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**The Golden Cage: Imperial Politics, Colonist Rank and Marriage  
in the nineteenth century Black Sea Steppe**

In this paper,<sup>1</sup> I discuss the imposition of the legal restrictions on marriage of the “German” colonists in the Black Sea Steppe, and the dynamics and logics of policy formation. In doing this I mainly focus on the marriage eligibility of the colonists, and the marriage conclusion procedure. The analysis suggests on the instrumentalization and subordination of the colonist marriage to the Russia’s politics in a region. It also points out on the role and the intersections of gender, confession and social position in the policy formation and implementation. I address the following questions: What significances did the colonists’ civil rights, colonist status and its continuous legal specification bring to its bearers in the sphere of marriage? How was marriage of the colonists defined, specified, and conditioned within the frame of the colonist status and the imperial politics in the region? What was the interplay between marriage ability of the colonists, gender and social status?

Among numerous groups of population that migrated to the Black Sea Steppe in the course of Russia’s colonization, present research focuses on people from Central Europe, mainly Lutherans and Roman Catholics, referred to as “German colonists” in the imperial discourse and legislation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The hundreds of thousands immigrants of some imagined “Germanic” heritage gradually become collectively identified as “German” colonists, imputing a homogeneity and uniformity that never existed, and leveling the diverse backgrounds of the migrants.

The empirical foundation of this paper derives from imperial legislation and archival materials of official origin. I draw on the *Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*: the regulations of the Committee of the Ministers and State Council, Senate and Emperor’s decrees, the Ministry of the Interior’s orders to be followed and implemented by the colonial administrations of the Black Sea provinces and considered by the ecclesiastical authorities.

Focusing only on the imperial legislation is not enough in studying and comprehending the complexities of the Russian legal regimes. Published official sources might create a twisted vision of actual legal practice in place. It does not provide the insights of the backstage of the colonization project either. Its complexities might be untangled by examining the practices. Alison Smith points out on the complications in the examination of the eighteenth-century legal

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper is the part of the on-going PHD project.

practices brought by *the Complete Collection of Laws*, due to its actual incompleteness. The primary sources for this examination are composed of the archives of colonial administration of the Russian government, which I call the colonial archive, accumulated in two Ukrainian regional archives of Odesa and Dnipro.<sup>2</sup>

This study is largely inspired by the theoretical and methodological insights provided by an array of scholars focusing on the history of the Russian Empire, particularly the scholarship on the nature of autocratic legality, imperial geographies of power and Russia's imperial statehood, the heterogeneity of the imperial rule.<sup>3</sup> My analysis also takes into consideration the concepts of gender, introduced by Jeanne Boydston,<sup>4</sup> and "patriarchal equilibrium", coined by Judith M. Bennett.<sup>5</sup>

### Historical Background

By the end of the eighteenth century, as a result of the victorious wars of the Russian Empire with the Ottoman Empire, the Northern Black Sea littoral fell under the Russian Crown. This was preceded by a profound political shifting in Dnipro, Azov and Black Sea areas and removal of a number of political actors of the region, as the Cossack Hetmanate, Nogai Hordes, Zaporozhian Sich, and the Crimean Khanate. The Empire aimed at digesting hastily alien territories above all through the dislocation and migrations, and the constant administrative territorial redrawing. Having engendered massive migrations and displacements, the establishment of the Russian rule in a region brought radical changes for its population and societies, and destruction of established socio-economic and cultural settings.<sup>6</sup>

In Catherine's reign (1762-1796), people from German lands were invited to settle vast Steppe territories newly annexed by the Russian Empire and promised free land, exemption from

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<sup>2</sup> At the State Archive of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (*Derzhavnyi arkhiv Dnipropetrovskoi oblasti*), further DADO – Fund 134, the Guardianship Office for New Russian Foreign Settlers and Ekaterinoslav Office for Foreign Settlers (1781-1857). At State Archive of Odesa Oblast (*Derzhavnyi arkhiv Odes'koi oblasti*), further DAOO – Fund 6, Trustees Committee for Foreign Settlers in the Southern Region of Russia (1799-1876) and Fund 252, Odessa Office for Foreign Settlers of the Southern Region of Russia (1807-1850).

<sup>3</sup> From an enormous amount of literature see: William G. Wagner, *Marriage, Property, and Law in Late Imperial Russia* (Clarendon Press-Oxford, 1994), pp. 1-137, *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, ed. Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev (Indiana University Press, 2007); Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Jeanne Boydston, "Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis", in *Gender and History*, vol.20, no.3 (2008), pp.558-583.

<sup>5</sup> Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters. Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 20-21, 80.

<sup>6</sup> From a huge amount of literature, see: Hakan Kirimli, "Emigrations from the Crimea to the Ottoman Empire during the Crimean War", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.44, no.5 (2008), pp. 751-773; Bohdan Korolenko, "Istorychna kryvda" iak ideia ta lehitymatsiinyi faktor aneksii Krymskoho hanstva Rosiiskou imperieiu: vytoky, ideolohichne zabezpechennia ta realizatsiia "novoi" polityky pamiaty, in *Derzhavotvorchi ta tsyvilizatsiini zdobutky ukrainskogo narodu. Natsional'na ta istorychna pamiat'* (Kyiv: Stylos, 2011), pp. 283-303; Bohdan Korolenko, *Vkhodzhennia Krymu do Rosiiskoi imperii: stabilizatsiini zakhody rossiiskoi administratsii (1783-seredyna 1784)*, *Kultura narodov Prichernomoria*, no.51(2004), pp. 104-110.

taxes, and religious freedom. The first German speaking migrants arrived on the banks of Volga River in 1764. In 1804 and 1812, Alexander the First (1801-1825) published a series of decrees, setting new conditions for the extensive European immigration into the Russian Empire and facilitating new influx from turmoil German lands to the Black Sea Steppe and Bessarabia. Over the years, immigrants and their offspring established colