unity and safety (S. Holmes and Castañeda 2016). In Italy, Grillo writes that cultural anxieties about immigration are concerns “about cultural identity and cultural loss, the fear that someone is robbing us of our culture; that authenticity will be destroyed” (2002, 59). In the Russian context, the reverse is true as it pertains to refugees from Ukraine: Russians perceive refugees from Ukraine as culturally similar and historically tied to them. Even if Ukraine and Russia are split at the international level, stuck in a frozen conflict (Dunn and Bobick 2014), for those who fled to Russia, Russians still perceive them as “we are one people,” as Putin had said at Valdai (Ryazanova-Clarke 2017, 450). What is interesting about Russia's refugee crisis, and the compatriots program under which it has fallen, is that the compatriots program is a policy devised to attract similar, rather

than alien, cultures. While many have interrogated narratives of cultural difference as new forms of racism (Barker 1981; Stolcke 1995; Taguieff 1990; Grillo 2003), I suggest that it is just as important to see how states and people justify migration policies for those they deem culturally similar as it is to identify those who are supposedly different. As the next section demonstrates, although privileged for their cultural similarities, refugees and immigrants from Ukraine still struggled to adapt to life in Russia.

### Unneeded in Moscow

In April 2017 when I moved from Vladivostok to Moscow, I brought with me a cat, who I had found on the street and adopted when no one had claimed him. I named him Riko after Vladivostok's first carryout restaurant, where I had found him, crying outside the window beneath the bright sign that advertised pizza and sushi, the classic Russian combination. In Moscow, I took Riko to the vet to be microchipped. It was the end of the day and after the procedure, the vet, Seryozha (short for Sergei), and I walked together to the metro. It finally felt like spring, sunny and warm. Seryozha insisted he carry Riko for me.

"Are you from Moscow?" I asked.

"No, from Ukraine. I moved here two, three years ago. There isn't any future there (*tam net perspektiv*)," he said, repeating a phrase I had heard before. In Russian, the phrase is literally, "there isn't any perspective." As in English, "perspective" can also refer to the art of depicting a three-dimensional space on a plane. I heard this phrase often enough to code for it in my data analysis. Every time, I imagined someone in a field, looking at the horizon, assessing what kind of future lay ahead. Immigrants from

across post-Soviet countries used the term to describe their decisions to leave, referring to lack of jobs, linguistic discrimination, and low salaries.

“There aren’t laws,” Seryozha said. “Corruption is everywhere. It’s not just like that in the east, where I’m from, but in Kiev too.”

“Terrible,” I replied. “I met many refugees from Ukraine when we lived in Vladivostok.”

“You have to be careful of Ukrainians. When I moved here, I quickly Russified (*rusifitsiroval*).”

“Why?” I asked.

“When I arrived, I had a strong accent,” he said, providing examples in which the hard “g” in Russian became the “kh” in a Ukrainian accent. “I spoke (*khovoril*) with an accent, and many (*mnokhie*) didn’t like it. Locals, Muscovites, don’t like Ukrainians. When I looked at apartments...” his voice trailed off. “Nobody liked it.”

“Why not?”

“Because we’re not needed (*my ne nuzhny*). Why are there so many (this time he said *mnogo* with the Russian “g”) Ukrainians in Russia now?”

I gave a noncommittal “m” sound, shaking my head, uncertain whether Seryozha’s question was rhetorical. Just then, Riko began meowing, irritated to be in the pet carrier, ignored. We came to a halt as Seryozha cooed endearments to Riko through the mesh window, telling him not to cry because he was the luckiest Russian cat. “You won a green card!” he laughed.

Seryozha’s attempts to Russify, lose his Ukrainian accent, and appear as Russian reflected the unusual situation in which Ukrainian citizens found themselves in Russia. A week later, I met another Ukrainian citizen in Moscow. When it turned out that spring

was not in sight and faced with another six weeks of snow, I decided to join a gym. As we stretched before class, the teacher, Kristina, approached me, pressing my shoulders and pushing me deeper into the stretch. She was petite with light, brown hair, fair skin, and bright pink, matte lipstick. "Where are you from?" she asked.

"Massachusetts," I replied, wincing as a twinge of pain shot up my right leg.

"You're not Russian?"

"No, I'm an American in Russia for graduate school." I had assumed she asked because my foreignness was obvious. "Are you from Moscow?"

"No, from Kharkov," she replied, naming a city in northeastern Ukraine near Russia. She let go of my shoulders and looked at two women, who arched their backs into bridges behind us. I didn't ask Kristina anything else, sensing that she didn't want to talk about it.

Later, after class as I tied the laces of my shoes, Kristina approached and offered me tea. We left the exercise room and entered a narrow room with tall glass windows that overlooked the snow-covered botanical garden below. As we drank our tea, she asked whether I missed home. "Of course," I replied.

"Me too," she said. "There everything is already green and beautiful. Everyone is there. But there wasn't any perspective. I already had my certification as a Pilates instructor, so I gathered everything and left." I nodded. "There are more opportunities here in Moscow."

Officials and journalists presented refugees as Russians' close relatives. Seryozha and Kristina weren't refugees in the sense that the violence of the war displaced them. Rather, they were what scholars have called "forced migrants," compelled to immigrate in the aftermath of the war for economic reasons (Myhre 2018). Officials welcomed

them, too, though, emphasizing that they were Russians' Slavic brothers and brought needed skills (Domcheva and Panina 2014). They weren't needed in Moscow though, as Seryozha and Kristina experienced. No one was needed in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Officials designed the compatriots program to attract immigrants to other parts of Russia, where the population was declining. Similarly, as Marthe Myhre (2018) has demonstrated, officials systematically denied refugees from Ukraine asylum. Instead, they distributed refugees across Russia in ways that benefited the Russian state. They only offered Ukrainian citizens' permanent residency and Russian citizenship through the compatriots program, which required them to give up their Ukrainian citizenship (Myhre 2018; Schenk 2016). Though aware of the benefits of the compatriots program, neither Seryozha nor Kristina had seriously considered joining the program because they would have to move to another part of Russia, away from their family and friends. Though they lacked a permanent immigration status, both decided to risk continuing to live in Moscow because of the city's better economic opportunities.

While Moscow and St. Petersburg supposedly didn't need immigrants, how did officials and locals receive refugees and immigrants from Ukraine in areas like the Far East that supposedly needed them? I now turn to local receptions of Ukrainian refugees in Primor'e. Although privileged in official discourses for their cultural similarities, I found that refugees from Ukraine were still found to be different.

### **Needed in Primor'e?**

While hopes of the refugees as the ideal immigrant group that would solve the Far East's demographic crisis circulated among government officials and regional development experts in Moscow in 2014 and 2015, they did not resonate on the ground.

Although many locals I met in Vladivostok expressed sympathy for the refugees and were proud of their own Ukrainian heritage, most people from Primorskii krai whom I spoke with in 2016 and 2017 had never heard of the compatriots program or knew very little about it. In fact, when I told people about my project, I found that I had to specify which resettlement program I was studying because so many thought I meant the resettlement of Ukrainians that occurred at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When I clarified that I met the current resettlement of compatriots program, many did not know what I was talking about or if they did, they associated it only with the help refugees from Ukraine had received through the program. Very few realized that individuals from other ethnic groups and countries could obtain citizenship through the compatriots program.

By 2016 when I began fieldwork in Primor'e, relations between the refugees and locals had cooled. While locals initially welcomed the refugees, collecting items for them and supporting measures to provide temporary housing, by the end of 2014, many had the same complaints of the refugees as they had of other immigrants. Journalist Polina Nikol'skaia captured the tensions between locals, officials and Russian citizens, and the refugees in an article she published in *Kommersant* in November 2014. The title of her article, a quote from one refugee in Khabarovsk, "There [in Ukraine] we were *moskali*, and here [in Russia] we are *khokhly*," was representative of the situation. The words *moskali* and *khokhly* are both derogatory terms. "Moskal'" means from Moscow, while "khokhol," literally "forelock," refers to Ukrainians, simultaneously making fun of the Ukrainian accent in which the hard Russian "g" is pronounced as "h." Nikol'skaia detailed the fate of Ukrainian refugees who moved to Khabarovsk, a city north of Vladivostok. While high-level officials, like Galushka quoted above, promised highly

qualified specialists, in reality, a third of all who arrived in Khabarovsk in 2014 were children. Only 900 of the 1,597 refugees in Khabarovsk were of “working age,” said Konstantin Vinogradov, Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Labor and Employment for Khabarovskii krai. He claimed that among that 900, still many were *mnogodetnye* (many-childrened) or pregnant women on maternity leave, supposedly little help to the local economy because they would be out of the labor market while their children were small (Nicol’skaia 2014b). “Many-childrened” can be used positively, as in the case of the Old Believers, who state officials hope to attract to the Far East because of their large families, or to refer to other white, Slavic families who move to Russia through the compatriots program. However, in this case, overwhelmed by the large number of refugees, large families were seen as negative.

In the Far East, there was the additional complaint that those immigrants (and refugees) who made it there hadn’t selected the region but were resettled to the Far East because they did not qualify to immigrate to other, supposedly better regions like Moscow, St. Petersburg, or western Russia. As quoted earlier, Pushkaryov complained in 2013 that Central Asians came to the Far East with big families to “just to give birth to more children here” (Shipilova 2013). In my interview with him, he told me that Central Asians who chose Primor’e over Kazakhstan and Novosibirsk, which are closer to their home countries, “aren’t the best.” Similarly, in the case of the refugees, Galina Vostrikova, the director of Khabarovsk’s Labor Center, told Nicol’skaia, “We conclude that in Central Russia, they filter the stream of Ukrainians (*fil’truiut potok ukraintsev*): for the most part, the workforce that comes to us is less qualified and has less popular professions” (Nicol’skaia 2014b). Just months after welcoming the refugees in the summer of 2014, by November of that same year, regional officials, like Vinogradov and

Vostrikova, claimed that central Russia was selecting the most highly qualified refugees to receive permanent status through the compatriots program and sending the youngest (children), oldest (many were also pensioners), and most poorly qualified to the Far East.

Regional officials complained about the refugees and blamed Moscow, arguing that their western Russian counterparts had sent only the poorest and neediest to the Far East. Their suspicions reflected tensions between the center and periphery and the long-held belief that Moscow didn't know what was best for the Far East. Just as Moscow had sought to rein them in the 2000s, controlling Vladivostok's car industry and trade with China, Moscow now told them that the Far East needed more people. The people they sent though, like earlier waves of planned migration during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, were poor and dependent on the state (Stephan 1996).

Locals, too, often complained about the refugees. Vika, a friend of a friend, who ran a hotel in Artyom, where refugees were initially resettled when they arrived to Primor'e, told me,

Understand, Lauren, that Russians and Ukrainians are pessimists. The government program spends a lot. It is humanitarian help. They [the Ukrainians] don't understand how much the government spends on them. They spend it on housing, for every room, they feed them. When you count everything up all together, it is a lot. [The program] is big humanitarian help. The MCHS (rescue workers)... they collect things for people – clothing, groceries. When the *pereselentsy* (the compatriots, immigrants) arrived, they looked at the things, chose some, but didn't take them. They didn't want them. They said they were old. What does that mean? That they don't need it. That wasn't nice. They had a high quality of life there in Ukraine. And now here they don't take [our help, our things], which means they don't need help. Russians and Ukrainians, Lauren, are pessimists.

Vika's example that the refugees did not want the items that locals had collected for them was a complaint I often heard from people in Vladivostok. Many were also aware

that the standards of living in Ukraine were supposedly higher and that the refugees were unhappy with their situation in Primor'e. People often sympathized with the refugees and recognized that housing and groceries were more expensive in Primor'e and salaries were lower – they, too, felt the economic hardships of the region and worried often about money. They were offended though that the refugees did not want their help, especially the items they had collected for them. When I asked refugees who I met about these items, they told me that the items were second-hand and in bad condition. “Understand, Lara, why take what we don't need?” one refugee replied.

In the next section, I turn to the refugees and their stories. Although officials and migration experts claimed that the refugees were their preferred immigrant, more able to adapt because of their shared linguistic, cultural, and historical ties, my ethnographic research revealed that this was not the case. Transitioning from a refugee to a compatriot, trading in the blue refugee book for the green compatriot book, was not as easy as promised.

### **The Realities of Cultural Adaptation for Refugees in Primor'e**

In January 2017, I drove from Vladivostok to neighboring Artyom to interview the first group of compatriots I had met in Primorskii krai – a group of refugees from eastern Ukraine. As we moved inland away from the port of Vladivostok, the fog thickened, distributing the sunlight in wide patches that cast the city in a cloudy, industrial haze of concrete and cars. We drove away from the hundreds of men, who sat on buckets, fishing, on the frozen Corner Bay. Artyom, unlike Vladivostok, is not on the sea. It seems like a small, provincial suburb of Vladivostok with a Soviet-era downtown that includes the obligatory World War II monuments, a new Orthodox church built in

2007, and the Coalminers' House of Culture. Despite the small-town feel, Artyom's population is a little more than 100,000, and it is home to Vladivostok's international airport, a large Hyundai factory, and several food processing factories and energy plants that serve the region. People live in apartment buildings and houses in varying states of repair. While some are big and new, others are small wooden houses with gingerbread-like trim and shutters in bright colors reminiscent of the Russian dacha. Between 2014 and 2016, Artyom received nearly 3,000 compatriots and was one of the most popular destinations in Primorskii krai, along with Ussuriysk and Nakhodka, other cities in Primor'e.<sup>3</sup>

Vika (introduced above) had arranged for all of my interviews to take place in her hotel in downtown Artyom. When the refugees first arrived in the region in 2014 and 2015, the Ministry for Civil Defense, Emergencies, and the Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disaster (MCHS) coordinated with Vika to provide temporary housing in her hotel for up to six months. Vika wasn't exactly sure how the state paid her for the housing, but she thought it was a combination of funds from MCHS and the compatriots program. She said that as soon as the refugees arrived, FMS officials collected the refugees' documents and 15 days later they returned them, replacing the blue refugee book (if they had received one elsewhere) with the green compatriots book that signified program participation, and most importantly, access to its benefits. Now, almost two years later in 2017, most of the refugee-compatriots lived in apartments they rented in Artyom and some had left, returning either to Crimea, now part of Russia, or joining family and friends in western Russia despite the program's requirement that

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<sup>3</sup> These figures are based on FMS and MVD spreadsheets shared with me unofficially by a Primorskii krai official in February 2017.

they live in Primor'e for three years. I had met Vika a month earlier at a friend's party in Vladivostok. When I told her of my project, she had offered to put me in touch with the refugees who had stayed at her hotel. It took six weeks to arrange the interviews because the refugees were nervous to talk with me. "They're afraid," she told me. "They don't want to talk about political questions." However, once I met with some of the refugees at Vika's hotel in January 2017, my reputation improved as those I met vouched that I would not ask about the war and that my questions centered on their experiences moving to Primor'e. Inevitably though, the war always came up.

I waited in the hotel's cafe for my first interviewee to arrive. Silver streamers hung from the ceiling, and two artificial trees decorated for New Year's with ribbons, ornaments, and lights framed the entrance to the cafe. Across the room, a couple sat, flipping through the pages of a book, planning their wedding reception with a woman from the hotel. The bride asked questions, her lips pouting and arms crossed, while the groom hunched forward, eyes glazed, occasionally jerking forward when brought to attention. My mind wandered as I listened to the three discuss food options. "Lara?" I heard and looked towards the door. A woman, probably in her 40s, smiled at me. Dressed fashionably, she wore a white sweater and lilac scarf with beige polka dots. As she approached me, I noticed she walked with a cane.

We greeted one another, and she introduced herself as Sveta. Sveta was white with long brown hair and hazel eyes and she wore light pink, glittery lipstick. As she explained during the interview, she was ethnic Russian but from Ukraine. She moved to Artyom in December 2014 with her 24-year-old son and 17-year-old daughter. They were from a small village two hours by marshrutka from Donetsk. Sveta described in detail, the moment she decided to leave Ukraine. It was a summer day, and she had the

balcony door open to feel the warm breeze. She sat at the table, looking at the computer, when her daughter called. Her daughter was out on a walk with her boyfriend on the edge of the village. On the phone, her daughter was now crying, “Mama, did you hear that?”

“What happened?” asked Sveta.

“The ground beneath our feet is buzzing (*gudit*),” her daughter replied.

“At that moment, they were bombing somewhere,” Sveta told me. “We didn’t even know then where. We only heard later. It was so frightening. And at that moment I was scared for my children. It was very scary. And then the refugees came...” Sveta’s voice trailed off as she dabbed her eyes. Soon after, when the military showed up one day (she did not specify Ukrainian or separatist), looking for her son, she decided it was time for them to leave Ukraine. They left everything and everyone behind, including her elderly mother and stepfather, who insisted on staying, and went to Donetsk to take a train to Russian-occupied Crimea. “It was really horrible (*strashno*),” Sveta remembered. On the train, they passed armed men and hours after they left Donetsk her mother called, crying to ask if they had made it out. Donetsk was under attack.

Once in Crimea, the MCHS resettled them to a refugee camp in a village even smaller than their own in Oryolskaya oblast, a region in southwestern Russia and the birthplace of the Russian writer Ivan Turgenev. “There wasn’t any future for us there,” Sveta told me; no work for her son and the university in Oryol was too far away for her daughter. “I was shocked. I’m even a village person, and I was in shock [at the conditions],” Sveta described. They lived in military barracks. After a few months, they started to think about where else they could go. While Sveta had family in Tula and Samara, she and her children did not want to live with them. When they learned of the

compatriots program and that Primorskiï krai was a priority region with additional benefits, her son was excited. He knew Vladivostok from the music videos of the Russian rock band Mummy Troll. Dreaming of beaches and the sea, the family applied to move to Artyom, outside of Vladivostok.

The local FMS denied their application. The local FMS officer said Sveta and her family could move, but the Russian government would not reimburse their moving expenses, one of the benefits of the compatriots program, because the government had already paid for their move as refugees to Oryolskaya oblast. Sveta and her children were crushed; they had their hearts set on a new start in a city of their choice. In December 2014, a man from Dagestan, who Sveta's daughter had met online, sent them money, so they could move to Artyom. "There are very few kind people, very few, but they exist," Sveta said, again wiping her eyes as she remembered the kind man, whom they never met, who helped them move to Primor'e.

Even though they now lived in a city of their choice, moving to the Far East was not easy. Although Sveta's son had finished his degree in computer engineering and was talented with computers, it took him six months to find a job. Employers would not hire him until he had received citizenship; they did not trust the blue refugee book or the green compatriots book, both documents that granted immigrants the right to work in Russia. Sveta's daughter, a dancer, taught at two dance companies in Artyom to support the family, but she only made 10,000 rubles a month (\$155.40). Sveta, an accountant, could only manage to find temporary gigs. Once they received citizenship and their compatriots program money (490,000 rubles or \$7,614.61 as of March 2019) and Sveta's son found a job, the family's financial situation improved, but when I spoke to her in January 2017, money was still tight. The three of them lived in a one-room

apartment that cost 20,000 rubles a month (\$310.80), much of their monthly income. They also sent whatever they could to Sveta's parents, who remained in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup>

While Sveta's children were adjusting to life in Artyom, for Sveta, moving to Russia was much harder. Like other newcomers to the region, she felt lonely. "I've always felt at home everywhere, but here I feel different (*chuzhaia*). I don't feel like I'm at home. I can't, even after two years, I can't get used to the idea that I live in a different city," Sveta told me. She had trouble finding work, and she spent much of her day dealing with bureaucracy, first to get citizenship for the family through the compatriots program and now to formulate the documents necessary for her to receive financial assistance for her handicap. From friends she had met at the refugee camps in Crimea and Oryolskaya oblast, she had heard that it was easier elsewhere. "Here it's the hardest. Here, by the way, the least amount of refugees ended up. It's furthest away. Only those who had the desire to, came here," Sveta told me.

The isolation Sveta described was an experience ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, compatriots and refugees alike, often expressed to me during interviews. Sveta and other parents I met struggled to adapt to life in Russia and feel part of the community, while they watched their children easily assimilate in school. Before they had moved to Russia, they, too, felt alien in their home countries. However, they felt tied to Russia, their attachments stimulated by events they attended organized by the Russian Embassy, Rossotrudnichestvo, and Russian World Foundation. Despite warnings from others on online forums about the challenges of the program, many of the ethnic Russian and ethnic Ukrainian compatriots I met said that they thought adapting would be easier.

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<sup>4</sup> As of March 2019, the conversion rate was 64.35 rubles to 1 US dollar.

The TV shows they watched and the magazines they received promised a better life for not only them but most importantly their children in Russia. However, for many families I met, once they arrived adapting and joining the local community was harder (and often more expensive) than they expected.

Of course, for the refugees, adapting was even harder. Although officials and Russian media romanticized the “Ukrainian refugees” as the ideal immigrants, who would easily integrate because of their cultural similarities to Russians, my interviews and interactions with refugees like Sveta revealed a different story. Of the 27 interviews I conducted in Primorskii krai with compatriots, nine were refugees from eastern Ukraine and five had moved from other parts of Ukraine to Russia after the conflict began. Of this second group, they had moved to Russia in response to the conflict and what they perceived as increased discrimination towards Russian-speakers and Russian culture. Often, they were concerned about the curriculum in their children’s schools and how Russia and Russian history was represented. Although officials presented both groups, refugees and Ukrainian *vykhodtsy* (those who have left, immigrants) as one big group – those from Ukraine – and did not differentiate between refugees and other people from Ukraine in program statistics, it is important to note that the two groups were quite different and their experiences reflected a key difference that motivated their decision to immigrate – choice. Most compatriot-participants chose to move to Russia, spending months or years deciding whether to move, preparing their documents in advance, selling their property in their home countries, and arriving with some savings (even if only very little) to help supplement the compatriot program’s financial support. However, this was not the case for the refugees, who left very suddenly, sometimes deciding only a day or hours before leaving as the frontline moved closer, their towns

were bombed, or the military arrived, separatists or Ukrainian, looking for their sons to recruit, as was the case for Sveta and her children. While government officials may have envisioned the refugees as the ideal immigrants that would solve the Far East's demographic crisis, these narratives ignored the reality that the refugees were refugees, not immigrants. As refugees, they faced a different set of challenges adapting to life in Russia and to places they may not have chosen to immigrate to.

For example, in March 2017, I met a young woman from eastern Ukraine who fled to Russia without a passport. Yana's family had fled civil war twice. As ethnic Russians in Dushanbe, they left Tajikistan in the early 1990s when civil war broke out. Some of her family settled in Russia, outside of Moscow, but her parents moved to Donetskaya oblast in eastern Ukraine, where Yana and her older brother and younger sister were born. But then in 2014, war started again. Divorced, her father immediately left for Vladivostok, "to the end of the world, the furthest away," she told me. A few months later, her mother died of cancer. Yana and her siblings were alone with their grandmother in Donetsk, a separatist region and active war zone. In August 2014, Yana and her brother left for Russia too. But Yana had a more difficult situation than her brother. She was 17 and did not have a passport, applying for her own documents had slipped through the cracks as her mother was dying. Without a passport, she could not apply to university when she graduated that spring, she could not travel, and she could not get a job. With her mother gone, her father in Russia, and a worsening situation in Donetsk, she decided to go to relatives in Moscow and apply for refugee status there.

For a year, Yana tried to get refugee status in Moscow with the hope of then applying for citizenship. She worked as a courier, delivering documents around the city, a job that did not require a work permit. She moved between family members and

friends, renting crowded rooms and sometimes sleeping in train stations. She told me the lines to apply for refugee status in Moscow were awful. "If there are 20 people in front of you here [in Vladivostok], there are 200 in Moscow." Like Sasha and Kristina, as another Ukrainian in Moscow, Yana, too, was unneeded. Yana's brother though had moved to Vladivostok to join their father when Yana had left for Moscow. He learned of the compatriots' program and had gotten his Russian citizenship already. After a year of trying in Moscow, Yana borrowed the passport of a friend (one cannot travel without an ID in Russia) and bought a late-night train ticket. It was too dark for the ticket collector to notice that she was not the woman pictured in the passport. Seven days later she arrived in Vladivostok.

In Vladivostok, everything was easier for Yana. She received refugee status in three months and then was accepted into the compatriots' program three months later. Within a year, she had obtained Russian citizenship. "When I received citizenship, it was so cool. It's cool that there's such a program," she told me, continuing:

In that office [the FMS], there was such a strict woman, who does everything. I went to her for the blue book [refugee status] and then for the green one [the compatriots' program], permanent residency, my passport. Then after that, when I went to her and asked what was next, she said nothing. 'Yana, you're already a citizen. You don't have to come to me again.' Can you imagine how I felt? I was lucky.

Although Yana was the only refugee I interviewed who arrived in Russia without a passport, her experiences applying for refugee status, learning of the compatriots' program, and getting citizenship were similar to those of other interviewees. At the beginning of almost every interview, refugees described in detail the excruciating lines, moving from one office to the next at the FMS, the documents they had to gather, how long they waited, and their frustration at the process. Other worries they had were the cost of housing, groceries, and climate. Given the barriers and the trauma of refugees'

experiences, it seems naïve – and even irresponsible – to expect them to integrate quickly without challenges, just because Ukrainians and Russian have been historically “close” in Primor’e and share cultural similarities. As stories like Sveta’s and Yana’s suggest, the compatriots program, while providing some support to refugees, was not intended for them and, therefore, did not necessarily provide the full support they needed to start over in Russia.

### Conclusion

Later the same day that I met Sveta in Vika’s hotel, I stood outside a flower shop on the outskirts of Artyom with Natasha, a redhead in her 30s from Donbass. Admiring the burly chickens resilient to the snow and cold temperatures, we looked across the landscape at the small houses that crept into the frozen field, offset against a small mountain. It was here, in this field, that only a few months earlier a young, male Siberian tiger had come through from a national park in northern Primorskii krai on his way to Vladivostok. The tiger picked off people’s small pets and proved true my Muscovite friends’ warning that “Tigers roamed the streets of Vladivostok,” which was not usually the case. We laughed about the incident, then Natasha frowned. “I miss it [Ukraine]. I don’t even know what for. For my acquaintances? For the memories? Or for life as it was before?” She sighed and shook her head. “But here it’s good. It’s good that we tried. It’s good to travel.”

Natasha’s framing of her family’s experiences moving to Artyom as “travel” was odd. Natasha was one of the refugees who was initially resettled to Irkutsk; her family only found out a couple of hours before their departure their final destination. On the one hand then, to see their experience as “travel” was very forgiving, given they were

initially resettled to Siberia without warning. On the other though, Natasha's word choice was reflective of her and other refugees' feelings that their move was only temporary. Unlike my interviews with compatriots from Central Asia, Moldova, or other parts of Ukraine, many of the refugees with whom I spoke were doubtful that they would stay in Primor'e after the three years required by the compatriots program. Ironically, it was only Sveta, who had expressed such isolation, who was determined to stay. They had come so far away from Ukraine because they wanted to start over. Now their goal was to help her parents join them in Artyom. Yana planned to return to Moscow for university or to her hometown in Ukraine, where her grandmother and younger sister still lived. She feared though that her Russian passport would prevent her from getting into a university in Kiev. Yana, once again, fell victim to geopolitics. In the fall of 2017, she planned to visit me in the US before returning to Ukraine. She had saved up money to fly to the US, and I had written a letter in support of her tourist visa application. In September 2017 though, the month in which Yana scheduled her visa interview in Vladivostok, the US suspended all nonimmigration visa applications except for those made in Moscow, a tit-for-tat move after Russian officials had announced that the US would have to reduce consular staff by two-thirds. Unable to afford a ticket to Moscow and then the US, Yana cancelled her trip and joined her family in Ukraine instead.

Some officials were disappointed that some of the refugees had left Primor'e. While rumors circulated during my fieldwork that many of the Ukrainian refugee-compatriots had left, when I asked Pushkaryov and Marina Ivanovna (the Primorskii krai official I introduced in chapter 2), both estimated that about 10 percent of the refugees had moved to other parts of Russia. "It was a very difficult situation in 2014,"

Marina Ivanovna responded when I asked her about the refugees in Primor'e. "They had a very short timeframe to decide whether to participate in the program. Let's say they had to agree to participate within 10 days [after arrival]. Those applications were very quickly looked over." Pushkaryov blamed the bureaucrats for Primor'e's loss of refugees. "The people (*narod*) we have are responsive; no one who arrived on the streets is left. But it seems that to take and feed refugees is easier than to formulate legal documents for them. Many migration officials simply don't have a soul, as the refugees say," Pushkaryov said in an interview in 2015 (Grafova 2015). However, Marina Ivanovna disagreed. She thought that the reason the refugees had trouble adapting was because they had no local community to help them in Primor'e. "Many compatriots come from Armenia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan. They already have here some kind of diaspora, their own groups, who have already lived here for a long time. They help them find work. But the refugees, they don't have that. They need more from the government," she explained.

Marina Ivanovna's explanation that the Ukrainians needed more was counter to assumptions other officials made earlier that refugees were the ideal immigrants because of their cultural similarities to Russians. Instead, she argued that Armenians, Uzbeks, and Tajiks had their own diasporas that supported newcomers, and therefore, they were less reliant on the government for help. While many complained that Central Asians and Caucasians failed to integrate into Russian society, Marina Ivanovna, who managed the compatriots program in Primor'e, believed that they were more self-reliant and found jobs and housing more quickly than other groups. She was also hesitant about the Old Believers' adaptation to Primor'e, in contrast to her colleagues in Moscow

who romanticized the Old Believers, like the Ukrainians, as the solution to the Far East's demographic crisis.

Russian news coverage and officials' statements presented Ukrainian citizens, more than those of other countries, as the most adaptable because of their cultural similarities to Russians. But even they, too, had a difficult time. As Russians tired of the conflict, representations of Ukrainian citizens and refugees shifted, so that they, too, became Othered. The case of the refugees, as among the most idealized compatriots, revealed that even those closest to Russians struggled to adapt. The resentment that local officials and residents expressed in Primor'e also reflected tensions between Moscow and the Far East. While Moscow may have assumed that they knew what was best for the region, many locals were doubtful and resentful.

## CHAPTER 4

### “NO, SHE’S A MIGRANTKA”:

#### BLACKNESS AND FOREIGNNESS IN CENTRAL ASIANS’ EXPERIENCES

Yonu and I entered a section secluded by bookshelves in the corner of the Far Eastern Federal University’s (FEFU) library. Framed by shelves of Orthodox books, our table overlooked the sea off the coast of Russian Island. Unfortunately, due to a design error, while the view was beautiful, the corner was deafening. Wind skidded along the outside of the building, pummeling around the corner and producing a loud whistling. It was hard to hear Yonu, who sat across from me. When I had first met her, I thought she was ethnic Korean. Petite, pale and with thick, dark brown hair and blunt bangs, Yonu looked like my Korean friends in Central Asia, whose families had been forced to migrate to the region during Stalin’s repression. Her round, wire-framed glasses; boxy, model-like clothing; and Hello Kitty pencil case suggested that she might be from South Korea as there was a large population of international students at FEFU. However, I had met Yonu the week before and knew she was from Kyrgyzstan. I had guest-lectured on the migration policies of CIS countries to third-year political science students. Afterwards, a tall, blonde girl had approached me, saying that her roommate was a compatriot. “She’s Uzbek but from Kyrgyzstan,” she told me in Russian. Another girl interrupted, “No, she’s a foreigner, not a compatriot.” The roommate corrected her, “No, she is a Russian citizen. Her parents live here.” The blonde girl gave me a phone number, and I contacted Yonu on WhatsApp.

Now, again Yonu’s citizenship was being called into question. “She is a migrant (migrantka)!” a voice called out. An elderly librarian emerged from behind a stack of

books. Just moments earlier, when we had arrived at the library, we had registered with her, giving her our student IDs, and my American passport, which she had carefully scrutinized, turning each page to either admire the pictures or examine my stamps. She had followed us to the corner where Yonu and I now sat.

“No, I am a citizen of the Russian Federation,” Yonu answered. I couldn’t read her face or tell from her expression whether she was uncomfortable or angry.

“Then you are from Siberia!” the librarian exclaimed.

I looked at Yonu, confused. “What does she mean?” I asked in English, switching, so that the librarian wouldn’t understand.

“She thinks I am from some ethnic group from Siberia,” Yonu explained, shaking her head.

“Do you want to go somewhere else? Are you uncomfortable?” I asked her.

“No, no, but we can talk in English. Maybe it will be better,” Yonu said, glancing at the librarian, who still stood over us. As we continued in English, the librarian retreated, returning back behind the rack of Orthodox magazines.

My interview with Yonu was not the first time I witnessed a compatriot’s citizenship called into question based on his or her perceived race. In Primorskii krai, many compatriots program participants were from Central Asia and the Caucasus, some of whom first came to Russia to work. In 2015, for example, 29% of participants were from Central Asia and the Caucasus. Before the war began in Ukraine in 2014, these numbers were even higher; a Primorskii krai administration official suggested that perhaps even 50% of applicants who moved to Russia through the program were from

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan between 2006 and 2013.<sup>1</sup> By joining the program once they were in Russia, Central Asians and Caucasians were able to obtain citizenship in as little as three to six months, compared to the usual process that took at least five years.<sup>2</sup> Once citizens though, as I found in my interviews and observed, many Russians still questioned their citizenship status as was the case with Yonu.

In this chapter, I examine how notions of blackness index foreignness in the experiences of the compatriots program's second largest population, Central Asians and Caucasians. Building on Rosa and Flores' (2017) raciolinguistic framework and Lemon's (2000, 2002, 1998), Humphrey's (1996), and Reeves' (2013) work on race in the post-Soviet context, this chapter examines how physical, linguistic, and contextual markers—such as skin color, eye shape, clothing, family size, accent, and location—come together in a set of signs to shape (or index, in linguistic terms) how people perceive belonging.

I draw on three ethnographic examples that demonstrate how raciolinguistic markers map onto Central Asians' experiences in Russia. The first two examples involve compatriots program participants, one ethnic Uzbek from Uzbekistan and one ethnic Russian from Kazakhstan, whom I met in Primorskii krai in 2017. Both moved to Russia because they spoke Russian as their native language and not the titular language of their home countries. While read as outsiders (*chuzhie*) in their home countries as Russian-

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are based on FMS and MVD spreadsheets shared with me unofficially by a Primorskii krai official in February 2017. In other regions, the number of non-ethnic Russian immigrants who already live on the territory of the Russian Federation is lower. One migration expert in Moscow estimated that it is 40 to 60% based on the region.

<sup>2</sup> By Central Asians and Caucasians, I mean those who immigrated to Russia from those regions. Central Asians include the citizens of the former Soviet republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Caucasians include those from Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Within those regions and countries, there is a diversity of ethnic groups. For example, Yonu is ethnic Uzbek from Kyrgyzstan. When introducing individuals, I specify their ethnicity and country of origin.

speakers, in Primorskii krai, they were perceived as foreigners (*inostrantsy* or again, *chuzhie*). Even locals to Primor'e viewed the ethnic Russian family from Kazakhstan as outsiders, suggesting that constructions of race did not arise from physical features alone. The third example extends debates about race and citizenship beyond the compatriots program through an analysis of the popular Russian sitcom, *Kukhnia* (kitchen). I analyze how *Kukhnia* plays with notions of race and legality in an episode in which the Federal Migration Service (FMS) raids the popular Moscow restaurant to check for illegal workers (*nelegaly*). The episode's twist highlights representations of race and citizenship in Russia, linking whiteness with Russianness and blackness with foreignness.

### **Blackness as Foreignness**

Ilya87's profile picture was of a gray cat with big green eyes, drinking tea and eating cookies. As Lara89 (profession: anthropologist), I had come across Ilya's posts on Back2Russia.net (*Domoi v Rossiuu*), an online forum where compatriots answered one another's questions and shared their experiences moving to Russia.<sup>3</sup> Ilya had created a page in the Primorskii krai section of the site, asking whether there was anyone else from Tashkent in the area. He wanted to help other compatriots by answering questions about Vladivostok and to share such "nostalgic themes," so as not to "forget and remember the native and so far away Tashkent." I sent Ilya a message on the site,

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<sup>3</sup> It is notable that the name of the forum is in English, "Back2Russia," and that the name plays with the English homophones "to" and "two." It could simply be that the forum predates the use of Cyrillic web addresses that only began in 2009 or that the site host, Invision Community, only supports English domains. However, it also speaks to the cultural capital of English as a trendy, global language. In earlier versions of the site, the banner was in Russian, *Domoi v Rossiuu*. The banner changed though to the English slogan, Back2Russia, sometime in late 2017 or early 2018.

explaining my interest in the compatriots project and that I had traveled to Tashkent in 2011. He immediately responded with his phone number. After exchanging messages on WhatsApp, we agreed to meet in a Central Asian-Japanese-Italian fusion restaurant in downtown Vladivostok.

When I arrived at noon, the restaurant was empty, and I chose a table in the center to wait for Ilya. After about ten minutes, the waiter, a young, Uzbek man approached me with a tall, tan man with brown eyes, a friendly face, and dark brown hair, cut fashionably with the top longer and the sides buzzed shorter.<sup>4</sup> “Ilya?” I asked, and he smiled. He was not what I expected. From his name, I assumed he was ethnic Russian. In our text message exchanges, he had told me a bit about his family. His family left Tashkent because they saw no future for themselves as Russian-speakers. His mother was a sculptor and his sister, a ballerina working for a company in Greece – class markers that I read as indicators that they were members of the Tashkent intelligentsia. In Tashkent, Ilya had been a high school teacher at a Russian-language school, but many of the Russian schools were closing as the Uzbekistani government replaced them with schools taught in Uzbek, the dominant, titular language. After three years of living in the former Soviet Union in Russia and Kazakhstan, I, too, read racial, linguistic, and class markers and assumed that Ilya was ethnic Russian. The background information I gleaned from online and our WhatsApp conversations – his name, affection for cats, language, family members’ intelligentsia background, and nostalgia for Tashkent specifically, rather than Uzbekistan as a whole – informed my assumption that he was

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<sup>4</sup> I assumed the waiter was Uzbek given his darker skin tone and dress – a red, embroidered skullcap and long, striped robe. The waiter’s outfit though was what all the waiters wore because the restaurant’s décor was Central Asian.

ethnic Russian. Now though, at the restaurant, when I saw his darker complexion, I wondered whether he was ethnic Uzbek, rather than Russian.

“How can I help you?” Ilya asked in English.

“You speak English?” I responded.

“Yes, of course. In Artyom [Vladivostok’s neighboring city] I work in a casino. I got my job because I was talking in English and my boss hired me.”

“Do most people there speak English?” I asked.

“Yes, I would say half are Chinese. They are how to say – fortuitous?”<sup>5</sup>

“Lucky?” I suggested.

Our conversation shifted to the topic of my research. When I handed him my IRB information sheet, Ilya immediately began answering the questions I listed as examples on the form:

“First, I must say hot climate [why he moved] in my native country. It was torture for us,” he said, emphasizing “torture.” “If I were to spend several more summers there, I’d have [a] heart problem. Second, this is my native language.”<sup>6</sup>

“Russian?” I confirmed.

“Russian. But [the] majority of [the] Russians immigrated to Russia, Jews to America, to New York.”

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<sup>5</sup> Ilya’s ease at finding work as an English speaker reflects the cultural capital of English and certain kinds of bilingualism as valued over other kinds (Rosa 2016). Many people in Vladivostok and neighboring Chinese cities learn English to interact with one another, not necessarily to communicate with Europeans or Americans. Therefore, most people in the tourism industry in Vladivostok use English to communicate with Chinese, Korean, and Japanese visitors. With Vladivostok’s multiculturalism also comes cultural stereotypes, including the one that Ilya evokes – that Chinese people enjoy gambling and are lucky at it.

<sup>6</sup> Ilya’s response that he left because of the climate was not unusual. Many of those I interviewed chose Primor’e because of its climate and the proximity of the sea. One Ukrainian refugee even chose the city because her children knew it from Mumiy Troll’s, a popular rock band from Vladivostok, music videos.

At this point, I interrupted Ilya and asked whether I could record our conversation. He agreed and continued still in English, "I worked as [a] teacher at a college. All were speaking Uzbek, and I was not feeling good. I always had problems because I could not speak my native language. And all our neighbors and all [the] Russians moved away. Although here I speak Russian with my compatriots, they see me as [a] foreigner."

"Are you ethnic Uzbek?" I asked.

"Yes, yes. I'm [a] foreigner for them. I'm [a] foreigner," he repeated. "But they are very, they're not, uh... *Predubezhdennyi*, envious. They could [not] be [prejudiced] because it's not their land too. It was historically, it was, if I'm not mistaken, Chinese people were living here. And Russians came here two centuries ago or something like that. That's why they're hospitable here. And what about [the] central part of Russia or the western part of Russia? The western part, they are a bit dangerous."<sup>7</sup>

"Is that why you chose Primorskii krai?"

"That is the reason. Also, there are several countries. Primorskii krai borders with some Asian countries. And I think the economic situation is going to be better or will improve here."

Ilya's decision to immigrate to Primorskii krai because of its location in the Asian part of Russia near China, Korea, and Japan was not unusual. Other ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks I spoke with in the region chose the Far East for similar reasons. Likewise, many of the Central Asian students I interviewed in Moscow in 2015 chose to study there rather than in St. Petersburg because of the city's diversity. As one female student told

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<sup>7</sup> While Ilya translates "*predubezhdennyi*" as envious, it actually means prejudiced.

me, revealing the stakes around race, “It is safer here [in Moscow]. There are fewer skinheads.” She and her Kazakh friends lived in the dormitories outside of Moscow and commuted by car together to avoid harassment on the metro. In Ussuriysk, a city north of Vladivostok near the border with China, I met Farrukh in March 2017. Farrukh, who was ethnic Uzbek, had moved to Primor’e with his wife, who was ethnic Russian, and their young children in 2015. Before then, they had studied and worked in Vladimir, a city east of Moscow. After finishing university and working for a few years in Vladimir, they had decided to apply for Russian citizenship through the compatriots program, but they were rejected. “The competition was high,” Farrukh told me. “There were many skinheads too,” he added. Through word of mouth, they knew their chances would be better if they applied to move to the Far East and if they applied from abroad rather than from within Russia. They returned to Uzbekistan in 2014 and then applied to the program in 2015. A month later Primorskii krai accepted their application, they moved, and a year later they received Russian citizenship. When I met Farrukh, he worked as a computer engineer and his wife was on maternity leave with their small children. They had just received land through the Far Eastern Hectare Program. With their three hectares (7.5 acres), the family planned to open a Jerusalem artichoke farm outside of Ussuriysk.

Ilya, Farrukh, and the Kazakh students I interviewed in Moscow chose where they immigrated to out of fears of racially motivated violence. Based on what they described as their Asian appearance (*aziatskaia vneshnost'*), their skin color or eye shape, they chose cities that they perceived as more “hospitable” in Ilya’s words. Ilya and Farrukh interpreted Primor’e’s proximity to Asian countries and the region’s history, interchanging between Chinese, Russian, and Japanese imperial powers, as more open

towards other ethnicities than central or western Russia. Indeed, many locals in Vladivostok prided themselves on their city's diversity and openness towards others. I often observed instances though that suggested this openness was complex. As elsewhere in Russia, everyday forms of prejudice were evident from cleaning services that promised only "Russian personnel and guaranteed quality" to one friend telling me that he had bought a house in a nice area with "just children and grannies, no Central Asians."<sup>8</sup>

Halfway through our interview and lunch, a young, Russian woman joined us.<sup>9</sup> She and Ilya greeted one another with a kiss on each cheek, and Ilya introduced her as his colleague, Oksana, from the casino. Oksana had just returned to Vladivostok from Cyprus, where she had been working at a hotel for Russian tourists for the past three years. We continued the interview, and I asked Ilya why he had joined the forum, Back2Russia, where we had met.

Now in Russian, so Oksana could participate in the conversation, Ilya replied, "I had questions [about the program] and I searched for them there. I just searched on Google ... and I realized that many of the answers were on the site. And there I registered and made a nickname [he says nickname in English] because if I had written Kamil' then people wouldn't answer me, as if I were illegal (*nelegal*)."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For the cleaning service that promises only Russian personnel, see <http://cleanvl.ru/>. Meanwhile, home renovation sites advertised North Korean workers as harder workers than their Russian and Central Asian counterparts (see <https://remontkorea.ru/>).

<sup>9</sup> Rather than describe the signs of every person I encountered that suggested one's race, I simply label that person as the ethnicity I know they identify with. For key encounters, I explain why raciolinguistic markers may be more important to local interpretations.

<sup>10</sup> Kamil' ends in a soft sign, but I drop the soft sign in his name when writing in English.

I stopped writing and looked up from my notebook. “Wait, is your name Kamil or Ilya?” I asked in Russian.

“Please meet Kamil,” Ilya – now Kamil – replied in English, opening his arms and smiling.

“Really! Why did you choose Ilya?” I asked in Russian.

Oksana jumped in, laughing, “Why? Maybe you want to give this name to your son?” We all laughed.

In English, Kamil paused, more serious, “Well, nickname and people are more friendly, if you are native Russian. I think so.”

Ilya’s sudden transformation into Kamil in our interview was reflective of the discrimination many from the Caucasus and Central Asian face when immigrating to Russia. Just as he and others I interviewed selected the Far East for its openness, on the compatriot forum he intentionally selected a Russian name to mask his nationality and race. He feared that people would assume from his ethnic Uzbek name that he was “illegal” or a migrant worker. As Madeleine Reeves writes, the terms *nelegal* (illegal) and *gasterbaiter* (guest-worker) evoke those who are *nerusskie* (non-Russian), *neslavianskoi vneshnosti* (not of Slavic appearance), *chernye* (black), or *sredneaziatskie* (Central Asian) (2013, 512). Assumptions about Russian fluency merge with physical markers of race to label someone as nelegal. When Russians think that *nelegaly* (the nominative plural of nelegal) are “pervasive” and “visibly recognizable” as “non-Slavic,” ethnic profiling through frequent document checks becomes socially acceptable. With frequent reports of fakes (*poddelki*), everyone of a non-Slavic appearance becomes suspect (Reeves 2013:512).

However, as Lemon reminds us, racial signs are “slippery.” In post-Soviet countries, many non-Russians, such as Caucasians, Tatars, Central Asians, and Roma,

aren't any darker than ethnic Russians. As a result, people must look to other signs beyond skin tone to index race. Often these other characteristics indicative of one true nationality are seen as "innate" or in Russian, "in the blood" (*v krovi*). Lemon writes that for Roma, such innate practices include trading, stealing horses, playing music, and dancing. These "national traits" have "to be detected, unmasked," and Soviet films and plays often focused on ideas of race as "under the skin" (Lemon 2000, 69).<sup>11</sup>

While Kamil could not necessarily control how people interpreted him in person, he took effort to conceal his Uzbek name, Kamil, online on Back2Russia. When I asked him whether people in Vladivostok recognized him as Uzbek or if he ever experienced discrimination because of his nationality, he replied (in English), "I never tell my nationality to others. Sometimes guys ask me, where do you come from? And I tell them I'm local [he laughs]. I lie." The compatriots program may define "compatriot" as Russian-speakers, but for many Russians in Russia, raciolinguistic markers continued to inform their understandings of citizenship and group belonging, so that they assumed that immigrants of non-Slavic experience like Yonu, Kamil, and Farrukh were migrants or illegals even though they were Russian citizens.

### **"But Here I Understood We're *Ruskie* But Not *Rossiane*"**

Like Kamil, I first met Zhenya online at Back2Russia. She was an active participant on many of the forum's pages, answering questions about the application process, life in Ussuriysk, and the particularities of applying to the program from

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<sup>11</sup> Lemon gives the example of the Soviet play *Gypsy* in which a Roma father searches for his son after World War II. At a collective farm, he recognizes his son when the boy quickly picks up "Gypsy dance." Although the boy's adoptive mother claims her son is Tatar, the Roma father knows that she is lying because "the proof was in the performance" (Lemon 2000, 69)

Kazakhstan. When I met her in person in February 2017, the taxi dropped me off among blocks of rectangular, gray Soviet apartment buildings. On the edge of Ussuriysk, the neighborhood's name, "Promyshlenniy" (industrial), was appropriate. I had seen it from the train; the former factories and smoke stacks apart from Ussuriysk's center. The pale blue and white apartment buildings with tin flowers along the balconies faced one another, separated by parks and playgrounds in the center of the blocks. It was cold, just a few degrees above 0 Fahrenheit, but elderly people sat on benches, chatting, and mothers walked together with strollers while their children played. Near the trash, an old woman broke apart bread to feed the pigeons, who gathered around her, landing on her arms and at her feet. As I waited for Zhenya, I watched the woman leave the pigeons and begin putting out food in plastic bowls for the stray cats and dogs that waited for her.

I heard the door open beside me and a woman emerged with a baby stroller. Even though she had never seen my picture (my profile picture on the forum was of a squirrel), she immediately recognized me. So far, everyone in Ussuriysk had picked me out as a foreigner – perhaps it was my LL Bean backpack or thick, brown hiking boots I wore to walk through the mud, shoes a Russian woman would never wear for their lack of taste. As Lemon notes, place matters; racial hierarchies, including whiteness, map onto specific spaces (Lemon 2000, 58). In Moscow, I often passed as a white, Russian woman, my casual American clothing mistaken as hipster. In small cities in the Far East, I was still white, but my clothing and accent suggested that I wasn't Russian. I approached Zhenya, greeting her and thanking her for meeting with me. Zhenya was white and had bright blue eyes and light brown hair that she wore in a braid. Her heavy

coat was open, buttoned in only a few places. Underneath she wore a shirt, no sweater or other layer.

“It’s nice to meet you, Lara. Hold him,” she said, passing me her baby, who was like a starfish, his arms and legs pinned in opposite directions by his blue snowsuit. The baby calmly examined me while Zhenya arranged the blankets in his carriage.

“Let’s go for a walk,” Zhenya suggested. As we walked among the apartment buildings, we chatted in Russian about Zhenya’s immigration from Kokshetau, a small city in northern Kazakhstan, not far from Russia’s border with Omsk. Zhenya’s siblings had moved to Russia also through the compatriots program but to Kaliningrad and Ekaterinburg. She and her husband decided to move to Russia in August 2014 because salaries were higher in Russia than in Kazakhstan. Her husband’s profession, a type of specialized electrician, was considered “needed” in Primorskii krai. While in Kazakhstan, he had received approximately 13,000 rubles (\$202) a month; in Russia, he was paid 40,000 rubles (\$621.60).<sup>12</sup> They also moved for their children. As ethnic Russians, Zhenya and her husband worried that their children wouldn’t have the same opportunities as Russian-speakers and would face discrimination someday. Concerns about their children’s future was the most common answer I received when I asked people why they moved to Russia, regardless of country of origin or nationality. With the exception of the refugees from Ukraine, nearly every compatriot I interviewed cited better economic opportunities for their children and their desire to preserve their

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<sup>12</sup> As of March 2019, the conversion rate was 64.35 rubles to 1 US dollar. Though higher than his salary had been in Kazakhstan, 40,000 rubles was still lower than the official average, 49,156 rubles, for Primorskii krai (see Administratsiia Vladivostoka 2018). When I asked my friends from Vladivostok what the average salary was, they scoffed when I told them the official rate from the Primorskii krai’s administration’s website. They doubted it was that high.

family's Russian language and culture as their motivation for joining the compatriots program.

Although parents moved to Russia to preserve their ethnic Russian heritage or because they thought their children would have more opportunities, their shared cultural background (as Soviets or Russians) and language did not necessarily make their experience adapting any easier. A key assumption of the compatriots program is that if an immigrant is ethnic Russian, or at the very least speaks Russian, she will have an easier time adapting. However, ethnographic research frequently challenged these assumptions of shared culture, shared language, and easier integration.

While Zhenya and her husband did not regret their decision to move to Russia, life in Ussuriysk was harder than they expected. Zhenya's husband found work immediately, but they were unable to sell their apartment in Kazakhstan and housing was more expensive in Ussuriysk than Kokshetau. Home on maternity leave, Zhenya also felt isolated, which was why she participated on the forum so much, she told me:

My friends are all former resettlers or future resettlers (*pereselentsy*). The kids have already adapted, they're small, they'll be Russian, locals (*rossiiskie, mestnye*). And my husband has also adapted, he's working. But for me it's harder.

On our walk, we chatted about the differences between Kazakhstan and Russia. Zhenya thought that parents raised their children differently in Kazakhstan than in Russia. In Kazakhstan, people were more respectful of their elders, more family-oriented, and hospitable. She also said that she and her husband were more comfortable around other Central Asians – Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, she named specifically – because they grew up around people with “Asian features” (*aziatskoi vneshnosti*).

Kazakhstan was changing. Ten years older than Zhenya, her husband didn't have any problems finding work as a Russian-speaker. However, Zhenya, who was 30 at

the time of the interview, found it more difficult as many jobs required Kazakh language as more ethnic Kazakhs moved north into what was once a predominately ethnic Russian region of the country. As Zhenya said,

In Kazakhstan, you graduate with a specialization, search for work, and you feel uncomfortable (*chustvuesh' diskomfortno*). That there is discrimination (*diskriminatsiia est'*). A little bit. You aren't needed (*Ty ne nuzhen*). Your homeland doesn't need you (*Rodine ne nuzhen ty*). You're an outsider (*chuzhoi*). But here you also aren't needed either. ... In my family, we are already the sixth, the seventh generation in Kazakhstan. We moved to Kazakhstan before the Soviet Union. In the '90s we struggled with the national question. Many of our acquaintances left.

Although Zhenya was ethnic Russian from Kazakhstan and Kamil was Uzbek from Uzbekistan, their stories were similar and they were of the same post-Soviet generation, both 30 years old. As Russian speakers, who did not speak Kazakh or Uzbek, they struggled to find jobs and felt uncomfortable in their home country. But now, in Russia, they also felt uncomfortable and like outsiders or foreigners, as Kamil described.

As we walked around Zhenya's neighborhood, reminiscing about Kazakhstan (I too lived in Kazakhstan for a year in 2011 and then again in 2014), Zhenya became serious as she remembered when they decided to move to Russia. "We're Russians (*russkie*) in Kazakhstan, different from Russians (*rossiiane*) in Russia. Locals somehow know immediately that I'm not a local," she said, looking around the playground, where we stood, watching her older son, who we had picked up from preschool, playing with the other children. "They are always asking me, where I am from. The dialect is different. In central Russia and Kazakhstan, vowels are longer, like how people pronounce 'a' and 'o,'" she suggested. Zhenya's husband, a tall, white man with a large belly and dark brown hair, had joined us. Like Zhenya, he wore only a light jacket.

“How do people differentiate you?” I asked her, comparing their clothing with mine and the Russians around us. Like the other Russian women, I wore a fur coat, my grandmother’s that she received as a wedding present from my grandfather in 1949.

“In northern Kazakhstan winter is minus 30, minus 40. Here we aren’t cold, we’re used to it. We walk around in light jackets in the winter,” Zhenya answered, motioning to her own open coat and her husband’s light one. “Locals also know that we’re Russians from Central Asia because of that. But there is also this kind of feeling that you are different (*chuzhoi*). We were different in Kazakhstan because we were Russian (*russkie*). But here [in Ussuriysk] I understood that we’re Russian (*ruskie*) but not Russians (*rossiiane*).”

Although Zhenya was ethnic Russian (*ruskaia*), like Kamil, she felt like an outsider, using the words “*diskomfortno*” (uncomfortable), “*chuzhaia*” (“foreigner,” “stranger,” or “different”), and “*nenuzhnaia*” (“not needed”) to describe how she felt in Kazakhstan and Russia. Zhenya though was white, and her physical features, such as her skin and eye color and her hair, suggested that she was Russian. As her discomfort and self-awareness that she was different suggested, racial markers alone were not enough to establish her sense of belonging or Russian identity. As she told me, “But here, I understood that we’re Russian but not Russians,” differentiating between *ruskie* (ethnic Russians) and *rossiiane* (Russian citizens). Other features, including the way she spoke Russian, her clothing (lighter jackets, perhaps also a different style of clothing), and her large family size (three children) made her stand out from her Russian neighbors who grew up in Ussuriysk. Zhenya believed that these features characterized her as a Russian from Central Asia. She thought that *mestnye* (locals) recognized her as *chuzhaia* (an outsider). However, it was not necessarily evident to me that the locals

around us perceived Zhenya and her husband as “foreigners,” rather than just from somewhere else within Russia. I didn’t have the chance to ask locals in Ussuriysk what they thought of ethnic Russian newcomers. Russia is a large country with many different regions, accents, styles of dress, and climates. Zhenya thought that her neighbors saw her as from Central Asia, but they could have as easily interpreted her as from another part of Russia than from abroad.

Rosa and Flores theorize whiteness as a “structural position,” one that whites and nonwhites can inhabit depending on the context (2017, 629). Zhenya and Kamil both describe themselves as outsiders in their home countries and now in Russia. However, it is important to recognize the colonial legacies of Russian language in Central Asia and the privileges extended to Kamil’s and Zhenya’s families during Soviet times as Russian-speakers, and in Zhenya’s case, as an ethnic Russian in Kazakhstan. Kamil’s family’s class background and identification as a Russian rather than Uzbek speaker suggest that his family was a member of the Tashkent intelligentsia. Historically, Tashkent had a large ethnic Russian population and the city hosted members of the Russian artistic community, including Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, during the siege of Leningrad (Stronski 2010; Manley 2009). In 1989, according to the last Soviet census, 1.65 million ethnic Russians lived in Uzbekistan, half of whom lived in Tashkent. By the mid-2000s, more than a third of the Russian population had emigrated and Russian language’s prominence had decreased as Uzbek officials engaged in an active campaign to build an Uzbek nation (Flynn 2007; Adams 2010).

Nation-building has occurred to a lesser extent in Kazakhstan, where the Russian population was higher (almost 40% of the population in 1989 as opposed to 8% in Uzbekistan) and the country shared a border with Russia (Peyrouse 2007). Like many

ethnic Russians in northern Kazakhstan, Zhenya's family history in the country predated Soviet times. Zhenya was of the seventh generation to live in Kazakhstan. Her ancestors arrived as Russian settlers from Siberia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to farm the steppe while also Russifying the borderland for the empire.<sup>13</sup> In 1989, when Zhenya was two years old, 53% of Kokshetau's residents were ethnic Russian and just 18.5% were Kazakh. By 2013, the ethnic make-up of the city had reversed – 56.5% of residents were Kazakh and 30.5% were Russians according to Kazakhstan's state committee on statistics. In the 1990s, Zhenya's family "struggled with the national question" and many of their acquaintances left Kazakhstan for Russia. When I met her, only Zhenya's and her husband's parents remained; Zhenya's siblings lived in Ekaterinburg and Kaliningrad. They, too, had immigrated to Russia through the compatriots program.

When Kamil and Zhenya were four years old in 1991, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan became independent countries. As Uzbek and Kazakh language became more prevalent in their hometowns and many of their family and friends emigrated, the status of Russian language shifted. While Russian was still a language of mobility that allowed one to work and study in Russia, English replaced Russian as the international language and one had to speak Uzbek or Kazakh to work in some professions.<sup>14</sup> Kamil and Zhenya moved to Russia because Russian was their native language, though for Zhenya's family, higher salaries and better economic opportunities also influenced her

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the Russian Empire in Kazakhstan and Kazakhstani nation-building, see Olcott (1996, 2010) and Zaionchkovskaia and Sdykov (2002) on legacies of imperial connections in contemporary migration patterns between Russia and Kazakhstan.

<sup>14</sup> In the 1990s, the politics around language were sharper in Uzbekistan than Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has carefully negotiated interethnic relations and language policies with an eye to its neighbor, Russia. While Uzbekistan switched from Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet in the 1993 (though its full adoption has been regularly pushed back each year) (EurasiaNet 2017), Nazarbayev only declared Kazakhstan's intentions to switch in May 2017, which led to widespread protests (Kumenov 2018).

family's decision to emigrate. Promotional materials curated by Russian officials and affiliated NGOs marketed the language of "return" (*vozvrashchat'sia*) and "homeland" (*istoricheskaiia rodina*) to people like Kamil and Zhenya, who felt linguistically uncomfortable and even at times discriminated against in their home countries. Glossy photos of white, ethnic Russian families, celebrating Russian holidays, and news clips of nonethnic Russians (but Russian speakers), performing their culture through dances and songs, promised acceptance. Once in Russia though, Kamil's and Zhenya's experiences were more complex. Though they spoke the language, as Zhenya noted, ethnic Russian culture was different than civic Russian culture. Kamil felt warmer towards his Uzbek compatriots and spoke Uzbek more frequently than he had in Uzbekistan. Zhenya felt closer to other Central Asians than to other ethnic Russians in Ussuriysk. Though Zhenya may have felt foreign (*chuzhaia*) and her clothing, accent, and large family may have suggested that she was an outsider, she was still ethnic Russian. For Kamil, locals didn't differentiate between someone from Tashkent and "provincial" Uzbekistan. Regardless of his native Russian fluency and attachment to Russian culture, his skin color signaled to those around him that he was Uzbek and immediately suspect as a nelegal.

I now turn to representations of language, race, and belonging as they played out in Russia beyond the compatriots program. I analyze a Russian TV show, *Kukhnia*, to highlight the underlying assumptions about physical appearance and citizenship that were the backdrop to the compatriots program.

### **The Hunter of the Guest-Workers:**

#### **Navigating Raciolinguistic Identities on Russian TV**

In the summer of 2015, at the beginning of my fieldwork in Moscow, I sat with my host family—a middle-aged Russian woman and her two elementary school aged children—around the kitchen table, drinking tea, eating cookies, and watching the popular TV show, *Kukhnia* (Kitchen). Though I had not yet met Yonu, Kamil, Farrukh, or Zhenya, the episode I watched with my host family that night illuminated many of the themes around race, language, and (il)legality that were already emerging in the earlier phases of my fieldwork.

Broadcasted on STS, a popular entertainment channel across Russia, *Kukhnia* ran weekly for six seasons from 2012 to 2016, followed by two movies and two TV show spinoffs.<sup>15</sup> The 25-minute episodes feature the lives of the kitchen staff of the fancy, French restaurant Claude Monet in Moscow. In the first several seasons, Maksim or Max, is the narrator, and the episodes focus on his experiences as he moves from the provincial Voronezh to Moscow to make his career as a chef. Within that main thread, the show spins off to pursue the stories of other staff members at Claude Monet, including Vika, the attractive, self-confident art director, with whom Max is in love; Viktor Petrovich, the grumpy but kind head chef; Ainura, the Kyrgyz cleaning lady; and Fedya and Senya, two other chefs in the kitchen. A comedy, *Kukhnia* is similar to the American TV series “*Scrubs*” (2001–2010) and Russian “*Interns*” (2010–2016) in how it pairs classical and popular music with character’s fantasies and slow-motion, slapstick disaster scenes.

In episode 16 of the first season, migration police raid the restaurant, searching for nelegaly. At the sudden appearance of the red-vested FMS officers outside the

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<sup>15</sup> The most recent spinoff, *Fedya and Senya*, premiered November 2018, two years after *Kukhnia*’s final season.

restaurant, Vika and Viktor Petrovich rush their immigrant employees out of the restaurant. If the FMS finds any immigrants without work permits, they will fine the restaurant 400,000 to one million rubles (\$6,216 – \$15,540 as of March 2019).<sup>16</sup> In a humorous scene, Viktor Petrovich stands in the middle of the kitchen, yelling, “Attention! In two minutes, we will have an inspection by the migration police. All nelegaly exit the restaurant, not slowly! Quickly!” In the background, an Eastern European-Romani band plays a fast-paced, frantic song, heavy on the violin and clarinet, as Viktor Petrovich begins grabbing people by the shoulders and pushing them in different directions. Ainura, the Kyrgyz cleaning lady, known to be working at the restaurant without a work permit, runs into another room, warning presumably in Kyrgyz, two dark-skinned men. In the kitchen, there is chaos. Meanwhile, Max, unperturbed, is trying to persuade people to taste his newest recipe. He approaches Louis, the French chef, who is frantically looking through the cupboards for his work permit. In French-accented Russian, he exclaims, “Where is my work permit (*razreshenie na rabotu*)? It was here before!” Max turns to Ainura who has come out of the laundry room and asks her to try his dish. She tries to refuse but gives in, tasting the recipe and losing her chance to exit in time.

Viktor Petrovich continues to usher people in different directions, ordering them to leave one by one, half through the restaurant, the other through the backdoor. A black man in a plaid shirt and wire-framed glasses, carrying his uniform, rushes out the backdoor. We also see the Central Asian men from the laundry room quickly exiting.

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<sup>16</sup> As of March 2019, the conversion rate was 64.35 rubles to 1 US dollar.

Fedya, one of the chefs, runs by Viktor Petrovich and Viktor Petrovich grabs him. “Fedya, where are you going?” he asks (see figure 8).



Figure 8: Screenshot of Viktor Petrovich (left) and Fedya (right) (D'iachenko 2012)

Fedya cringes, tilting away from Viktor Petrovich. “Chef, my passport is expired (*prosrochen*).”

“Okay,” Viktor Petrovich says, his voice drawing the word (*tak*) out.

“Fake (*poddel'nyi*),” Fedya's voice rises.

“Okay,” Viktor Petrovich says louder.

“Moldovan!” Fedya cries.

“Cripple! (*Invalid*)” the chef yells. “Get out!” He pushes Fedya away from him.

Fedya exits the kitchen into the restaurant, just as Vika walks the FMS chief, a balding, white man in a red vest, into the restaurant. Seeing them, Fedya turns around and goes back into the kitchen. Meanwhile, Ainura, heading towards the backdoor, runs into more FMS agents. She, too, returns to the kitchen. Seeing both again, Viktor Petrovich grabs Fedya, locking him in the refrigerator room, and pushes Ainura into his office,

where she hides under his desk. A few moments later, Vika dresses both in other staff's clothing, telling them to eat in the restaurant as if they were guests until the FMS leaves.

In the next scene, Ainura sits uncomfortably at a table, fidgeting and straightening her plate and silverware. She jumps as the FMS chief asks if he can join her but then smiles, nodding. He sits down across from her, and they both order. After their food has arrived, the FMS chief picks up his fork to eat the apple strudel he ordered. "Do you know why they call me *okhotnik gasterbaiterov* (hunter of guest workers)?" Ainura chokes, then takes a large gulp of her white wine. The FMS chief sniffs and smiles at her, "Because I always find them." The camera moves to show Viktor Petrovich and Vika on tiptoes, nervously watching Ainura and the chief through the window of the kitchen.

Panning back to Ainura (figure 9), the chief asks her, "Is it okay that I keep talking about work? Is it interesting to you?" Ainura smiles then quickly presses her lips together, second-guessing the width of her smile so as not to reveal her gold tooth, a common stereotype of Central Asian immigrants.



Figure 9: Ainura from *Kukhnia* ("Serial *Kukhnia*" 2019)

“You know to find gasterbaiters, you have to become them (*im nuzhno stat'*). You have to think like a gasterbaiter, understand? And I have already done this for five years. Therefore, I know exactly how and where they pay *nelegalov* (illegals). Those who are stupider hide them away in the bathroom, in the coat room, etc. And those who are smarter in the restaurant hall,” the chief tells Ainura, who raises her eyebrow slightly. “I’ll tell you a secret,” he continues. “In this hall, there are nelegaly.” Ainura stares back at him, silent.

This scene is a parody of two scenes from Quentin Tarantino’s 2009 film, *Inglorious Basterds*. In the movie, a group of American soldiers’ efforts to assassinate Nazi leaders fatefully comes together with a French Jewish woman’s plan to burn down her movie theater, full of Nazis in occupied Paris. *Kukhnia* combines two famous scenes from the film. The first is the opening scene in which the audience meets Colonel Hans Landa, known as the “Nazi hunter.” Over a tense glass of milk, Landa tells the French farmer, who is hiding a neighboring Jewish family beneath his floorboards, “I can *think* like a Jew.” Eventually, the farmer gives in to Landa’s interview, crying as Nazi soldiers shoot down into the basement, killing the family in a gory scene typical of Tarantino. A young woman, Shosanna, escapes out the window of the basement, running away. We meet her later in the film as an adult, now Emmanuelle, running a movie theater in Paris. After a Nazi hero selects her theater for a premiere of his biographical film, she meets Landa again. *Kukhnia* draws from this scene as well. Like Landa’s interview of Shosanna, the FMS chief’s conversation with Ainura is over an apple strudel.

Returning to Ainura and the FMS chief, the chief has finished his strudel and Ainura has not touched her salad. “Well, that was the most wonderful apple strudel I’ve ever eaten,” he tells her, patting the corners of his mouth with a napkin. “It’s the kind of strudel that can be devoured and that can save (*mozhet spasti*). Tell the chef that his apple strudel saved someone. And I beg you, please take care of your work permit,” he nods to her, smiling kindly. Relieved, Ainura smiles back, revealing her gold tooth. Unlike Tarantino’s Landa, the FMS chief recognizes Ainura as a nelegal, but he lets her go.

Vika and Viktor Petrovich in the window smile in relief, but as the FMS chief walks away, flexing his fingers, he approaches Fedya, now in a T-shirt, who sits, poking his dessert with a fork. Leaning down over Fedya, he asks him for his documents – his passport, registration, and work permit. The chief lists the three reasons he knew Fedya was a nelegal. First, only a chef would pick apart his food, thinking how he could make it better. Second, Fedya keeps touching his head, feeling the absence of his chef’s hat. Finally, Fedya has not touched his wine because he knows he cannot drink at work. As the hunter of guest-workers, the chief claims that these three contextual signs suggest that Fedya is not a patron of the restaurant but its chef, hiding in the hall because he is a nelegal. Fedya does not deny the evidence, and the FMS chief snaps his finger, motioning for one of his colleagues to make the arrest.

In the next scene, Fedya, Viktor Petrovich, and the FMS chief are in Viktor Petrovich’s office, filling out the paperwork for Claude Monet to pay the fine and for Fedya to be deported back to Moldova. Completing the form, the chief tosses a lemon drop into his mouth and begins to choke. In slow-motion, we see the chief grasping his throat as Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” plays in the background, another reference to Nazi Germany (Hitler was a fan of the composer). Fedya helps him, slapping his back

and giving him the Heimlich maneuver. Having saved him, Fedya smiles, expecting forgiveness, but the chief, looking away from him says, “*Pridetsia deportirovat’* (You will have to be deported). I am sorry, but it’s my *dolg* (duty).” The passivity of the FMS’s language is notable. Avoiding eye contact, he literally says that “it has come (*pridetsia*) to deport you,” then “it is my duty.” The passivity of the verb, *pridetsia*, suggests that it is out of the FMS chief’s control, but as we know from Ainura’s experience, this isn’t true. He has a choice.

The camera switches scenes, with Viktor Petrovich, apologizing to Elena Pavlovna for calling the FMS on her, and then Max getting Viktor Petrovich to try his dish. Finally, in the final scene as the credits begin to appear, Fedya returns as if from vacation, sun-tanned. Everyone greets him, and they joke about his deportation. “But if anyone asks, I’m Misha,” he says, glancing around, nervously laughing. Like the taxi driver I met in Artyom, Fedya – now Misha – has outsmarted the black list by changing his name and procuring a new passport. The show ends.

This episode of *Kukhnia* plays with the audience’s assumptions of race and migration status. Presentations of language and race, specific to the post-Soviet context, appear throughout the series, arising in unexpected ways that challenge common assumptions that link whiteness to Russianness and blackness to foreignness. At the same time, *Kukhnia’s* jokes can be seen as sexist, racist, and homophobic. The female characters, while presented as strong-willed, are also silly and dependent on their male counterparts. Throughout the series, Max cheats on Vika, who always eventually takes him back. In another episode, Louis, the French baker, who is gay, breaks up with his

partner and sleeps with a woman in Moscow, pressured to by his co-workers.<sup>17</sup> Ainura's Kyrgyz-accented Russian, frequent linguistic mishaps, and cultural differences are the subjects of many of the show's jokes, as are Louis', though as French rather than Kyrgyz, he has greater cultural capital. However, the show also explores the hardships each character faces, including Ainura and later her niece's immigration difficulties. Zhanyl Asanbekova, the Kyrgyz actress who plays Ainura, has become a popular actress in Russia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, and she has used her celebrity to promote Kyrgyz language and theater. Since *Kukhnia* has ended in 2016, she has been working on opening a Kyrgyz-language theater in Moscow.

Presentations of language and race, specific to the post-Soviet context, appear throughout the series, arising in unexpected ways that challenge common assumptions that link whiteness to Russianness. In this episode, the joke is on us, the audience, and how we read raciolinguistic signs. We assume that Fedya's Russian fluency and whiteness mean that he is Russian and Ainura's "blackness" and imperfect Russian mean that she is the nelegal. The FMS chief, who brags that he is the "hunter of guest-workers," is an allusion to Tarantino's Nazi Jew hunter, Hans Landa. Like Landa, the FMS chief knows how to read the signs of the nelegal and the signs he lists extend beyond raciolinguistic markers. The reasons he knows Fedya is a nelegal are the same ones that would suggest Ainura, too, is one: they are contextual signs of Fedya's and Ainura's discomfort of eating in the fancy restaurant, rather than working and eating in the kitchen. However, we, the audience, aren't as good at assessing the situation as the

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<sup>17</sup> It's surprising that Russian TV features a gay character in the context of the 2013 law that banned gay "propaganda." However, as a friend pointed out, Louis is a foreigner and being gay is "so French." In *Kukhnia*, sexuality, like profession (baker) and accent index Frenchness.

FMS chief is. We learn at the same time as Viktor Petrovich that Fedya is Moldovan. White with blonde hair and blue eyes and a native Russian-speaker, we assume until he tells Viktor Petrovich about his expired, forged Moldovan passport that he is Russian. Meanwhile, we assume that Ainura is a nelegal from raciolinguistic signs and that the FMS chief will catch her. Her clothing and physical appearance – her skin color, eye shape, gold tooth, and eyebrows – as well as Kyrgyz-accented Russian are indexical of migrant workers from Central Asia. Indeed, when I first watched this episode with my host family in 2015, the children shrieked with laughter at this unexpected turn and we all commented on how surprised we were that Fedya was a nelegal.

At the same time as *Kukhnia* jokes about raciolinguistic assumptions, the show demonstrates the precarity of working in Russia for non-ethnic Russians from Central Asia and the Caucasus. After a torturous, drawn out encounter with the FMS chief, similar to Landa's one with Shosanna as an adult in the French restaurant in *Inglorious Basterds*, Ainura gets away and it's unclear why. In *Inglorious Basterds*, Landa never realizes that Emmanuelle is the Jewish Shosanna whose family he killed earlier. In the *Kukhnia* episode, the FMS chief suggests that the strudel saved her, but perhaps it was her company and her powerless position as a female migrant worker, forced to listen to a white, Russian official talk. The chief tells her kindly to make sure that her documents are in order and she smiles, relieved. However, as Madeleine Reeves (2013) has argued, even having the right documents can't protect those of non-Slavic appearance from heightened scrutiny and becoming the targets for corruption schemes. Jason De León (2015) and Reeves (2013) have demonstrated how migrants take great care to mask their race and citizenship status by preparing for the police's and border guards' assumptions about so-called "illegals." Just as Ainura and Fedya dress as restaurant patrons, Central

Asians memorize the Moscow metro to demonstrate to police they're local (Reeves 2013) and migrants carry less water and food supplies to appear as hikers rather than border-crossers in the Sonoran desert (De León 2015; De León, Gokee, and Schubert 2015).

*Kukhnia's* allusion to *Inglorious Basterds* is more complicated to interpret. Having never seen the film until audience members pointed out the similarities at the American Anthropological Association's annual meeting in November 2018, my host family and I did not pick up on the comparison the show made between the FMS chief and Hans Landa. By translating and adapting Landa's lines for the FMS chief is *Kukhnia* suggesting that the FMS is like the Nazis? If so, the show does so cautiously; one would have to have seen *Inglorious Basterds* to draw the comparison. In their work on Russian state-owned media during Putin's presidencies, Tolz and Teper (2018) have demonstrated the degree of independence TV channels enjoy. STS aired this episode of *Kukhnia* on November 12, 2012 during the 2012–2013 anti-migrant campaign Tolz and Teper analyze. Tolz and Teper argue that the campaign was "entirely media-generated." While Kremlin officials argued that migration was good for the Russian economy, news coverage utilized European tropes of migrants as dangerous to the white, Christian civilization to which Russia belonged (Tolz and Teper 2018, 217, 222; see also Hutchings and Tolz 2015). Tolz and Teper also emphasize how producers adapt global pop culture for Russian audiences. This episode of *Kukhnia* exhibits this adaptation well. Very few Russians had likely seen *Inglorious Basterds* and the episode was humorous without understanding the allusion. At the same time, the writers were able to make an insider's joke for those who had seen the film, likening the FMS to the Nazis. Although the FMS chief shows greater compassion than Landa, the suggestion that Russia's migration

police share similarities with the Nazis continues throughout the episode even in the subtle detail of Fedya's arrest as Wagner's composition plays in the background.

### Conclusion

Although fictional, *Kukhnia's* comedic exploration of race and migration status reflected the experiences of many immigrants, and non-Russian minorities in Russia, whom I met during fieldwork. As I explored above, Yonu, Kamil, and Farrukh faced discrimination and were read as foreigners and sometimes nelegaly because of raciolinguistic signs that indexed them as Central Asian. Throughout my fieldwork, I heard and witnessed examples of how people's non-Russian appearance informed their actions and subjected them to discrimination.

For example, when I lived in a *kommunalka* in St. Petersburg in 2015, many of my neighbors were immigrants, Ukrainian refugees living with family, Georgians, and Azeris. While the white Ukrainians "passed" as Russian, the Georgians and Azeris were more aware of their non-Russian features and, therefore, more attentive to registration laws. Although I often passed as ethnic Russian, probably because of my white skin, blue eyes, and light brown hair, my husband, Dan, was sometimes stopped by the police in Moscow. Dan's Sicilian and Jewish heritage made him appear native to Central Asia or the Caucasus, and he was often assumed to be Turkish, Azeri, and Georgian by locals, who in Kazakhstan spoke Turkish to him and in Georgia, Georgian. His features also mapped onto place (Lemon 2000). We lived near Prospekt Mira, the metro station closest to the Moscow's main mosque. Days after the metro bombing in St. Petersburg in April 2017, our Russian neighbor stopped me in the hallway to ask where we were from. She assumed I was Finnish then asked suspiciously, "Where is the *chernyi* (black) you live

with from? The Caucasus?" Meanwhile, in the tunnels outside of Prospekt Mira and the Leningrad train station, I saw police stopping men who appeared to be Central Asian, timing their heightened presence with prayers at the mosque. While police occasionally profiled Dan as "black" or Muslim, he was still privileged. As soon as he withdrew his dark blue passport from his pocket, the police would apologize, rarely even opening the American passport to check his visa, registration, and migration card.

Although the compatriots program may define compatriot broadly to include any Russian-speaker, in practice, most Russians did not equate Russian citizenship with Russian language. They continued to map ethnicity onto people's physical appearance and seek linguistic and contextual signs to determine who was and was not Russian. However, it was not necessarily racial features alone that marked someone as "foreign" or other as Zhenya's experience demonstrates. Rather, it was a combination of raciolinguistic features, including one's clothing and family size as visual markers and the way one spoke Russian, that informed assumptions about citizenship. *Kukhnia's* episode on the FMS raid plays with these assumptions by revealing Fedya as just as illegal as Ainura.

## CHAPTER 5

### “YEAST FOR THE RUSSIAN LAND”:

#### AUTHENTICITY AND PRIMOR’E’S OLD BELIEVERS

In 2009, Old Believer families from South America began immigrating to Primorskii krai through the Resettlement of Compatriots Program. Religiously conservative, they had fled to Siberia and the Far East centuries earlier and left Russia altogether in the 1920s, escaping first to China and then to the United States, Australia, and South America. But with the Soviet Union’s collapse and the introduction of the compatriots program in 2006, Russia had again become appealing. Today, approximately 100 Old Believers, all from South America, live in Dersu, a small village in the Krasnoarmeiskii region of northern Primorskii krai.<sup>1</sup> Dressed in bright, traditional clothing and the men with long beards to their chests, the Old Believers stand out in Primor’e. Their “exotic” appearance and lifestyle have become the subjects of numerous TV broadcasts, documentaries, and newspaper articles across Russia.

I begin this chapter with one such popular video that portrayed the lives of Primorskii krai’s Old Believers (RT 2017). In the summer of 2017, the state-owned TV network RT (previously called Russia Today) released a short video about the group. Originally designed as a Russian counterpart to international media like the BBC and Al Jazeera, RT broadcasts in Russian, Arabic, Spanish, English, Dutch, and French. The

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<sup>1</sup> The village of Dersu’s original name was Lauliu, a Chinese name that reflected the village’s origins. After Soviet and Chinese forces clashed during the Damansky conflict in 1969, Soviet officials renamed many of Primorskii krai’s towns. Lauliu became Dersu, named after Dersu Uzala, a Nanai hunter and guide to the famous Russian ethnographer, Vladimir Arsenyev. Arsenyev named his 1923 memoir after Dersu Uzala, and there were two Soviet film adaptations of the memoir, featuring Dersu Uzala as a prominent character.

company positions itself as “counter-hegemonic” to the West, and its producers are adept at circulating its stories across multiple platforms and through the use of social media (Hutchings et al. 2015; Miazhevich 2018). The video about the Old Believers was one such example. Posted on Facebook, friends and groups shared the video, and it reappeared on compatriots forums and email listservs that I had joined throughout the summer.<sup>2</sup>

Even without a command of English, the video is easy to understand since the Old Believers speak in Russian with English subtitles. The video depicts daily life in Dersu. Children recite prayers in Old Church Slavonic, men load potatoes onto a truck, and women bake bread in stone ovens and embroider vibrant, floral patterns. It is a sunny, summer day, and the viewer is struck by the lush, green landscape and open fields set against the dark mountains of pine and birch trees in the distance. Captions narrate the images, emphasizing the importance of traditions for Old Believers and depicting their culture as lost in time. The title of the video itself signals this position, “Russian ‘Old Believers’ Still Live as Though It Is the 17th Century,” and the 17th century is repeated throughout the video (“These people teach kids like they did in the 17th century”).

As captions freeze the lifestyles of the Old Believers in the past, the footage of how the Old Believers dress and live remind the viewer of romanticized images of traditional, rural Russian culture and spirituality (*dukhovnost'*). “The community’s worst fear is mingling with modern day civilization,” the captions tell us, paired with a shot of

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<sup>2</sup> The video is available on Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/RTDocumentary/videos/1476879535701984/>, last accessed December 7, 2018.

Ulyan Murachev, who I met earlier that spring in 2017, and his family, walking across a field. “But despite the various restrictions, some traces of the Old Believers’ previous lives can be found in their households,” the video continues as men use machetes brought with them from South America to cut grass. In the last shot, the captions tell us, “Old Believers know they don’t keep up with the times” as a group of families in a kitchen sing. The camera zooms in on the men’s faces as they sing, moving across the room to stop and focus on a woman, smiling while she places a baby into a swinging cradle. “But they treasure their lifestyle as any deviation from the canon shows spiritual weakness,” the captions read as the screen fades out and we are left with the voices of the families singing.

The RT documentary – its tone, imagery, and underlying argument – was reflective of how Russian media has presented the Old Believers in news articles and YouTube videos as well as how some NGO activists and government officials have romanticized them in roundtables I attended in Moscow. The video combined images of objects and behaviors emblematic of traditional Russian culture – bright colored fabric, traditional embroidery, the kitchen, farming, and a rural lifestyle. In these representations, the Old Believers were at once quintessentially Russian while also exotic, having fled Soviet power to South America then back to the wild, isolated Far East. The images and narratives idealized not only the Old Believers but also the rural, Russian landscape in which they inhabit. The Old Believers’ language of return and the idea of rural Russianness, which they evoked, have enamored policymakers and compatriots activists. The Old Believer supporters I met in Moscow envisioned a mass migration of Old Believers from South America to Russia. They framed the Old Believers’ return as not only a practical solution to Russia’s demographic crisis but also a

moral one. As an example to others, advocates believed that the Old Believers' essential Russianness had the potential to erase the bad habits of Soviet Russians and even purify Russian society. Advocates' romanticization of the group built on Russian nationalist constructions of the rural, Russian peasant as authentic and counter to the Soviet past (Brudny 2000; Parts 2018). Their rhetoric also echoed early ideas of the "Russian World" in which intellectuals argued that dialogue with Russian compatriots, who had fled the Soviet Union, would revitalize Russian society (Suslov 2018).

In contrast to the sunny, warm imagery of the Old Believers in the RT video, when my partner Dan and I traveled to meet the Old Believers in northern Primorskii krai, the landscape wasn't so inviting. It was March, cold and muddy. On our way north from Vladivostok to Dersu, we crossed through small towns with buildings in various states of repair. Some were small, wooden houses with bright-colored shutters and peeling paint. Others were gray and tan, concrete blocks of apartment buildings with pastel, corrugated metal balconies. People's homes were shabby but well-loved and resourcefully maintained with sheets of plywood covering weathered patches and holes. Where the road split, we drove by a green sign with yellow sheaves of wheat for the "Khvalynsk kolkhoz," a now closed, Soviet collective farm. Later, we passed what appeared to be a fortress in the distance, a castle surrounded by a beige wall. Closer, we realized it was a cement factory that pumped smoke into the gray sky. Most of the time though, we drove by fields of dark earth, patches of snow, and tall grass, browned and reddened by the sun. The landscape was pretty – the fields, trees, and mountains – but life also seemed hard.

The next morning, guided by Fyodor, a Primorskii krai official and our local host, we met some of the Old Believers in Roshchino, a small town across the river from

Dersu. While I had planned to visit them in Dersu, I was too late. The river was already high, churning from the melting snow, and locals advised us not to attempt to cross by raft, the only means available. Instead, I met one of the families in Roshchino, where they sold milk, tvorog (a thicker version of cottage cheese), and butter. Fyodor, Dan, and I pulled into a farming and gardening supplies store. Next to a blue car stood five people – three young girls and an older woman in skirts to their ankles and a man with a long, red beard, whom I recognized as Efrem. I had met him the week before in Vladivostok at a meeting about the Far Eastern Hectare Program.

I was nervous getting out of the car, wishing that I could speak alone with Efrem, rather than in Fyodor's presence. However, Fyodor was already out of the car, bounding towards Efrem, hand extended to greet the family. When Dan and I approached, the family smiled, and I introduced Dan. As we chatted, Dan and Efrem switched to Spanish. Ksenia, Efrem's wife, joined in, while Fyodor and I observed, unable to participate. Fyodor beamed though as if proud of Efrem and Ksenia's knowledge of another language. The three girls, Efrem and Ksenia's daughters we learned, while initially curious, wandered away, losing interest. Though my Spanish wasn't good, I could follow the conversation and heard Efrem and Dan reminiscing about traveling around the Amazon. Efrem talked about how much they missed the people and the food of South America. He said the produce had been much better than what they had in Russia. My mind wandered as I reflected on this odd moment of transnationalism – we stood in a small, freezing Russian village as an American man and two Russian Bolivians spoke in Spanish to one another nostalgically of South America.

Just then, I returned to the scene as I heard Efrem say something about Evo Morales, the president of Bolivia. Wanting to clarify but unable to in Spanish, I asked in Russian why they had decided to move. Fyodor's attention returned too.

"They started to bother us (*trogat' nas*). They wanted our children to go to school. The most important thing for us is our faith. When one hurts our faith (*trogaesh' nashu veru*), then we have to leave (*nado uekhat'*)," Efrem replied.

Before I could inquire further, a man in sunglasses and a black, leather cap with ear muffs interrupted us, shaking hands with the men in our circle. "Are you Lauren?" he asked, turning towards me. "I'm Aleksandr. We spoke on the phone." Aleksandr was the local head of the nearby nature preserve, and we had spoken a few weeks earlier as I planned my trip. As our conversation strayed, I sensed that Fyodor, our host, wanted us to move on and continue to Glubinnoe, our next stop. Though only 50 miles away, it was two hours by car. I thanked Efrem and told him that I hoped I could visit him sometime soon in the summer. As the men again shook hands, Fyodor asked Efrem and Ksenia, "Do you want to go back?" He meant to South America.

"There isn't enough money! (*Deneg ne khvatilo*)" exclaimed Efrem, laughing. "No, we plan to remain in our motherland (*na rodine*)."

While the RT video romanticized the Old Believers and the Far Eastern Russian landscape, my own experiences in rural Primorskii krai were more complicated. Primorskii krai, while beautiful and unique, faced many challenges, including outmigration, poverty, and alcoholism. I, too, often found myself in awe—of the teal sea and nearby islands of Vladivostok, and inland of the tall, thin birch trees, white against the golden fields and thicker, darker pines in the distance. It was hard not to exoticize a region so different from any other part of Russia to which I had been. But then, there

was also the jarring human industry of Vladivostok's busy port and the half-finished high rises scattered throughout the city, signaling erratic and often unsuccessful development. On day adventures outside the city, my friends and I came across abandoned collective farms and villages, one of which left only to a lone dog and soldier who stood watch. In December 2017, the media reported that dozens had died in Siberia from drinking bath lotion that contained alcohol because it was cheaper than vodka. Our hosts in Dal'nerechensk, where we stayed while visiting the Old Believers and Ukrainians in the region, told us that alcoholism and outmigration were the biggest threats to their communities. And as Fyodor told us, just an hour before we met Efrem in Roshchino, he had to turn many compatriots program applicants away because he knew there weren't any jobs for them in northern Primorskii krai.

This chapter investigates the unique case of the Old Believers against a backdrop of renewed patriotism in Russia and fears of demographic crisis. Why does the Russian government hope to attract Old Believers from South America to immigrate to Russia? What does the group symbolize? And how have they become among the most desired of immigrant groups? I draw on my fieldnotes from roundtables I attended about Old Believers in Vladivostok and Moscow, conversations about Old Believers I had in other settings, and Russian news coverage of their "return." I examine two issues that debates about Primor'e's Old Believers revealed about the compatriots program.

First, the conversations at the roundtables demonstrated factions within compatriots program's supporters as different groups debated whether the program should be one of repatriation or of resettlement. Like the compatriots program as a whole, the case of the Old Believers has attracted the interests of a diverse group of people, including supporters of the Russian World concept and Russian liberals. United

by an interest in addressing Russia's demographic crisis and helping Russian-speakers broadly defined abroad, these groups came together in the debates I observed in 2017. In this chapter, I examine their common causes and points of fracture.

Second, the discussions highlight that although the Old Believers, like the refugees from Ukraine, occupy a privileged position within the compatriots program, this position is also an ambiguous one. While proponents of the compatriots program romanticize the Old Believers and the group has attracted a great deal of coverage, they remain enigmatic. Even though beloved, they are also exoticized and essentialized as authentic Russians. Representations of the Old Believers as those who do not drink, smoke, or lie and those who have preserved an authentic Russian culture mask who the Old Believers really are. As a result, we never really understand who they are as individuals, what they really want from the compatriots program, and whether the program will allow them to realize their goals.

In this chapter, I first provide background information on Primor'e's Old Believers, including their flight and return to Primorskii krai and how I met them. In the second section, I examine how some Russians have romanticized the group, presenting them as authentic, pre-Soviet Russians, whose traditional lifestyles and rural culture will set positive examples for contemporary post-Soviet, urban Russian society. However, as I also note, not all of those involved in the compatriots program, favored the Old Believers. In the third section, I analyze a conflict that arose at one roundtable I attended, revealing tensions inherent in the compatriots program's implementation. In the fourth and fifth sections, I turn to questions about motives: on the part of the government—whose dream is it for the Old Believers to return? For the Old Believers themselves—what do they want from the compatriots program? Throughout the chapter, I draw on a

combination of news analysis and participant observation I conducted at a series of meetings I attended in Moscow in the spring of 2017 on Old Believer issues and the demographic crisis in the Far East.

## **Background**

### **Fleeing the State**

In 1653, Patriarch Nikon introduced a series of reforms to the Russian Orthodox Church that led to a schism (*raskol*). While the changes in practices may seem minor today, at the time they were significant to many of the Russian population, who viewed these rituals as symbolic of their faith (Rogers 2009).<sup>3</sup> With Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich's support, the church and state persecuted dissenters, many of whom were ordinary people, torturing and executing them and destroying their churches (Kozhurin 2014). The dissenters, or the Old Believers (*starovery*, "Old Faith" or *starobriadtsy*, "Old Beards"), fled western Russia, heading north to the Arctic, east to Siberia, and eventually to the Far East in the mid-1800s. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, communities of Old Believers lived in the Far East, far from the Russian state and society.

Once the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, the Old Believers again faced persecution for their faith. In the 1920s and 1930s, they fled in large numbers to China. Those from Priamur'e (now the region of Amurskaya oblast) and Primor'e moved to Manchuria, where they formed a large community near Kharbin. But after World War II, the Soviet Red Army arrested many of the Old Believer men in Manchuria and sent

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<sup>3</sup> Such changes included the number of fingers used to cross oneself (two rather than three), the spelling of Jesus' name, and the direction of the procession (clockwise rather than counterclockwise).

them to forced labor camps, and in 1949, Chinese communists targeted those remaining as class enemies. The Old Believers fled to Hong Kong and, from there, with the help of the Red Cross, United Nations, Tolstoy Fund, and World Council of Churches, to Australia, New Zealand, the United States (Alaska and Oregon), Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Bolivia (Argudiaeva 2013; Aleshkovskii 2017). So far, it is only the Old Believers who moved to South America in the 1950s and 1960s, who have returned to Russia in large numbers.

In South America, the Brazilian, Bolivian, and Uruguayan governments accepted the Old Believers and resettled them in rural areas, often providing them with land. Since then, the Old Believers have become successful farmers, growing rice, corn, wheat, bananas, pineapple, soy, and sunflowers. Unlike many other Russian emigrant communities elsewhere, the Old Believers in South America have maintained Russian language across several generations, continuing to speak the language at home and in their community (Argudiaeva 2013; Riazantsev and Grebeniuk 2014). They live primarily in isolation from other groups, though they send their children to local schools as required by law. Although they forbid TV, the Internet, and literature, they use modern technology, such as tractors, refrigerators, and cars and have electricity in their homes (Argudiaeva 2013). It is unclear how many Old Believers live in South America, but the Russian government estimates the population to be between 3,000 and 5,000.<sup>4</sup> The largest population is in Bolivia, where there were approximately 2,000 Old Believers in 2005 (Argudiaeva 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> I obtained this estimate from government officials at a roundtable discussion on Old Believers that I attended in Moscow in June 2017.

## Return to the Historic Homeland

Beginning in 2009, Old Believer families began immigrating from South America to Primorskii krai. As I will analyze below, Primor'e's Old Believers have described their decision to immigrate to Russia as compelled by their desire to return to their homeland. But they are also fleeing the communist state yet again. When I met with one family in Roshchino in northern Primorskii krai in March 2017, they explained how it was becoming more difficult to live and farm in Bolivia because of the state. They complained that the state was intervening and forcing their children to attend school and seizing their land to redistribute to indigenous peoples.

Until the mid-2000s, the Old Believers had few issues with the governments in South America. However, with Evo Morales' election to the Bolivian presidency in 2006, representing a shift in larger regional politics towards the Left, relations have soured. Morales has advocated for indigenous rights, including the return of land to indigenous peoples. Bolivia's Old Believers have interpreted his anti-racism campaign as discriminatory towards "white people (*protiv belykh liudei*)" as they told me in March 2017 (see also Argudieva 2013). Meanwhile, with the start of the Resettlement of Compatriots Program in 2006, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has sent emissaries to meet with compatriots and has organized compatriot conferences across the world, including two in Brazil and Uruguay. Persuaded by promises of citizenship, housing, land, and equipment at these conferences, the first family of Old Believers, the Kilins from Uruguay, "returned" to Primorskii krai through the compatriots program in 2009. In 2010 and 2011, they were followed by the families of six brothers – Ulyan, Elisei, Terentii, Evfimii, Ivan, and Nikolai Murachev – and in 2015, the Reutovs (Iosef), all from Bolivia. Today, there are approximately 100 Old Believers in Primor'e, with the

majority living in Dersu (the Murachevs) in northern Primorskii krai, near the border of Khabarovskii krai. The Reutovs live in Lyubitovka in the more centrally located Dal'nerechensk region, also in northern Primorskii krai.

The complicated relationship the Old Believers have with the state and local populations has continued in Primor'e. When the Kilins arrived in 2009, they settled in Dersu, where their ancestors had farmed 100 years earlier. At the time though, Dersu (formerly Lauliu in Soviet times), located in the Krasnoarmeiskii region of Primorskii krai, was not a participating region of the compatriots program. As a result, the Kilins did not join the program until later in 2012 when krai officials revised the program to include Dersu on their behalf, so the Kilins could get Russian citizenship.

In 2010, Ulyan Murachev and his brothers expressed interest in moving to Primorskii krai at a conference they attended in Montevideo, Uruguay. The Murachevs wanted to settle in Edinka, near the coast of Primorskii krai, to fish. However, like Dersu, Edinka was not a participating region. The krai administration proposed Korfovka in the centrally located Ussuriysk region instead and to sweeten the deal, they promised free land and housing. The local (and federal) government's willingness to adapt the compatriots program for the Old Believers' specific needs reflected the privileged position the group has occupied in the "Russian World" (*Russkii mir*) circle since 2009. In 2012, as part of a major revamping of the compatriots program, officials removed the previous requirement that applicants must find a job before moving to Russia and added farmers to the list of desired professions (Zabneva 2013). The Murachevs accepted the Primorskii krai administration's offer and in September 2010, eight families arrived through the program, totaling 44 people. Locals and state officials greeted them warmly, and Russian journalists flocked to Ussuriysk to document the Old

Believers' return to the homeland. At first, everything went well. The Murachevs lived in the housing provided to them by the krai, the barracks and five-story homes of a former military encampment, and they farmed, selling their produce locally.

However, soon conflict arose between the Murachevs and local government officials over three issues: primary education for children, the military draft, and housing. Russian law requires that all children attend state-approved schools and that men over the age of 18 serve in the military, both issues that the Old Believer families opposed for religious reasons. The krai again made an exception, allowing the children to study through distance programs, and delayed a decision about the military draft until the Murachevs received citizenship. The third issue, housing, was related to an unfulfilled promise by local officials to help the Murachevs build 10 single-family homes, more isolated from the village of Korfovka (Argudiaeva 2013, 129–31). When Ulyan Murachev followed up with local officials about the promise and asked for a copy of the agreement, they refused. Given their past experiences of oppression by the Russian state, Old Believers were understandably mistrustful of officials. Anxious to live more independently and more isolated from civilization, the Murachevs suddenly joined the Kilins in Dersu in the spring of 2012 after they received citizenship through the recent changes made to the compatriots program. Since then, all newly arrived Old Believer families to Primorskii krai, with the exception of the Reutovs who live in the Dal'nerechensk region, have moved to Dersu. Outside of Primorskii krai, there is a large population of Old Believers in Amurskaya oblast, another region of the Far East.

Dersu is certainly more isolated than Korfovka. It is separated from the neighboring village, Roshchino, by the Bol'shaya Ussurka River that floods for much of the year. Indeed, when I met Efrem and Ksenia in March 2017, I was already too late to

cross and visit the community in Dersu. Since their move to Dersu, conflicts have only escalated. Most of Dersu is a state-protected forest, also inhabited by members of the Udege, a group indigenous to the region, who have federally unrecognized claims to the forest. Conflict has arisen between the Old Believers, Udege, and other locals, leading to violence, theft, and most recently a series of acts of arson in the spring of 2017. Moscow officials intervened on behalf of the Old Believers, sowing additional animosity in the community as locals were jealous of the support the Old Believers received, who they saw as newcomers. In addition, by stepping in on behalf of the Old Believers, Moscow had also alienated the Primorskii krai administration, who resented the interference.

### **Conflict and Moscow's Intervention**

In a longform article, published not coincidentally a day before a major event in Moscow on the same subject, Mitya Aleshkovskii (2017) described the myth-like tale of how Primor'e's Old Believers' first captured the attention of Moscow elite. In 2011, Aleksey Kilin, one of the first Old Believers to arrive in Primor'e, was assaulted and robbed outside of Dal'nerechensk, a small city in northern Primorskii krai. When the local police failed to help him, he called Larisa Belobrova, the wife of Sergei Dar'kin, the then governor of Primorskii krai. Dar'kin was hosting Igor Shuvalov, Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister, in Vladivostok. That very night, Dar'kin sent his assistant 450 kilometers to Dersu to meet with the Old Believers to discuss their issues.<sup>5</sup> Shuvalov met

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that regional governors are not elected locally but appointed by the Russian president. As a result, they do not always have strong ties to the region in which they govern. Dar'kin and Milushevskii, Primorskii krai's last two governors, were born in the Far East but grew up, studied, and lived in Moscow until Putin appointed them as governor. Given Vladivostok's recent prominence, as the host of the 2012 APEC summit, Primor'e's governors have especially strong ties to the Kremlin.

with Kilin in Vladivostok and introduced him to his boss, who just happened to be in town, Vladimir Putin. This fateful meeting between Kilin and Putin raised the Old Believers' issues to the national level and since then a special relationship has formed between Moscow and the South American Old Believers. Putin and the governors of Primorskii krai, Dar'kin and later Vladimir Milushevski, have gifted the Old Believers tractors, cattle, horses, and a telephone (Vasil'ev 2017b; Aleshkovskii 2017). In May 2017, Putin met Cornelius, the Metropolitan of the Old Believer Church, the first time a Russian leader had met with an Old Believer leader in 350 years. During their visit, Cornelius discussed the Old Believers' issues in Primorskii krai. A month later, the Agency for the Development of the Human Capital of the Far East (ADHC), a government-funded NGO that carries out the hectare program, created a special division just for dealing with Old Believer issues.

Although the federal government was trying to help the Old Believers, its intervention has pitted the Old Believers against their neighbors and the local krai administrators. Each major visit from Moscow has been followed by what the Old Believers have interpreted as an act of retaliation by locals. Soon after Kilin's meeting with Putin in 2011, someone set fire to his house in Dersu. He and his family moved to Amurskaya oblast, where a particularly eager mayor, Robert Kaminsky, who I feature later, built a village in Svobodny just for Old Believers. Although the Old Believers have built new houses and received land from the Far Eastern Hectare Program, Svobodny's locals have continued to struggle and, like the locals of Dersu, were resentful of the help the government has offered to newcomers. "They shouldn't give the money for [newcomers]... They should give it to those of us who stayed here," a local woman told

a Radio Free Europe journalist in February 2018 after Putin's visit to Svobodny and to the Old Believers (Coalson 2018).

In Primor'e, jealousy and mistrust between locals and Old Believers boiled over yet again during my fieldwork. After the governor of Primorskii krai, Miklushevskii, brought the Old Believers a horse and telephone in May 2017, two more houses were burned down, and state veterinarians told the Old Believers that their cows had leukemia and their entire herd had to be killed. Officials thought the arson was tied to local drug lords, who were growing hemp illegally in Dersu until the Old Believers arrived and destroyed the fields, or to the Old Believers' neighbors, who were jealous of them. However, the Murachevs think that the arson was a conspiracy by the national park to destroy their property, so that they could use their land to build a hotel for tourists to visit (Vasil'ev 2017b; Aleshkovskii 2017). When I last spoke with officials in Moscow in June 2017, they were confident that they had identified the culprit and would make an arrest soon, ending the violence. I remained doubtful.

The attention the Old Believers have received from Moscow reflects the disconnect between Moscow and the Far East. Primorskii krai administrators have become more disenchanted with the Old Believers, complaining about their numerous demands of the government yet unwillingness to follow Russian law. For example, when I asked Marina Ivanovna, the Primorskii krai official who has appeared in previous chapters, about the Old Believers, she sighed and sat back in her chair:

Well, they all live there, let's say. ... But they, understand, aren't... People are stra...[she starts to say strange but stops herself]. Well, they are all a kind of community, let's say. Well, it's certainly difficult with them as I understand. Now some of them have left for somewhere, someone didn't build something. That they hoped for something I understand, that they would get land, etc. But it doesn't always work out like that.

Marina Ivanovna had spoken confidently and without hesitation earlier in our conversation about the refugees from Ukraine and the large Central Asian and Caucasian diasporas. However, when our conversation shifted to talk about the Old Believers' participation in the compatriots program, she became more careful, hesitating and pausing often as she expressed the issues the administration had with the Old Believers. Her reluctance was similar to that of other officials I met in Primorskii krai.

In Moscow though, officials and compatriots program advocates have remained enthusiastic about the Old Believers' return. In the spring of 2017, the Ministry for the Development of the Far East, in partnership with other governmental agencies and the Orthodox Church, organized a series of roundtable events and commissioned several studies to address Old Believer problems in Primorskii krai. Through my contacts with the Old Believer community and ADHC, I attended these events and spoke with various participants throughout the spring and early summer. The remainder of this chapter is based on my participant observation as I sought to understand the question of why the Russian government was courting Old Believers so intensely, a group that at first glance seemed difficult to work with and unlikely to integrate with the rest of Russian society.

Moscow's interests in the Old Believers and Primorskii krai officials' hesitancy reflected tensions between central and regional authorities. As has been historically the case, decisions about the Far East continue to be made in Moscow, often by those who have little connection to the region yet are enamored by romanticized visions of the eastern frontier and rural Russian culture. In this case, a nexus of government agencies, the Orthodox Church, Russian culture and language institutes and organizations, and human rights activists and journalists, devoted to protecting Russian compatriots, met in hopes of resolving the demographic crisis that "threatened" the Far East. They saw the

Old Believers as a solution to fears they had about population decline as ethnic Russians moved west, immigrants from Central Asia replaced them, and the population of neighboring China continued to grow.

Fears of China pervaded Russian discourse, even though scholars like Ivan Zuenko (2015) have argued that although the Chinese population as a whole continues to increase, northeastern China's population, the region that borders Russia, does not. Locals in Primor'e I met didn't have the same fears about China as those in Moscow. Nita and Aleksey, who I introduced in chapter 1 and who lived in Dal'nerechensk on the border with China, only wished that it was easier to travel there and that their hometown would benefit more from the growing economy across the border. Many of my partner, Dan's, students at the university in Vladivostok studied English and Chinese and planned to move to China after they graduated for work or further study. Rather, concerns about China reflect a long history of exclusionist policies and racist rhetoric that extend back to Stalin's deportations of the Far East's Chinese and Korean populations in the 1930s and even earlier to Russian imperial policies of Chinese segregation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Glebov 2017). They also reveal global anxieties about racial and cultural differences (Billé and Urbansky 2018; Billé, Delaplace, and Humphrey 2012). These concerns are powerful mobilizers, fueling not only the rise of a new generation of the right into political office but also influencing everyday fears about immigration and demographic changes (De León 2015; Shoshan 2016; D. R. Holmes 2001; Grillo 2003; Stolcke 1995).

In the remainder of the chapter, I analyze my fieldnotes from discussions I attended in Moscow about Primor'e's Old Believers and Russia's demographic crisis. Before I do so though, I introduce how I became involved in the government-organized

roundtables in the spring of 2017. In March 2017, as I describe below, a group of Old Believers invited me to attend a meeting about the Far Eastern Hectare Program, a government policy that offers one hectare of land (2.47 acres) per Russian citizen. At the meeting, I met Dima, a young official from the Agency for the Development of the Human Capital of the Far East (ADHC).<sup>6</sup> Under the Ministry for Development of the Far East, ADHC carries out the Far Eastern Hectare Program as well as other initiatives to encourage people to move to the Far East, including services that help people find work and university programs. Through Dima and the Old Believers, I was invited to a series of meetings about the group in Moscow, providing me greater access to the institutions and people who supported the compatriots program as well as piquing my interest in the Russian World project.

### **“Snow White and the Seven Dwarves”**

In March 2017, a week before I traveled to northern Primorskii krai and met Efrem and Ksenia, I received an unexpected phone call. Aleksandr, the director of a nature preserve in northern Primorskii krai, had heard that I wanted to meet Primorskii krai’s Old Believers. A journalist had given him my phone number. Aleksandr told me that some of the Old Believer men would be in Vladivostok the very next day for a meeting about the Far Eastern Hectare Program. He then gave me the name of the head of Vladivostok’s local Old Believer community and told me that he would be waiting for me the next day at 5PM outside of Fresh Plaza, where the group would be meeting.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In Russian, *Agentstvo po razvitiuu chelovecheskogo kapitala na Dal’nem Vostoke*.

<sup>7</sup> The Vladivostok Old Believer community is not from South America but the descendants of those who remained in Russia during Soviet times.

The next day, I was late, delayed by the inevitable traffic from Russian Island to downtown Vladivostok. I hurried up the hill from the bus stop towards Fresh Plaza, a high rise with green-blue windows that reflected back the sea and Vladivostok's skyline. I had walked by Fresh Plaza hundreds of times, noticing the young, beautiful women in black mink fur coats, smoking outside. One of my friends worked for Samsung in the building, and I also knew that Deloitte, General Electric, and Kaspersky Lab had offices there. It seemed an unlikely spot to meet Russia's most exotic immigrant population – the Old Believers from South America.

Only a couple of minutes after 5PM, I entered the building and saw a group of men with long beards to their chests in winter coats, passing through the turnstile and walking towards the elevator. I assumed they were the group I was meeting. "Vyacheslav..." I called, my voice trailing off, hoping that someone would respond as I tried to remember my contact's patronymic. A middle-aged man, sunburned and tired, with a smaller beard, only a few inches below his chin, exclaimed, "You're late!" The elevator doors closed, and the group disappeared. I turned around, looking for someone to let me through to join them. Spotting a young woman at a desk, I approached her and told her that I was with the men who had just gone upstairs. Without glancing up from her phone, she ordered dispassionately, "Documents." I handed my passport to her, which she photocopied and gave back with a badge. Two more men waited at the elevator. Both were without beards, and I hesitated, wondering whether they were Old Believers. We entered the elevator together and ascended silently to the 14<sup>th</sup> floor.

Once upstairs, we exited and I saw a queue of men with long beards to their chest and below, waiting. I joined them and looked around. Down the hallway, I spotted a tall man, who the others seemed to gather around. Approaching him, I asked,

“Vyacheslav Vladimirovich?” (I had checked my notebook in the elevator). “Yes, Lara, we waited for you.” I apologized, explaining that I had been in traffic, but just then, a young, blonde woman in a tight, black dress interrupted us, asking us to follow her to the room. As we entered the office corridor, we passed a sign with a green lotus flower next to it for the Agency for the Development of Human Capital in the Far East (ADHC). The woman unlocked a room and, speaking to me, possibly because I was the only woman besides her and clearly not an Old Believer, invited us to sit down. Nervous, I responded that I was only an observer and didn’t want to take someone else’s seat. She led me to a chair by the window and told me that I could sit there. Together, we looked out the window. From the 14<sup>th</sup> floor, we had a stunning view of Vladivostok’s port – the red and white cranes moving cargo, the Golden Bridge stretching across the bay, and in the distance, Russian Island.

Vyacheslav entered the room, and I left the window to speak with him. He invited me to sit down next to him, and I started to tell him about my project on Russia’s Resettlement of Compatriots Program. As we talked, the men sat down around the table. With the exception of two, all of them had beards and wore clothing that reminded me of pictures of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian author, Lev Tolstoy. They wore long, brightly colored shirts that extended to their thighs and tied around their waists with a string belt. I asked Vyacheslav whether he knew Fyodor, the local Primorskii krai official near Dersu, where the Old Believers lived, who I had been trying to get in touch with. The man who I had seen earlier downstairs with the short red beard looked across the table at me. “You, I guess, are that girl he [Fyodor] called me about yesterday. Probably you want to meet with Ulyan. There he is,” he said, nodding towards a man on my left. Ulyan had dark, almost strawberry blonde, wavy hair with curls that framed his face.

Before I could introduce myself to Ulyan, their leader, two men in suits entered the room, introducing themselves and shaking hands with all of the men and smiling at me, the only woman. The men worked at ADHC's Vladivostok office. They apologized that their colleague, Dima, who was from Moscow's ADHC office, was stuck in traffic, coming from Russian Island. They would begin without him, taking notes on the problems the Old Believers faced with accessing the website for the hectare program and getting their free land.

Because I knew little about the meeting beforehand, I had trouble following the details of their conversation and I began to worry whether this governmental agency I had never heard of would mind my presence once they realized I was an American graduate student. After about 20 or 30 minutes, a younger man in a blue suit entered, introducing himself as Dima and shaking hands with the men around the room. When he reached me, he stopped. As the only woman among ten bearded men, I stuck out like "Snow White (*Belosnezhka*)" among "the seven dwarves (*sem' gnomov*)," as Dima would later joke in Moscow, retelling how we had met.<sup>8</sup>

"And who are you?" Dima asked. "Do you work here at the agency?"

"No, I'm a graduate student," I responded vaguely, hoping not to attract any more attention to myself. I was still not sure why I had been invited and wondered whether I was allowed to be there.

"Are you a compatriot, perhaps from the Baltic countries?" another official suggested.

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<sup>8</sup> *Gnom* also means gnome in Russian.

“No, I’m a graduate student from the US,” I responded, deciding it was best to be as transparent as possible. “I’m here at DVFU [the local university] on exchange this year to write my dissertation on the Resettlement of Compatriots Program.”

“We should talk after. I just came from DVFU. We’re opening a new center on demographic issues, and I’ll give you the contact information,” Dima replied. He jotted something down and returned to the Old Believers, beginning to ask them questions about the issues they faced.

As I observed how the officials and the South American, Russian Old Believers interacted, I analyzed the curious juxtaposition before me. The Old Believers’ conservative dress and preservation of pre-Soviet – and even pre-schism – Russian culture contrasted with the glamor and money of ADHC, where young, attractive women in expensive fur coats and men in suits worked, perched on a top floor, overlooking Vladivostok’s harbor. ADHC’s abundance of resources, within the network of compatriots program organizations, suggested the Far East’s importance to the Russian government. Dima’s joke that I was Snow White felt real – I had stumbled into this meeting, invited by the Old Believers but without any idea of whom we were meeting. Why had they invited me? And why had Dima allowed me to stay?

This fortuitous encounter led to a series of invitations that would greatly enrich my fieldwork, shifting the focus of my research to the infrastructure of the compatriots program and the political players involved in promoting it in Moscow. A week later, Dima invited me to attend a roundtable in April in Moscow entitled, “The Return of the Old Believers (*Vozvrashchenie staroverov*).” The group email included the addresses of Russian scholars studying the Old Believers and members of the Duma, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID), and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). My last name, Woodard,

though written in Russian as *Vudard*, was clearly foreign among those listed. Addressed as “Friends!” the email updated us on ADHC’s recent trip to the Far East and invited us to present at the conference in April. Dima wrote with excitement,

!!! Last Thursday Russian President V.V. Putin met with Metropolitan Cornelius. This is the first meeting of the head of the government with the Metropolitan of the ROOBC [Russian Orthodox Old Believer Church] since the schism of the Church. According to Metropolitan Cornelius’ secretary, V.V. Putin “promised to turn his attention to the issue of the resettlement of Old Believers to their homeland.” Have a good weekend!)<sup>9</sup>

Putin’s meeting with Cornelius was a meaningful victory for Dima as an Old Believer advocate. It signaled a greater interest – and the promise of increased resources – to attract Old Believers to the Far East.

Dima had specific hopes for my participation in the roundtable. He wanted me to present my research on the compatriots program and give an interview in English to RT about the program. I was in an unusual position at the meetings, not only because I was the sole foreigner but also because I had spent so much time studying the compatriots program in the Far East. While other Russian scholars had studied the program, their studies did not include an ethnographic component (see, for example, Grebeniuk 2009; Afonina 2013; Kolesov 2014; Riazantsev, Pis’mennaia, and Khramova 2015). It also seemed though that Dima wanted me to promote the compatriots program as an American researcher. I was reluctant to do so, aware that my Americanness would lend the program a certain credibility and fall into Russian media’s, and especially RT’s, larger narrative that Russia offered a life counter to that of the West.

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<sup>9</sup> The single end parenthesis, “)” or “)))))”, is a Russian “smiley face.”

At the end of April, I attended the meeting in Moscow after persuading Dima that I did not want to present and did not want to give RT an interview about my research. During a coffee break in which we enjoyed freshly baked Russian pies (*pirozhenki*), Dima retold the director of the Solzhenitsyn Home for Russians Abroad, a scholar from the Institute of CIS Countries, and an Old Believer who lived in Kaluga how we had met, joking how he had found “Snow White among the dwarves” (*Belosnezhka s gnomami*). I didn’t think that Dima’s reference to the Old Believers as dwarves or gnomes was meant offensively, and I didn’t perceive that the joke upset our audience. Everyone laughed, including the Old Believer.<sup>10</sup> Rather, the story centered on me, the young, American woman he had met in such an unlikely place – the Russian Far East. I think Dima’s simile was also an attempt to connect with me. Every time we saw one another, he greeted me first in English with a heavy Russian “kh” for “Hello,” before switching to Russian.

Dima’s likening of me to Snow White was perhaps more accurate than he realized. At these meetings in Moscow, I was excited to observe officials’ discussions and to ask them my questions during break. At the same time though, like Snow White, I was uneasy. As the only American at the meetings whose name appeared in English among the list of Russian ones, I felt out of place and in a constant state of anxiety that I would eat the poisonous apple someone might offer me. As tensions escalated between Russia and the United States over the 2016 presidential election, I sat in rooms surrounded by powerful figures, including representatives from the Ministry of Foreign

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<sup>10</sup> The Old Believer was also from Bolivia and his wife from Oregon. To reduce intermarriage, many families now arrange marriages with other Old Believer families from different continents. The family in Kaluga had originally moved from South America to the Far East. Disappointed with the conditions, they then moved to Kaluga a few years later.

Affairs, Ministry of International Affairs, Ministry for the Development of the Far East, the Russian World Foundation, and the Orthodox Church. Leonid Kalashnikov, Chairman of the Duma Committee on CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration, and Relations with Compatriots and sanctioned by the European Union and Canada in connection to Ukraine, attended the event in April and spoke about the Old Believers. During coffee breaks, people who had either denied or ignored my requests for interviews were suddenly available to me as I approached them with Dima or the Old Believer from Kaluga, with whom I exchanged contact information and planned a visit to his farm for October 2018. But I was also nervous, fearful that I had flown too close to the sun and towards those in power, who made decisions about the Old Believers and compatriots. How would they perceive my American presence or try to make use of it?

Back in Vladivostok, when Dima had asked me how Dan and I had liked the Far East, I had joked that Dan, whose family emigrated from Russia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and who could technically identify as a Russian compatriot, wanted to claim his Far Eastern hectare. We had laughed and Dima suggested that I could apply for our family with my Russian language skills. In Moscow, Dima retold that story as well, and I wondered whether he had taken my joke seriously, especially given that he wanted RT to interview me. Now, home in America while writing this dissertation, Dima continues to update me on ADHC's work with the Old Believers and invite me on "expeditions" with other Russian scholars to visit the Old Believers in the Far East and even to South America with them.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> His most recent email from the beginning of January 2019 included a link to a new, mobile-friendly website about the compatriots program, accessible in Russian and Spanish. Devoted to the Old Believers, the website walks one through the steps of applying to the compatriots program and the Far Eastern Hectare Program in greater detail than on the programs' other sites. The additional information and accessibility in Spanish make it easier for Old Believers

### Romanticizing the Old Believers as a Solution to Demographic Crisis

In June 2017, compatriot supporters from civil society, academia, and government agencies met again in Moscow at the Solzhenitsyn Home for Russians Abroad to discuss issues related to Old Believers in the Far East. Lidia Grafova, a journalist and compatriots rights advocate, organized the roundtable as a continuation of earlier discussions in April that had been led by the ADHC. Lidia had invited journalists from prominent news outlets; scholars, including Svetlana, a linguist who specialized in Old Believers; and government officials from the MVD and ADHC. After hearing my presentation on the compatriots program a week earlier at the Higher School of Economics, she had also invited me since I had met with the Old Believers in Primorskii krai and could offer “an anthropologist’s perspective,” she told me.

Compared to the large, conference-like meeting in April, I found the June roundtable much more comfortable. There were less than 20 participants and on the invitation I received, Lidia had invited my colleagues from the Higher School of Economics. Though they were unable to attend due to final exams, I felt more comfortable knowing that they, too, had been invited and we had common acquaintances. Although I was pressed to share my opinion during the meeting, I remained mostly silent, jotting fieldnotes and whispering clarifying questions to Dima. I was most eager to talk to Katya, from the MVD, about the program and request an interview with her, but she carefully avoided me during the breaks, speaking with me only briefly when I drank coffee with Dima. Katya’s reluctance to meet with me was likely because of internal office protocols. The MVD requires that its officers gain

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unfamiliar with Russian bureaucracy and for those who only have elementary proficiency in Russian.

permission from the Interior Minister to speak with foreigners, but it is sometimes possible to interact with the MVD informally as I had hoped to accomplish. The theme of our discussion in June was “a mass resettlement of Old Believers from America to the Far East – dream or reality?”

Our discussion that day revealed the tensions between the factions involved in the compatriots program. The compatriots program first emerged in such a setting as our roundtable in June – a joining of civil society, academia, and government. Contracted by the government, sociologists and economists designed the compatriots program to resolve two issues simultaneously: to address displacement of Russians and Russian-speakers in the now post-Soviet abroad, while also responding to Russia’s demographic crisis. Through the program, government employees have resettled compatriots strategically, selecting participants based on their profession and only allowing them to move to territories where they are considered “needed” (*nuzhny*). Therefore, conflict has arisen between those who have prioritized the first goal of the program, who have wanted the program to be one of repatriation (*repatriatsiia*), and those the second, who have seen the program as one of resettlement (*pereseleniia*).

Shevel (2011c) has argued that rather than setting off potentially divisive debates about who is included and excluded in notions of “*rossiianin*” (Russian citizen) or “*sootchestvoennik*” (compatriot), officials have institutionalized their ambiguity in Russia’s citizenship laws and compatriots policies. Through such intentional ambiguity, officials can pursue a range of policies while not committing to any particular one (Shevel 2011c; Suslov 2018). However, the uneasy partnership between advocates for repatriation and defenders of resettlement becomes tense in the case of the Old Believers. The issue of the Old Believers reveals these tensions as many of the South

American Old Believers would not have qualified for the program if administrators had not made exceptions. The program seeks to attract “highly qualified specialists” (*vysokokvalifitsirovannyi spetsialisty*), who have a higher education, and their specialization must be one needed by the region. As farmers with a primary education in Spanish, who struggled to fill out the forms in Russian, the Old Believers did not meet these minimum requirements. Yet as described above, they have fascinated Russian society and attracted the attention of Putin and Moscow. Therefore, they have been granted citizenship through exceptions, by the governor of Belgorodskaya oblast, a region that does not even participate in the program, and by the Primorskii krai and Amurskaya oblast administrations, who have allowed them to participate in the program even though they do not meet the professional requirements or had settled in a participating territory.

During the roundtable on Old Believers in June 2017, Lidia’s idea to discuss how to help the Old Believers return to the Far East through the program was met with resistance from those who saw the program as one of resettlement, mainly from Katya, who worked at the MVD and carried out the program at the national level. Throughout this chapter, I return to our discussion about whether there will (and should) be a mass movement of Old Believers from South America to Russia. The debate that arose highlighted the tensions between different groups involved in the program. On one side, we see those who have devoted their work to helping compatriots receive Russian citizenship. They include Lidia and Robert, the mayor of the city Svobodny in Amurskaya oblast who had built a village for Old Believers. Dima (from ADHC) was a more recent advocate of the Old Believers, and Svetlana, a linguistics scholar who specialized in Old Believers’ language practices in South America, offered a more

pragmatic perspective. Svetlana had perhaps spent the most time with the Old Believers, visiting them in South America several times and in the Far East. On the other side, Katya from the MVD was more reluctant and emphasized that the government must assess all applicants equally and not favor the Old Believers over other groups. Her stance aligned with the Primorskii krai administration's officials I had met, who believed the compatriots program's resources should be available to all who apply rather than channeled towards one group over another. For the most part, the journalists and I observed the conversation in June, occasionally interrupting to ask questions.

In this section, I analyze how compatriots advocates, like Lidia and Robert at the roundtable and journalists elsewhere in coverage of the program, romanticized the Old Believers, emphasizing their pre-Soviet, rural Russianness. These proponents viewed the Old Believers as not only a quantitative solution to Russia's demographic crisis (their large numbers would reverse outmigration) but also a qualitative one. They equated the Old Believers' so-called return to Russia as a reinvigoration of Russian society, arguing that the Old Believers would set a good example for others.

### **“A Prototype of the Russian World”**

Although the Old Believers experienced centuries of oppression in Russia, there has also been an enduring fascination with their isolated, rural lifestyle. Even Vladimir Arseniev, the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century explorer and ethnographer, beloved in the Far East, noted the essential Russianness the Old Believers evoked. On an expedition in 1907, he described an Old Believer settlement he found:

The Old Believer village Amagu consists of 18 households. The first settlers (seven families) migrated here in 1900 from the Daubikhe River. Living far in the mountains, the Old Believers have preserved the image of pure Russians (*oblik chistykh velikorossov*). The patriarchal family,

costumes, utensils, embroidered clothing, woodcarving, etc. – all that is reminiscent of ancient Rus (*vse eto napominalo drevniuiu Rus'*) (Arseniev quoted in Argudiaeva 2017, 14).

The Old Believers' traditions Arseniev described were similar to those in the RT video from the beginning of the chapter – their outfits, embroidery, woodcarving, etc.

Arseniev used old words tied to Russian ancestry, “ancient Rus” (*drevniaia Rus'*) and “pure (great) Russians” (*chistye velikorossy*), to imply that the Old Believers carried on the traditions of ancient Russians.

Today, more than a century later, Lidia and Robert at the roundtable used similar language to argue that the Old Believers were the descendants of a pre-Soviet, rural Russian culture. During his presentation on the Old Believer village Svobodny, Robert told us:

But we decided to do this project, and look, here we see a prototype of the Russian World (*chto takoi obrazets russkogo mira*). We all have this Soviet world, we are all Soviet people (*U nas zhe vse-takie sovetskii mir, my sovetskie liudi*). That is, we already have a lower percentage of Russianness (*russkosti*) in contrast to the Old Believers. And those who left, they completely preserved [their Russianness] – they speak informally (*oni govoriat na ty*), they use idioms.<sup>12</sup>

Robert continued to show us images of the village – men building cottages, farming the land, women and children milking cows, similar to those from the RT video. Later, he told us,

But I believe that these people are like yeast for the Russian land (*drozhki na russkoi zemle*). They will show another example of Russian life, a different conception, a different paradigm, a different picture of the world for us.

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<sup>12</sup> In my quotations from the June roundtable, I draw on my fieldnotes and the transcriptions Lidia shared with me afterwards. Unless otherwise noted, the quotes are from Lidia's transcriptions.

In his presentation and throughout the conversation, Robert argued that the very presence of the Old Believers would revitalize Russian society, “like yeast for the Russian land,” serving as a “prototype of the Russian World.” Robert suggested that Old Believers had preserved rural Russian traditions – authentic Russian culture – because they had fled Soviet power. Russians, who had remained in Russia, became “Soviet people” in a “Soviet world,” with a “lower percentage of Russianness (*russkosti*) in contrast to the Old Believers.” Robert did not specify what he meant by Soviet people, but the comparisons he and others made throughout our discussion implied that Soviet qualities were negative. In response to a journalist’s question about why the Old Believers should receive preferential treatment, Lidia became defensive, claiming, “In nine years of communicating with Old Believers, I still believe that Old Believers cannot lie (*ne umeiut vrat*).” The Old Believers’ honesty (and innocence – what you see is what you get) reappeared throughout conversations I observed about the group and in newspaper articles.

Robert, Arseniev, and even the RT video from the beginning of the chapter portrayed the Old Believers as an image (*oblik* for Arseniev), model, and prototype (*obrazets* for Robert) for contemporary Russian society. Robert at once drew on narratives of the Russian tragedy that lamented the Bolshevik revolution (Oushakine 2009), elements of the Russian World concept (Suslov 2018; Laruelle 2015b), and recent changes in popular culture that depicted provincial, rural Russian culture as a source of authenticity (Parts 2018). Robert argued that Russians today in Russia had a smaller percentage of Russianness in them than the Old Believers. His concerns echoed the kinds of histories of ethnotrauma that Serguei Oushakine examines in *The Patriotism of Despair* (2009). Through the genre of the Russian tragedy, Oushakine argues that

Russians navigated the upheavals of the Soviet Union's collapse by reassessing their history to unearth "the non-Russian character of its institutions" (2009, 85).<sup>13</sup> Robert's division of Russians in Russia as Soviets and Old Believers as Russians had elements of the Russian tragedy in it. Robert suggested that the Russians who remained in Russia during Soviet times became "Soviet people," whereas the Old Believers, by leaving, escaped and "completely preserved their Russianness."

With the Old Believers' return, Robert also suggested that they would revitalize Russian society, echoing key theorists (in this case, Lev Gumilev), whose work has influenced the Russian World concept (Oushakine 2009; Suslov 2018). Mikhail Suslov writes that in earlier iterations of the Russian World concept, roughly between 1996 and 2001, supporters viewed the Russian diaspora as "energy-rich," or in Gumilev's terms as "passionary (*passionarnost'*)." They argued that although Russians' energy in Russia had been depleted, members of the Russian diaspora abroad had preserved true Russian culture and would bring to Russia their vitality (Suslov 2018, 336). Rather than Russia asserting control over its sphere of influence, the diaspora, with its preservation of true Russian culture and vitality, would influence the homeland (Suslov 2018). In Robert's vision for the future of the Far East, Old Believers would revitalize the land and people, "like yeast for the Russian land."

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<sup>13</sup> Robert was not the only person I met during fieldwork who was interested in understanding how Soviet culture diverged from Russian culture. In Vladivostok, the husband of a friend became interested in my research because he believed we had mutual interests in anthropology. I soon realized that we had a different understanding of anthropology as he sent me links to articles and images that argued that the Soviet Union collapsed because its earliest leaders were Jewish. Though he cited different texts than the ones Oushakine (2009) analyzes in Altai, the texts shared an anti-Semitic interest in ethnos and sought to account for Russia's current problems by blaming Russian Jews. The combination of my disciplinary interests as an anthropologist and in Russia's so-called demographic crisis often attracted men similar to my friend's husband. I plan to explore these themes further in future projects.

In addition, throughout his presentation, like the RT video and Arseniev's description, Robert located the Old Believers in a *rural*, village past. *In the Search of the True Russia*, literary scholar Lyudmila Parts (2018) writes about a recent trend in Russian popular culture that began in the 1990s. While high culture and art-house films have depicted the provinces as stifling and backwards, in recent popular culture (Parts analyzes journalism, fiction, TV shows, and film) the provinces have been cast as the real Russia, evoking the Soviet era village prose writers who also promoted a rural, agricultural Russia (see Brudny 2000). We can find authentic Russian culture not in the westernized, commercialized Moscow but in the provinces. Parts draws on Bakhtin to argue that references of Russian authenticity are not just deep in the hinterlands but also deep in the past (2018, 141). The RT video of the Old Believers that I described at the beginning of this chapter portrays the Old Believers as in the depths of Primorskii krai and in the depths of the past, specifically the 17<sup>th</sup> century, supposedly untouched by modernity, except for their South American machetes. In his presentation of the Old Believers, as well as many of the articles I collected about the Old Believers, Roberts' obsession with the Old Believers' Russianness is because he sees them as authentic. In a kind of survivor guilt, Robert implies that unlike we, Soviets, who have lost Russian culture, the Old Believers have preserved it. The Old Believers' culture is authentic, tied to the past and to the countryside, untouched by urban, Soviet and post-Soviet society. 100 years before Robert, Arseniev also located the Old Believers in the past as "reminiscent of ancient Rus (*vse eto napominalo drevniuiu Rus'*)."

Besides their authenticity, the Old Believers had other positive traits often cited, including that they did not drink or smoke, that they spoke multiple languages (Russian, Old Church Slavonic, Spanish or Portuguese, and sometimes English), and

that they had large families. This last issue, large families, especially piqued the interest of those concerned about Russia's demographic crisis.

### **Many-Childrened, Russian Families**

"La-u-ren," Lidia pronounced my foreign name slowly, emphasizing what is often a silent "u." "Here is the demographic question – 67 grandchildren!" She smiled, pointing to the image of an elderly Old Believer surrounded by his family on the PowerPoint slide. Robert, who she had interrupted, exclaimed, "Maybe even more by now!" Lidia and Robert believed that the sheer size of Old Believer families would solve the Far East's demographic crisis. If Russian government officials could persuade Old Believers to emigrate from South America, they would replace the number of those who were leaving. Robert and his wife had also contributed to counteracting demographic decline in Amurskaya oblast as the "many-childrened" (*mnogodetnye*) parents of nine.

Excitement about family size appeared throughout news articles I collected about the Old Believers. For example, in a 2009 article about the same family, the Kilins, who Robert reported on above, journalist Natalia Ostrovskaya wrote, "The Kilins, Tatiana Ivanovna and Fyodor Savel'evich, like all Old Believers, have not merely big but enormous sized families. Seven children, five sons, 50 grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren!" Ostrovskaya's use of the exclamation point after listing the size of the family emphasized how unusual the Old Believers' large families were when on average in Russia, most families have one or two children.

Family size was a reoccurring interest throughout my fieldwork, taking on different meanings for different groups. For poor refugees from Ukraine and Muslim Central Asians, "many-childrened" was a negative quality of which officials

complained. Pushkaryov, the former head of the FMS for Primorskii krai and a local compatriots advocate, complained that labor migrants from Central Asia came to Primor'e "with their whole families and just give birth to more children" (Shipilova 2013). In Khabarovsk, another official, Vinogradov, claimed that most of the refugees from Ukraine that the krai had received were "many-childrened" (Nikol'skaia 2014b). However, in the case of the Old Believers from South America, Russian officials and compatriots enthusiasts spoke of the Old Believers' large family sizes with fascination and even excitement.

In June 2017, I presented my research on the compatriots program to a branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. Afterwards, a young man, Vanya, approached me to talk about the Old Believers. Vanya told me that he worked as an assistant for a professor at Moscow State University, who was writing a report for the Ministry of the Development of the Far East about the demographic potential of the Old Believers. He thought that I could contribute to the report. I hesitated, "Honestly, I don't understand why they want especially Old Believers in the Far East."

Vanya replied,

Well, they have a lot of children (*mnogodetnye*), big families. Maybe they don't write in Russian well, but they speak it fluently. They are preserving Russian language and culture, spirituality. A friend of my mom's, she's Spanish by citizenship, but she went there to Uruguay to teach their children Russian. There are a lot of Old Believers there.

"Yes, there are many. But they have a lot of problems and they don't adapt well," I said. "They live separately; they don't want to be a part of society. How can they solve the problems of the Far East?"

My skepticism didn't sway Vanya. "But they have a lot of children (*mnogodetnye*)," he emphasized, "The birth rate in Russia is low."

Vanya's repetition of the word "many-childrening" throughout our conversation was what most people focused on when they speak of the Old Believers at the events I attended in Moscow. Tasked with increasing the birth rate through various incentives, many viewed the Old Believers with their large families as a theoretically quick solution to solving the Far East's "demographic crisis."

As anthropologists have traced in other European countries, concerns about low birth rates are not unique to Russia. In Italy, Elizabeth Krause has argued that demographers have "juxtaposed" low Italian birth rates with narratives about the loss of Italian (and European) culture in the face of a growing, non-European immigrant population (2001, 595; Krause and Marchesi 2007; Marchesi 2012; Krause 2018). In fact, Russia and the US have the same fertility rate—1.8 births per woman—according to the World Bank (2018). However, during the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Russia underwent massive demographic changes. While the United States and European countries experienced a more gradual decline over decades, Russia's fertility rate dropped more suddenly, from 2.01 in 1989 to 1.16 by 1999 (Brainerd 2006; DaVanzo and Adamson 1997, 2). Like their European counterparts, Russian demographers warned of a crisis as the population "died out" (*ubyt', vymirat'*), but in contrast to Europe's more steady decline over several decades, in the 1990s, Russia's population decreased more drastically (Rivkin-Fish 2010, 710). Although birth rates have increased and death rates have decreased since the 1990s, references to the "Russian cross," a term to describe the decreasing births and increasing deaths on a graph and their intersection to form a cross, persist (Oushakine 2009, 100–102).<sup>14</sup> Putin introduced the compatriots program and

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<sup>14</sup> While the birth rate has gradually increased since 2000, the death rate has remained more complicated. Its peak was 16.4 deaths per 1,000 people in 2003. Since then, it has dropped to 12.9

maternity capital vouchers in tandem with one another in May and June 2006. As participants of the compatriots program and soon-to-be Russian citizens, many-childrenerg families are eligible to receive financial support through the maternity capital program. With their large families, the Old Believers have taken advantage of the program.

Although many-childrenerg families took on negative meaning in the case of refugees from Ukraine and immigrants from Central Asia, those concerned about the demographic crisis saw the Old Believers' large families as a solution rather than burden. As the conversation above about the Old Believers suggested, advocates hoped for a mass migration from South America because they saw the Old Believers as a quantitative and qualitative solution to Russia's demographic crisis. On a practical level, they believed the Old Believers' large, "many-childrenerg" families would solve Russia's demographic crisis. And on a more affective level, their preservation of pre-Soviet, Russian traditions would serve as examples for their Soviet, Russian neighbors.

### **Repatriation versus Resettlement**

While Old Believer advocates like Lidia and Robert at the roundtable and Vanya at the Academy of Sciences romanticized the Old Believers, there was another faction of those involved in the compatriots program who were more reluctant. Lidia organized the roundtable meeting in June as a continuation of the government-organized meeting about Old Believers that had occurred in April. Smaller and more intimate, this group was made up of journalists, scholars, and civil society group members with

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as of 2015. However, that number is still high compared to the US, for example, where the death rate has been consistent at 8.4 for more than a decade (World Bank Group 2018).

representatives from ADHC and the MVD. As Lidia, Svetlana, and Robert discussed the Old Believer issues and how unfair the program was to them, Katya, the young woman from the MVD, started to lose her patience. Finally, when Robert called the law malicious (*vredonosnyi*) because it required the Old Believers to travel so far (500 kilometers (about 310 miles) to Montevideo in Uruguay) to apply in person, Katya could not remain silent any longer:

I want to focus your attention. We must understand that [when we say] Old Believers, we are talking about compatriots first of all. And the state program we have is aimed at the attraction of compatriots for permanent residence in the Russian Federation, and Old Believers are one of the... [she pauses]. One of the participating groups. Approximately 500,000 [compatriots] have been resettled to date in the implementation of the state program.

Katya's language was formal. She used passive constructions, like "the attraction of compatriots for permanent residence" and "500,000 have been resettled...in the implementation of the state program," to create distance between the results of the program and her own work at the MVD. As the head of the MVD's Department for Refugees, Compatriots, and Internally Displaced Persons, she worked directly with refugees and compatriots, yet her linguistic constructions seemed to displace responsibility from her. Katya continued:

But I want to emphasize the 3,000 to 5,000 [Old Believers], of which we're talking, that is in total is a negligible number. At yesterday's meeting with the [Putin] administration, I recounted how I called the [Russian] consulates in Bolivia, Uruguay, Brazil. They told me that in the past year and this year, there has been not one application from Old Believers to resettle on the territory of the Russian Federation. Coming back, I support you, *but whether they want to is one question* – because the land they want is unavailable to them, because they are afraid, and from another perspective, whether they really have the desire to move here (*ikh zhelaniia real'nogo siuda priezhat'*). I support you in that. This is my own opinion (*Eto takoe lichnoe*). *First of all [though], we have a basic principle of the voluntary resettlement program. We can't forget that* (emphasis added).

Katya then suggested that while the MVD at the federal level cannot make changes that would favor the Old Believers over other compatriots, the regional governments, including Primorskii krai and Amurskaya oblast, could adapt their programs to provide special assistance to Old Believers, such as helping them fill the paperwork out in Russian, an issue many Old Believers have since their primary education was in Spanish or Portuguese. In fact, before the major reworking of the program in 2012, this was how regional officials had made changes to the program to allow groups to obtain citizenship through such special circumstances. Katya emphasized that the Russian Constitution viewed everyone equally and that it was the MVD's duty to consider each applicant, without preference. In Aleshkovskii's (2017) account of how the Old Believers rose to national prominence, Putin had intervened personally in almost a mythical, tsar-like way. However, as Katya demonstrated, the situation was more complex. The MVD must evaluate all applications and respond to the diversity of interests and pressures in administering the compatriots program.

Lidia, Robert, and the two Aleksandrs, one a filmmaker and the other a specialist on the Far East, interrupted Katya, criticizing the government's inability to stop the outmigration flow. Aleksandr, the specialist, described how tragic it was that Russia had lost 80% of the 10 million Russian compatriots who were living abroad when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.<sup>15</sup> Aleksandr, the filmmaker, suggested that the compatriots program should be more like Israel's program and offer citizenship regardless of profession; in other words, it should be one of repatriation. Lidia told Katya that she

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<sup>15</sup> I'm not sure to which number Aleksandr referred. According to the last Soviet census conducted in 1989, there were approximately 25.3 million ethnic Russians living abroad and 11.2 million Russian-speakers, non-ethnic Russians who had selected Russian as their native language (see Shevel 2011c, 2-3 for more information). These two numbers are what most compatriots advocates most frequently cite.

thought the Old Believers were incapable of lying (*starovery ne umeiut vrat'*) and that they had told her that it was nearly impossible to be accepted into the program. Lidia became flustered:

First of all, ask your bosses. As a journalist, I'm not an enemy but a friend of the migration services. And since you are the head of the department that is concretely responsible for the different aspects of the lives of compatriots, I beg you to believe my 26 years of experience that *Russia vitally needs resettlers (Rossii zhiznenno neobkhodimy pereselentsy)*. *Not only in the Far East, but the Far East will simply leave, swim away like the Titanic if we don't open it for people (a Dal'nii Vostok prosto uidet, uplyvet kak Titanik)*... Sashas, two Sashas, more than anything, [we must] strive to create a special migration regime at least for the Far East, which floats away from us like the Titanic, which the Chinese will take with pleasure (emphasis added).

Filmmaker Sasha responded, "And RVP [permanent residency permits] is against them." Lidia agreed:

[RVP] is against Russians (*protiv russkikh*) in general. Other nationalities can work around it. Russians find it impossible to give bribes for RVP, returning to the historical homeland. And those dead ends to which they're dragging our native people, [those] needed in Russia! Those ploys that are mottled with instructions, regulations, dead ends, through which you cannot get out of without a bribe. These are especially placed in our legislation by some kind of very wise people, who are camouflaged!

RVP—Russian for a "temporary residency permit" (*razreshenie na vremennoe prozhivanie*)—is the second step, after one's immediate arrival and registration, that an immigrant must take on the path to obtaining permanent residency (step three) (*vid na zhitel'stvo* or VNZH) or citizenship. Remnants of Soviet efforts to control internal migration, RVPs are limited in number and each region has a different quota (Light 2016). Compatriots, too, have to obtain an RVP, but the process is theoretically easier because they are excluded from regional quotas. Compatriots, unlike other groups, can apply for citizenship immediately after obtaining an RVP, skipping step three. Though faster, in practice, obtaining an RVP even for compatriots is a frustrating, even soul

crushing, bureaucratic process that involves waiting in multiple lines for days over the course of months. When I asked program participants the challenges they faced, nearly everyone listed in great detail the amount of time they had spent in line at the MVD or FMS, waiting to obtain RVP.<sup>16</sup> For the Old Believers, in particular though, obtaining an RVP has been complicated and confusing. Most other compatriots were from former Soviet republics and had the Russian proficiency to fill out the documents and the Soviet know-how to navigate the system.

The MVD, the state agency where Katya worked, is responsible for processing RVP applications. Unable to lie, the Old Believers did not know how to navigate Russian bureaucracy like other, wily non-Russians, Lidia accused. “You see how good our discussion is,” Robert said after Lidia finished, smiling. “I will comment. What Katya said, everything is correct. She is clearly a professional; everything she says is correct. But we had one family, the Fefelovs...” Robert continued, describing the bureaucratic hurdles they had to jump through, driving hundreds of miles around Amurskaya oblast to gain citizenship.

As Katya listened, she, too, was flustered. She sat back in her chair, her arms crossed and her eyes wide, barely blinking. She chewed her gum venomously, occasionally interrupting Lidia and Robert to defend herself, “This is not my personal opinion! (*Eto ne moe lichnoe mnenie!*)” and to point out that the MVD was not the only government agency involved in the process. As Lidia, the Sashas, and Robert described passionately all the problems of the compatriots program, I found myself in an unusual position—sympathizing with an MVD official. Katya and Dima were young and

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<sup>16</sup> Journalists have traced the numerous hurdles compatriots and other immigrants have faced in accessing residency and citizenship (Grafova 2018, 2015; Nikol’skaia 2014a). See also Myhre 2018.

seemingly attentive. Rather than circumventing Lidia and the other older activists, they had accepted their invitation to coordinate between the government agencies they represented and the civil society activists interested in Old Believers and compatriots. As I noticed earlier in March when I had first met Dima, he was the image of a young, responsible, attentive official. He dressed professionally, was inclusive of everyone in the room, drawing each person into the conversation, and taking notes on people's concerns and connecting them with people who could help them, whether it was at ADHC, Sberbank, or Moscow officials.

In these meetings, though, I noticed a generational difference. Lidia, Robert, the Sashas, and the other members of the group, who were older, became passionate during the conversation, and as Robert's response ("You see how good our conversation is!") suggested, they enjoyed the debate. But it also came at the expense of Katya and Dima, the two government officials in the room (Dima's boss was also there, but he spent most of his time on his iPad), who were the recipients of Lidia's tirade. While Katya was defensive, Dima was more composed, again jotting notes and waiting patiently for them to finish. Though I sympathized with Katya and Dima, I also understood Lidia's point. Katya may have used formal constructions to distance herself from the MVD and its problems, but she was still the head of the department responsible for refugees and compatriots as Lidia pointed out. She was also much younger and not as experienced as longtime compatriots advocates like Lidia. However, as the representative of the MVD associated with the program, Katya did indeed have some power to influence how the organization handled the program.

Eventually, Lidia calmed down and sought to resolve the conflict:

[The problems of the program] are not a secret. Why do we have such conversations with one another? People who speak Russian pay their

way into the program, pay for places. It is not your fault at all. That the regions, by the way, aren't readily attracting people... All of this is clear. All of this [the program] is irrationally organized. Why are we interested in a [separate] program for Old Believers? Maybe through such a program, the people who dream of living here, who are needed, will come to the top. And for them [the Old Believers], we need to remove the roadblocks, the mousetraps at every step. We are not complaining about you personally. We are well aware of how difficult the program has been... We understand completely that there are problems. But you [Lidia used the informal "ty" here] are so young and beautiful. Everything will be okay.

Lidia patted Katya's arm and Katya smiled as the conversation moved on to discuss the new Far Eastern Hectare Program.

The debate that arose between Lidia, Robert, and the Sashas and Katya reflected tensions in how those involved understood the compatriots program. While Lidia, Robert, and the Sashas thought the program should be one of repatriation as in Israel, Katya argued that selection was made by profession and that the government should not favor any one group over another. Later, her view was supported by a journalist from Russia Behind the Headlines, a state-run news agency whose goal is to dispel myths about Russia through multilingual coverage of Russian life. The journalist asked a question similar to the one I asked Vanya at the Academy of Sciences: why devote so much attention and resources to a small group that does not want to integrate and will not alone solve the demographic crisis? "Then I'm sorry, [but] what a storm in a glass of water (*buria v stakane vody*). Because of one village and two families we have been here already for three hours!" the journalist said as she left. Dima and Lidia responded that it was not a storm in a glass but that the Old Believers would set an example for Russian society, similar to what Robert had argued earlier.

This idea of serving as a model returns again to notions of Russianness and cultural authenticity. Lidia and Robert's support of the Old Believers had alarmist

undertones as Lidia made very clear in her explanation of why the Old Believers mattered. She argued that if the Russian government failed to act, the Far East would leave Russia and the Chinese would accept the region with pleasure, echoing anxieties about China many Russians share. Likewise, she argued that the process of getting temporary residency (RVP) was designed against ethnic Russians (*protiv russkikh*) in particular. Other groups had paid their way into the program even though they spoke Russian poorly.

As I found in my fieldwork in Primorskii krai in informal conversations and more formal interviews with Central Asians, Lidia was not entirely incorrect, at least about the Russian language issue. Several of those with whom I spoke with from Tajikistan, for example, did not speak Russian very well and I had difficulty understanding them as their Russian was interspersed with Tajik. In some cases, though, they were engineering or law students, who were also studying Russian as part of their graduate programs, and they qualified for the program for professional reasons. Other times, when I asked people waiting in line at the FMS with me or in taxis, they had professions that did not qualify, yet they claimed that MVD officials had suggested the program to them as a quick way to obtain Russian citizenship. It is also important to note that while immigrants must pass a Russian language and culture test to obtain a work permit, to participate in the program, there is no such exam. An applicant must only demonstrate his or her Russian proficiency by being able to fill out the paperwork accurately and apply in person. As one taxi driver from Uzbekistan pointed out to me in Vladivostok, it was theoretically easier to get into the compatriots program than to get a work permit. Therefore, while there was evidence of Lidia's fears that immigrants who did not speak Russian well would get into the program, I doubt that this practice came

at the expense of ethnic Russian or other Slavic immigrants or that it was even widespread.

Rather, Lidia's concern about China reflected larger anxieties in Russian society about demographic changes, particularly in the Far East. She and Robert called for special preferences for ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, including those who were not ethnic Russian. For many, concerns about cultural differences and their racial undertones map not only on to the Chinese but to those from Central Asia. However, Lidia was unique. Since the late 1980s, she has devoted her career as a journalist and a human rights activist to aiding refugees and Russian compatriots. Her help extends beyond ethnic Russians to other groups as well. Her earliest roots in civil society were when she organized help for Armenian refugees displaced by the 1988 earthquake and Nagorno-Karabakh War. In 1996, she founded the Forum for Compatriots Organizations, which supports compatriots across Russia and organizes events about the program. Lidia has a rare definition of compatriot. By Russian (*russkie*), she refers to "all indigenous (*korennykh*) people, who do not have a territory, a homeland, besides Russia" (Grafova 2018). Lidia's territorial definition of Russian has appeared less frequently in debates about how to define compatriots. As Shevel notes, including ethnic groups indigenous to Russians alongside ethnic Russians (Lidia names Tatars and Bashkirs as examples) has been less common than other definitions of compatriot, appearing briefly in the narratives of the Communist Party and the Homeland (*Rodina*) Party in the 1990s and early 2000s (2011c, 183). In contrast to others interested in the Old Believers and the compatriots program, such as the conservative supporters of the Russian World concept, who also attended meetings about the Old Believers, Lidia was a liberal. In a book of her articles published in 2016, one section is titled "Migration is

not a burden (*obuza*) but a blessing (*blago*) for Russia!” In that section, Lidia included interviews with prominent liberal leaders, including Grigory Yavlinsky, Yegor Gaidar, and Boris Nemtsov, and liberal demographers from the Higher School of Economics. Migration, they argued, was the solution to Russia’s demographic crisis, rather than a factor that exacerbated it.

Lidia’s own liberal position, in contrast to other participants’ more conservative positions, including Robert’s who emphasized the Russianness of the Old Believers, was what made these meetings about the Old Believers so compelling. The compatriots program at-large, and the Old Believers in particular, have attracted a diversity of people with different definitions of compatriot and solutions to the demographic crisis. People like Lidia and Robert who had some opposing political views came together to argue that the compatriots program should be one of repatriation, not one of resettlement. Repatriation implied immigration based on a shared identity and promised freedom of movement, whereas resettlement in this context was more flexible, potentially open to a larger group as long as participants demonstrated some Russian and that they were willing to move to an underdeveloped part of the country. Lidia and Katya’s debate demonstrated not only divisions within the compatriots program but also how the program had brought a diverse group of actors together to envision solutions to Russia’s demographic crisis.

### **Whose Dream Is This?**

Not everyone at the roundtable romanticized the Old Believers. Lidia and Robert viewed the Old Believers as honest, authentic Russians who would serve as models for Russian society. However, Svetlana, a linguist who studied the Old Believers’ Russian

dialect and who has worked with them since the early 2000s in South America, was more reluctant. At the start of the roundtable, Lidia asked Svetlana to share her views on whether there would be a mass migration of Old Believers from South America:

The desire to move or not move [they approach] very cautiously. That is, from one side, without a doubt, there is a pull (*tiaga k*) towards Russia – Russian language, the homeland (*rodina*), here it is closer to God (*zdes' k Bogu blizhe*), these kind of nostalgic feelings (*nostal'gicheskie vsiakie chuvstva est'*). From another, many hold a grudge against Soviet authorities and because of this say, 'I will not be here.' From a third side, they have had the opportunity in the last 10 years, just in the last decade this has become more frequent, to come visit us. ... So, they come here, they see what's happening. And they behave very, very carefully and they wait – 'Let's see what they [the Old Believers who they visit in Russia] get.' ... *If there will be a mass movement is a big question and whether we're ready for a mass movement (i gotovy li my massovym).*

And generally, if three to five thousand, are ready to come I don't know. If they come, they'll be poor (*bednye*) and will remain poor. They can't buy here, for example, equipment for 250,000 dollars, like Reutov in Liubitovka, and buy 800 hectares of land with their own money. ... This is about mass migration. To this is already linked the question – *whose dream (mechta)? Who dreams of this (Kto mechtaet)?* (emphasis added)

Lidia replied, "Putin."

If Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin] dreams it, then the Old Believers better come," Svetlana responded. "... *Guys, it's not their dream. We want this for some reason. It is obvious that each [of them] is fleeing from some larger problem, for economic benefits. It is us who want them to come. Forgive me, but why should they fulfill our dream? Look, at the meeting on April 3 and then on May 25, Valentin Vital'evich Timakov said that they will come if Russia becomes more attractive, more attractive than Latin America. That means that those who will come are those who have it bad there. And it's bad right now in Bolivia because of the economic policies. Why did the Murachevs leave? Why did Iosef Reutov, why did they leave? Because there [in Bolivia] the economic policies are not advantageous for white people. And Iosef Reutov was the owner of 500 hectares of land, and in one wonderful moment, they [the Bolivian government] gave 300 of those acres to the Indians. ... They are afraid of communism. As they metaphorically expressed, as Iosef Reutov said, 'The red star (*krasnaiia zvezda*) has moved over Bolivia.' 'And what, you're afraid of socialism?' 'Yes, it is already starting.' And look, he left. This is from Bolivia. The Old Believers in Brazil ... they aren't going anywhere so far* (emphasis added).

While Lidia and Robert may have idealized the Old Believers, as Svetlana pointed out, the majority of those who had immigrated to Russia were from Bolivia and they left because of the political situation there. Once again, the Old Believers fled communism and, ironically, resettled on indigenous land yet again, this time in Primorskii krai – the Udege’s land in Dersu remains unrecognized by the Russian government.

In addition, Svetlana warned that those who would come to Russia would be those who were poor, who had lost their land in South America and who moved to Russia, seeking economic opportunity. To start over, to buy equipment and land, was expensive. Svetlana believed that the Old Believers were unprepared for life in Russia. While Robert and Lidia argued that their lack of Soviet experiences made the Old Believers more authentic and morally pure, this also placed them at a disadvantage for navigating Russian bureaucracy as I explained above in my discussion of RVP. Many of them did not write in Russian but in Spanish.

Svetlana asked, “Whose dream?” Who dreams of a mass return? She continued:

Furthermore, and why wouldn’t we be happy that somewhere in the faraway Latin America, *there are small islands of the Russian world (ostrovki russkogo mira)*, where they pray to God, speak in a Russian dialect, observe the traditions. And we are friends with them, they visit as guests, we study them, we learn something from them. Indeed, why not leave them there at peace (*v pokoe*)? (emphasis added)

As Svetlana’s narrative highlighted, the dream of return was not necessarily the Old Believers’ but that of a small group of advocates, who worried about the demographic crisis and participated in conversations about the Russian diaspora. As Katya’s and Marina Ivanovna’s reluctance indicated earlier, the desire to attract the Old Believers was not even consistent among government officials. Putin may have met with some of the Old Believers and helped them by sending equipment and elevating their concerns to the national level. However, it was notable that no one from his administration or the

Primorskii krai administration attended the meetings about the Old Believers beyond the first one organized in Moscow in April 2017. Instead, Russian officials sent young officials like Katya and Dima to participate in the discussions and give the impression that the government was listening. The group that gathered in May and June after the kick-off meeting were long-term compatriots program advocates concerned specifically about the Far East's future. As ethnic Russians had left the Far East for better opportunities in western Russia and neighboring China, immigrants from Central Asia had replaced them. Lidia, like many Russians, especially in Moscow, feared that the Far East would "swim away" from Russia like the Titanic to be absorbed by China. Many people's interest in the Old Believers, especially outside of Primorskii krai, were tied to anxieties about cultural difference and demographic change. With their narratives of homeland and return, the Old Believers' traditional lifestyles evoked a quintessential Russian identity that was pre-Soviet and that many post-Soviet Russians found enchanting.

Throughout the roundtable in June, participants used the term "to fall in love with (*vliubit'sia*)" to describe their first encounters with Old Believers. Lidia described how she fell in love with Danila Zaitsov, one of the first Old Believers to return to Russia from Uruguay: "I was in love with him up to my ears." Svetlana warned her colleagues at the roundtable, "But I tell all of my guys, who have gone with me on expeditions and fallen in love with the Old Believers, I always tell them one thing: 'Don't idealize them.'" Yet, as I found during my fieldwork in participant observation in such meetings as this one and in Russian media about the Old Believers, idealizing them was exactly what people did.

### What Will You Write?

As government officials and compatriots activists debated the Old Believers' future in Moscow, the Old Believers, themselves, were notably absent from these discussions. While I listened to those around me passionately defend Old Believers' interests and dream of a mass return, I thought of Douglas Rogers' ethnography of Old Believers in the Perm region, *The Old Faith and the Russian Land* (2009). From what I knew of the group from his book and my own very brief experiences with the Old Believers in Primor'e a few months earlier, I wondered how they felt about suddenly finding themselves at the center of attention, the subjects of debates in Primorskii krai, Russian media, and the federal government in Moscow. I recalled a question Ulyan Murachev, the head of the community in Dersu, had asked me in March 2017.

At the end of that first meeting with the Old Believers at ADHC in Vladivostok, I followed Ulyan out into the hallway, where the men were putting on their coats. They were heading to the train station to take an overnight train to Dal'nerechensk and from there the next morning a bus to Roshchino. Then they would walk across the frozen river to Dersu.

Ulyan stopped in the hallway, holding his jacket in his arms and looked at me, "What will you write? From whose perspective? From the government's?" he asked.

I didn't know how to answer. What did he want me to write about? "No, I'm not a journalist," I replied. "I'm a graduate student, writing my dissertation. It will be about the compatriots program, where you are from, why you moved here, etc. May I meet with you again in Dersu?"

Ulyan took a step back from me, and I wondered whether I was standing too close or whether he wanted to move away from the partially opened room into which

Dima and the other Moscow officials had disappeared. I followed him, moving away from the door but also maintaining a greater distance between us in case I made him uncomfortable. "I knew of the program because my friends moved to Russia, to Kaliningrad, through it," I told him.

"You aren't going to write anything on the Internet?" Ulyan asked, and I assured him that I would not. He smiled. "Understand that everyone has the desire to return home to the homeland (*zhelanie vernut'sia domoi na istoricheskuiu roдинu*). To our home climate, where we're from. I won't say that everything is as we expected or that we haven't had hardships. We have. I don't think that everything will get better soon, but I think everything will be okay."

"Where were you born?" I asked.

"In Brazil. Even my grandparents [were born] in Brazil, but we never forgot our homeland," he said, smiling.

"Can I come to visit you?"

"You don't have to. You have already seen us and now you understand," Ulyan said. The men left, heading towards the elevator and I wished them safe travels.

Ulyan's question, "What will you write?" haunted me throughout fieldwork and as I wrote this dissertation. Although Ulyan told me that I had seen them and that I understood, to this day I still feel like I don't fully understand or that I know how to answer his question. When I told others who knew the Old Believers about Ulyan's questions, they suggested that Ulyan didn't want me to dissuade other Old Believers from joining them in Russia. However, I think Ulyan's second question about whether I wrote from the government's perspective suggested that he didn't fear that I'd convince others not to come to Russia but that I'd write that everything was okay in Russia.

Another question that has lingered from our conversation is my own: Why had the Old Believers invited me to their meeting in Vladivostok in March? Was it as a foreign (and American) witness to their complaints? We, too, were compatriots as many of them had American citizenship as well, gained through marriages with the American community of Old Believers who had settled in Oregon and Alaska in the 1950s.

Although the Old Believers had already received much attention from government officials and Russian and international media years earlier, our meeting in March 2017 came at a turning point in Primor'e's Old Believers' relationship with the government. At the meeting I witnessed, ADHC promised to help them with the bureaucracy of the hectare program, and in April and June, there were two meetings about the group that I described above. These meetings led to renewed interest in Primor'e's Old Believers as evidenced by a series of articles that appeared in April through June 2017 (Aleshkovskii 2017; Sumina 2017; Smetanina 2017; TASS 2018a; Vasil'ev 2017a, 2017b). As I attended these meetings and spoke to participants from various groups during coffee breaks, I thought of Ulyan's question to me as well as Svetlana's question above: whose dream was it that the Old Believers return? Besides wanting land and to live in peace, what did the Old Believers hope for? How did they understand their celebrity in Russia? And what did Ulyan want me to write? I was only able to interact with the Old Believers a few times during fieldwork. Living intentionally far away, they were difficult to reach. Government officials – Fyodor in Roshchino and Dima in Vladivostok – also filtered my interactions with the Old Believers; I never had the chance to speak with them alone. I was left wondering what the Old Believers themselves wanted from the compatriots program.

Ulyan's question, "What will you write?", also reminded me of a story Alaina Lemon has analyzed. A Lovari Romani girl told Lemon about the time that she and her cousins rode the metro in Moscow:

We saw how all the Gazhe (Russians, non-Roma) were reading, and my cousin started saying, "What are they writing? What are they writing?" They thought he was crazy. All the other black people, Armenians and such, were smiling: they knew. "What are they writing about us Blacks, eh?" (1995, 37)

Lemon wrote that the point of the story was about language, exclusion, and who controlled the narratives. In her book, *Between Two Fires*, Lemon returned to the incident, writing that the question

both indexed and performed their common experience of being lumped, marked, and described. Speaking directly of being shut out by print expressed how all the blacks on the train experienced an unimagined, anticommunity as non-Russians (2000, 78)

As ethnic Russian, Ulyan was not "black" but white. In comparison to the Roma and "black" immigrants on the metro, Russian officials, journalists, and ordinary people have romanticized Ulyan and his family as exotic and simultaneously as authentically Russian. These discourses, though positive, essentialized the Old Believers, lumping them together in a category of foreign, exotic Others, just as Lemon's Roma informant suggested Russian media had generalized all non-Russians together as "the blacks." Though privileged, the Old Believers, like other immigrants to Russia and participants of the compatriots program, were relatively powerless in shaping narratives of themselves in Russian culture and media. Filtered through discourses of return and authentic, rural Russianness, the Old Believers remained opaque. I never gained a sense of who they really were or what they wanted.

## Conclusion

The Old Believers' sudden arrival to Primorskii krai in 2009 presented a bureaucratic problem for the Russian government. Because Russia has visa-free agreements for visits up to 90 days with Uruguay and Bolivia, the Old Believers arrived in Russia without visas and then simply stayed. At the time (before 2010), they could not receive citizenship through the compatriots' program because one had to apply from abroad. They also did not meet the specialization requirements that prioritized highly-educated professionals' applications to "return" to Russia. Other routes to citizenship were lengthy and complicated. How then could they become naturalized?

In an article pressuring the government to make an exception for the Old Believers, Natalia Ostrovskaya (2009) argued that while not formally educated, the Old Believers had plenty to offer Primor'e: "My interlocutor, as is often the case with Old Believers, did not complete neither school nor university. But he knows five languages – Old Slavonic, Russian, English, Spanish, and Portuguese. He knows agriculture..." In Moscow, I heard similar arguments. While MVD officials often complained of the Old Believers' refusal to follow the rules and that they were not the ideal candidates because of their lack of education, compatriots' advocates argued that the Old Believers' ability to speak multiple languages and their farming experience should be considered as equivalent to the education requirements of the program. They thought that the government should make an exception for them for the reasons I highlighted above – their desire to return home, their commitment to preserving Russian language and culture, and their large families.

This chapter has contextualized the romanticization of the Old Believers by Russian media and the central government's efforts to attract them within renewed

patriotism and anxieties about demographic change in Russia. In the Far East, along Russia's border with China, this fear of difference is tied especially to suspicions that China wants to expand into Russia. Again, in support of the Old Believers, Ostrovskaya (2009) wrote an explanation of why Primorskii krai was a priority region for compatriot resettlement: "... Plus, such threats as the possibility of further claims to the territory of the Russian Far East, an unspoken encouragement of migration from neighboring countries (read: China)." The new hectare program that granted several acres of land per family member to Russian citizens was another program possibly motivated by fears of an encroaching China.

By courting those who had already arrived, Russian government officials and compatriots' advocates hoped to attract three to five thousand Old Believers from South America to immigrate to the Far East as a quick, easy solution to solving the demographic crisis. The Old Believers' desire to return home, preservation of Russian language and culture, and their large, Slavic families made them attractive to those involved in counteracting population decline. Although the Old Believers did not intend to integrate into Russian society, their desire to live in remote areas of the Far East could be useful to the Russian government. We seemed to repeat history as officials resettled refugees from Ukraine and Old Believers to the Far East and promised free land through the Far Eastern Hectare Program to those willing to apply. In its infancy when I conducted my fieldwork, the hectare program was already popular among compatriots I met.

Debates surrounding the Old Believers revealed two features of the compatriots program. Despite idealizations of the group, representations of the Old Believers remained stereotypical, steeped with narratives of return and depictions of an idealized

rural, Russian culture that shrouded any sense of what the Old Believers really wanted. Rather, what we saw and what this chapter has focused on was the ideology of the compatriots program and where that ideology fractures and rejoins. What was most revealing about the debates surrounding the Old Believers was the group of people they brought together. Their advocates shared a concern about Russia's demographic crisis, but their solutions varied – from efforts to attract ethnic Russians only to more liberal beliefs about immigration more broadly. At the meetings in Moscow, Lidia, Robert, Katya, and Svetlana's discussion about the Old Believers revealed persistent divisions within the compatriots program. On the one side, advocates like Robert and Lidia believed the program should be one of repatriation, intended to welcome back ethnic Russians and/or Russian speakers from abroad. On the other, officials like Katya and Marina Ivanovna argued that the program was one of resettlement, intended to attract Russian-speaking immigrants who would benefit the Russian state.

Notably though, in these debates, the Old Believers, like other so-called compatriots in program debates, were absent. Three families, including Ulyan's, appeared briefly on screen for the larger roundtable organized in April 2017, but only their representatives, Old Believer scholars and members of the local Old Believer community in Moscow, were there for the other meetings later that spring. In their absence, I, like Svetlana, wondered, "Who dreamt of their mass mobilization?"

## CHAPTER 6

### DIVERSITY, RACE, AND THE POLITICS OF RETURN

At the end of our time in Vladivostok, we met with a few of our friends one evening to say goodbye. Nastya was one of our first friends we had made there. Small and blonde, she was in her early 30s and taught English at one of the universities in the city. Her English was impeccable, perfected during the time when her family had lived in New Zealand when she was a teenager in the 1990s. We had met her through another friend, Misha, who studied English with Nastya and who I had helped apply for a Fulbright to do research in the US. One of our first weeks in Vladivostok, Misha had invited us to Nastya's to play board games and cook dinner together. Eager learners, Misha and Nastya had started their own English Club. Besides the two of them, the club's regulars included Katya, a shy university student from Khabarovsk, and Tanya, Nastya's 10-year-old daughter. Sometimes other students from the university joined, and together, we went on day trips to Russian Island and surrounding areas.

That evening we sat around a table spread with cucumbers, feta cheese, popcorn, crackers, and various kinds of cookies. Tanya played on the floor with her new pet hamster, who rolled across the room in a ball, occasionally colliding with our feet, chairs, and the legs of the table. The group was small tonight, just Nastya, Tanya, Katya, Alex, Dan, and me. Alex was new to the group. An American exchange student from North Carolina, he was a junior in college and was studying abroad in Vladivostok for the semester. He had arrived just a couple of months earlier and had befriended Katya, Nastya, and Misha at their university. Alex was also part of an unusual group of foreigners I had encountered in Vladivostok, who moved to Russia, drawn by the

country's commitment to so-called "traditional values." I had met others like him, including a young Canadian, who was studying Russian to enroll in a university and eventually apply for Russian citizenship; an English teacher from Alabama, whose Facebook profile picture was of a Confederate flag; and another English teacher from Georgia, who told me that Russia was "the last bastion of white values" and who was a Holocaust denier. They had discovered Russia not by reading 19<sup>th</sup> century literature or Cold War spy novels but by reading RT and Sputnik, Russian state-owned, English language media. Dan and I weren't fond of Alex, and I wondered to what extent our mutual friends in Vladivostok understood his views. While I knew some of our friends certainly disagreed with men like Alex, they also expressed a greater tolerance towards them, which was perhaps an additional reason the men (they were all men) had moved there.

"Well, Lara, tell us. What did you find?" Nastya asked in English.

"Well, I'm not done yet. We're not leaving Russia, just moving to Moscow," I reminded the group.

"But still, Moscow will be different. What are your results for Vladivostok?" Nastya asked.

"Well, does everyone know about the compatriots program?" I looked around the room. The others looked confused. "*Programma pereseleniia sootchestvennikov*," I offered in Russian. Before she had met me, Nastya hadn't heard of the compatriots program and what she knew of the program she had learned over the course of our friendship as I conducted my fieldwork.

"People from other parts of Russia who move," Nastya started, her voice trailing off.

“Compatriots – ethnic Russians (*ruskie*) who move to Russia from former Soviet republics,” Katya suggested in Russian. Timid, Katya often spoke in Russian rather than English, though she clearly understood English well.

“Exactly what Katya is saying, from Kazakhstan, Ukraine, etc.,” I answered in English.

“And who are our compatriots?” Nastya asked.

“Well, I interviewed ethnic Russians like Katya said, but also Ukrainians and Uzbeks and Tajiks. Compatriots are really diverse. Most people, I think, are from Ukraine, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan,” I said.

Katya and Nastya appeared unimpressed, their faces blank. “Well, yeah,” Nastya said, shrugging.

“Yeah, they’re coming to do the shitty jobs that Russians won’t do,” Alex interjected.

“Right, but they’re also getting citizenship, and I don’t think many realize that. The FMS is inviting them to apply to the program,” I replied.

“Tajiks and Uzbeks? So, when is Primor’e going to become Tajikistan?” Nastya exclaimed. She laughed but furrowed her brow with a trace of worry.

“Well, no, they become Russian,” I responded. Seeing Nastya shake her head and Katya’s confusion, I clarified, “I don’t mean they become *ruskimi* (ethnic Russian) but *rossiianami* (civic Russian). Russian citizens.”

Nastya shook her head as if I didn’t understand. “No, they are not Russian,” she emphasized. She spoke in English, so I was unsure whether she meant ethnic Russians or Russian citizens.

“But their children go to school here, speak Russian, and become Russian,” I argued.

“No, they are Tajik. They will always have that mentality.” Failing to articulate why Tajiks or Uzbeks would never become Russian in her opinion, Nastya utilized the term, “mentality,” (*mentalitet* or mindset) to explain their differences. As I stated in the introduction, mentality was a common term, one that I coded for during data analysis. Often used in an attempt to capture a group’s essence, it is a term that people fall back on when they cannot be any more specific, as was the case with Nastya’s use of it.

“But what about Ukrainians who come here? Are they Russians?” Dan asked.

“Right. Because you’re Ukrainian, right?” Alex added, nodding towards Nastya.

“Yes, my family is Ukrainian. But it’s different. We have the same religion. We’re Orthodox. What are people from Tajikistan, Uzbeks? They’re different...” As Nastya spoke, I noticed that she played with a small, silver cross that she wore around her neck.

“Yeah, they’re Muslim,” Alex said. “But they party. They have sex before marriage like Russians. They’re crazy like Russians. When I was in Uzbekistan...” I shook my head at Dan, irritated.

Fortunately, Nastya interrupted Alex. “Wait, now, I have to think about this. Why don’t I like Tajiks?” She sat back in her chair, pausing and frowning. Dan and I looked at each other, and I could tell that we both wondered whether she was going to recognize her prejudice, unable to pinpoint a reason.

Just then though, she shook her finger. “Wait, I remember! That’s why! Well, my mother always said never to take a taxi with an Uzbek. But then I called a taxi to pick up my daughter from school and the driver was Uzbek. And he asked if we could stop on the way, so he could give someone something. I was really scared, and I thought, where

can I run to? But it was winter, and I couldn't. When we stopped, I stayed in the car and waited. I didn't run because I thought if I ran away, then Tanya would be the only one left at school. But then the driver came back, and we picked Tanya up."

"But nothing happened!" I exclaimed. Nastya shrugged.

Switching tactics, I asked, "Isn't Tanya's class diverse? Aren't there Tajik and Uzbek children in Tanya's classes? Or Kyrgyz?" Earlier when we had taken the bus to Nastya's neighborhood, I had noticed the diversity of the neighborhood. For example, I had heard a couple speaking Kyrgyz when we got off the bus near Nastya's building.

"No, I don't know how, but there is not one Uzbek or Tajik at Tanya's gymnasium (school). I don't know how they do it," Nastya replied.

Alex asked Nastya what she meant by gymnasium, and the conversation shifted. As the group talked, I reflected on why Tanya's school didn't have any immigrant children. Located in the center of Vladivostok, at least a 30-minute drive from Nastya and Tanya's apartment in the north of the city, Tanya's school was prestigious. I heard Nastya say that she had used her connections as a former English teacher at the school to obtain a spot for Tanya. Even though they had to get up earlier to go to school and they got home later, Nastya said it was worth it for Tanya's future. It seemed obvious why there weren't any immigrants in Tanya's classes – their parents didn't have the same connections. As I considered asking Katya what she thought about Primorskii krai's compatriots' diversity, wondering if her experience as someone who was half ethnic Korean would differ from Nastya's, Misha arrived with a cake and we began toasting our departure and our friendship.

I selected this ethnographic vignette to conclude because it highlights recent shifts in views towards cultural diversity that this dissertation has explored and in which the Resettlement of Compatriots Program engages. First, like many of my friends and those I met during fieldwork, Nastya and Katya weren't immediately able to place the compatriots program. When I repeated the program's name in Russian, Katya knew the term and suggested that compatriots were ethnic Russians from former Soviet republics who move to Russia. Her answer was partially correct – ethnic Russians are one group eligible for compatriot support. However, the compatriots program also includes Russian-speakers, those who are “culturally and spiritually oriented towards Russia,” and those who have descendants who lived on the territories of the Russian empire or the former Soviet Union (Duma 2010, 2-3). Rather, Katya's definition of compatriots as ethnic Russian reflected my own initial assumption based on promotional materials and media about the program. With few exceptions, officials and journalists portrayed white, ethnic Russian, German, and Ukrainian families, “returning to their homeland” as Russian compatriots.<sup>1</sup> Like Nastya and Katya, I, too, was surprised when I began to meet returnees from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, who were absent in media about the program.

Second, Nastya's response to my finding and the anxieties it betrayed – “Tajiks and Uzbeks? So, when is Primor'e going to become Tajikistan?” – and the debate that followed between the Russians and Americans revealed our differing cultural assumptions about immigration, national identity, and belonging. Dan, Alex, and I repeated elements of the American immigration myth of the melting pot. I argued that

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<sup>1</sup> For an exception, see *Kommersant* journalist's Polina Nikol'skaia's (2014a) article about the compatriots program and tensions between repatriation and resettlement within the program.

the immigrants would become Russians, making sure to differentiate between ethnic Russians (*russkie*) and civic Russians (*rossiiane*). I repeated what many returnees had told me – that they moved to Russia for their children. Even if they hadn't initially intended to stay in Russia permanently, their children were born in Russia, they went to school in Russia and spoke Russian, and over time, the family had lost ties to their home country. As a result, they applied for Russian citizenship through the compatriots program because the process only took three to six months rather than the usual five years. These stories were similar to ones my immigrant friends in America had told me about their own families' decisions to stay in the US.

Despite his homogenizing assertion of religious affiliation, Alex broadly agreed with me and claimed that Uzbeks weren't any different from Russians even though Uzbeks are Muslim, and Russians are Orthodox Christians. Alex's assertion of Uzbeks' and Russians' similarity – though simplified as “crazy” – surprised me. Given that he had decided to study abroad in Russia, propelled by populist and white nationalist movements that had gained momentum in recent years, I did not expect us to have common ground. Rather, I had assumed he would relate more to Nastya's concerns about Uzbeks and Tajiks as Muslims as many Americans have expressed since 9/11. However, Alex's recognition that Nastya was ethnic Ukrainian and his attempt to assert that Ukrainians, Russians, and Uzbeks were alike was meant to bolster my argument that in time immigrants would become Russians, just as in America, they become Americans. Although our views differed, our shared assumptions reflected American legacies of the melting pot narrative, even as this narrative changes. While I did not ask Alex more about his views on immigration, I assume that he would have asserted that earlier immigrant groups had learned English and assimilated while newer groups had

not, a common claim that not only ignores that this was not the case but also the institutional structures that racialized some groups to become white and others to remain non-white.

Ultimately, our US conceptions of race and immigration did not make sense to Nastya. As I have argued in this dissertation, Russians have their own notions of race that reflect Russia and the Soviet Union's unique history, just as our notions reflected our American experiences. However, Nastya's fears that Primor'e would become Tajikistan reflected not only her concerns but recent shifts in cultural diversity that have occurred worldwide. When we pushed her to explain why she didn't like Tajiks, she paused and, at first, I thought she would realize that she didn't have an answer. Instead, she retold one particular incident, in which nothing actually happened, and notably, it was with an Uzbek, rather than Tajik, taxi driver. Throughout the conversation, she used Uzbek and Tajik interchangeably even though they are two different groups, who speak different languages (Uzbek is a Turkic language and Tajik is Persian, for example). However, like many, Nastya grouped Uzbeks and Tajiks together as immigrants, Central Asians, and Muslim. When Dan pointed out that her family was of Ukrainian, not Russian, origin, Nastya dismissed his comparison, replying that Ukrainians were like Russians because both are Orthodox Christians.

Nastya's discomfort with the idea that Tajiks and Uzbeks could be Russian compatriots and her belief that they will never integrate are the very concerns Russian officials try to address—but also avoid—through the Resettlement of Compatriots Program. Like many other European countries, faced with shifting demographics and labor concerns, Russian officials recognize that they are reliant on immigrants. However, many Russians oppose immigration because they fear immigrants' "cultural

differences.” I argue that through the compatriots program, officials seek to strike a balance between these realities by promoting the compatriots program as a Slavic, or culturally similar, solution to Russia’s demographic changes. At the same time, officials implement a broad definition of who qualifies as a compatriot, so that a diversity of people qualify for expedited citizenship, including those who other discriminatory migration laws target.

In practice, the legal ambiguity of the term “compatriot” provides flexibility to officials across levels of government and across Russia to use the compatriots program to meet their regional and local needs. This benefits not only officials eager to attract resources to their communities, but it also aids a diversity of returnees, who utilize the program to obtain Russian citizenship and move to the Russian Far East. In Primor’e, this means providing citizenship to refugees from Ukraine, immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus, and Old Believers from South America. Because of the compatriots program’s flexibility, the implementation of the program varies by region. For example, from conversations I have had with returnees, migration scholars, and the staff of immigrants’ support agencies, as well as observations made online on the forum Back2Russia, I know that in Kaluga, Ekaterinburg, and Novosibirsk, different groups benefit from the program than those in Primor’e. Although there are still large numbers of refugees from Ukraine in recent years, far more ethnic Russians seem to have obtained citizenship through the program in Kaluga than in Primorskii krai. Meanwhile, while I only met a few ethnic Russians from Kazakhstan in Ussuriysk and only one ethnic Kazakh in Artyom, there are likely more ethnic Russians and Kazakhs from Kazakhstan in Ekaterinburg and Novosibirsk because of their proximity to Kazakhstan. I suspect that the flexibility of the compatriots program plays out differently in every

participating region, shaped by that region's historical and contemporary immigration patterns as well as its professional needs.<sup>2</sup>

As I have already shown, the ambiguity and flexibility of the compatriots program allows a diversity of returnees to obtain Russian citizenship, simplifying the process for many participants. Nonetheless, the program's ambiguity may also perpetuate misunderstanding. Ironically, while the program has expanded the designation of compatriot, the promotional materials and the media about the program have simultaneously enabled the very same essentialized notions that the program's ambiguity tries to avoid. As one migration scholar told me in Moscow,

They [officials] only show the public small lightbulbs (*lampochki*). We all have the same problems and we need to show that. We have to show how we're similar. We have to better prepare the public.

His point was that by concealing the compatriots program's true beneficiaries, officials failed to address anxieties about diversity and thus contributed to reinforcing them. Like Glick Schiller and Caglar (2011), he argued that neoliberal economic reforms in Russia had marginalized Russians and immigrants alike, but rather than recognizing their similarities, Russians blamed immigrants, an issue that Russians share with their American and European counterparts. He proposed that it was the state's job to "better

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<sup>2</sup> Again, a returnee's profession is the most important factor for selection. Each region has a list of professions, some of which are very specific. Given the Soviet Union's large-scale economic coordination, sometimes people with a certain profession tend to come from the same few regions of the former Soviet Union. For example, I learned during a trip to northern Primorskii krai that the region needs specific types of engineers to extract tungsten, a rare, in-demand metal with a high melting point. After China and Canada, the largest known reserve of tungsten is in Russia. There are also smaller reserves in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Thus, there is a specific compatriots program "market" for engineers and miners who have experience with tungsten from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Regional variation in "needed" professions also shapes the ethnic origins of various returnees to Russia.

prepare the public” and one way to do so was to no longer avoid divisive debates about national belonging in Russia.

This gap between the compatriots program’s promotion and its implementation plays out in the everyday experiences of returnees. Although for many returnees the compatriots program is appealing as a quick way to obtain Russian citizenship, this doesn’t mean that adapting to life in Russia is easy for them or that locals recognize them as fellow compatriots. Regardless of a shared language and culture, immigrating to a new country, even if it was once part of the same country to which one belonged, the Soviet Union, is hard. For many, especially supposedly culturally similar immigrants like Sveta and Yana from Ukraine, Zhenya from Kazakhstan, and the Old Believers from South America, they struggle to adjust from being a Russian compatriot to being a Russian citizen. Wooed while abroad as tied to Russia culturally and spiritually, once Russian compatriots have “returned to the historic homeland,” they became just ordinary citizens, perhaps welcomed in the media, but in daily life, perceived as no different from other immigrants. Indeed, like Nastya and Katya, many Russians I met were unfamiliar with the compatriots program. Polina Nikol’skaia, a journalist who has written about the compatriots program, captured the disconnect and isolation many Russian compatriots feel when they move to Russia in an article she published in 2014. As one Ukrainian immigrant told her, “We came here for a reason, through the Resettlement of Compatriots Program. We were invited (*nas priglasili*), we are participants. Putin called us (*Nas Putin pozval*)” (Nicol’skaia 2014b). In Khabarovsk though, where the woman lived, locals mistook her as just another migrant rather than a refugee and Russian compatriot.

Although studies of race in Russia and other post-socialist countries have often focused on how “blacks” experience discrimination (Reeves 2013; Lemon 2000; Mukomel’ 2014; Sahadeo 2016, 2012; SOVA Center et al. 2017), this dissertation contributes to this literature by showing how other groups, including those who are supposedly culturally similar, are also racialized. The Ukrainians, ethnic Russians from other former Soviet countries, and ethnic Russian Old Believers from South America all shared stories of experiences in which they felt Othered, some of which I even observed during our interactions. Raciolinguistic features, such as their accent, multilingualism, clothing, and physical appearance, which originally placed them in the enviable position of being welcomed as ethnic Russians’ dear relatives, did not prevent them from being seen as exotic, uneducated, or unneeded (*nenuzhny*) with each geopolitical shift.

Despite the challenges, each family I met sought something different in Russia. Refugees continued to struggle with the aftermaths of the war in Ukraine, missing their family, friends, and hometowns. Old Believers wanted to farm and practice their religion at peace, away from Russian society, yet they also wanted the Russian government to give them land and equipment and leave them alone. For young immigrants from Central Asia like Yonu, Kamil, and Farrukh, they wanted to find interesting and better paid work, start families, and travel in nearby Asia. For ethnic Russians from former Soviet republics like Zhenya, Vladimir, and Tatiana, they wanted to raise their children in a Russian-speaking country. Ironically, as my research revealed, it was those who were supposedly most culturally and linguistically similar, ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, who struggled the most to adapt to life in Russia. As Marina Ivanovna from the Primorskii krai administration pointed out, Tajiks and Uzbeks had

their own “diasporas” to fall back on, whereas refugees and other ethnic Russians had only the Russian state.

By examining the Resettlement of Compatriots Program from different angles— from the perspectives of those involved, from officials to participants— I sought to reveal the complexities at play within debates about migration today in Russia and beyond as well as examine how raciolinguistic features influence people’s experiences. While Russians’ share European and American anxieties about cultural differences, Soviet legacies have also shaped how debates about migration and belonging play out in Russia. This was especially apparent in the narratives of the government officials I have examined throughout this dissertation. I found that what motivated officials’ work was a desire to revitalize their local communities and help compatriots, broadly conceived as former citizens of the Soviet Union and others who identified with Russian culture. Primarily middle-aged, these officials often drew on their Soviet educations that emphasized diversity and their experiences traveling across the Soviet Union in contrast to Russian nationalist narratives that have gained momentum in recent decades and that claim, “Russia is for Russians.” Soviet legacies in various forms, including memories of study and military service as well as shared identities and languages, also appeared in the returnees’ stories I analyzed. Although some may not have initially moved to Russia out of a feeling of compatriotism, they responded to the compatriots program’s offer of Russian citizenship and moved to the Far East.

By following how a policy “moves” and how different people respond to and identify with it, my chapters have revealed Russian policymaking and compatriotism as a reiterative process in which politicians, officials, journalists, immigrants, and citizens alike shape outcomes and interpretations. As such, my dissertation adds to

conversations about migration governance from the perspectives of the officials and immigrants involved in Russia, the fourth largest immigrant-receiving country (Schenk 2018; Reeves 2013; De León 2015; Reeves 2014; Fuglerud 2004; Gupta 1995). It also contributes to a growing body of literature on the Russian state that reveals the importance of regional variation across Russia and the negotiations made between the center and regions, officials and the populace (Laruelle and Radvanyi 2018; Laruelle 2019; Rogers 2012; Wengle 2015; Hemment 2015; Schenk 2018). Within those negotiations, as we have seen, returnees, like those who promote and influence the program, struggle to define what it means to be Russian today.

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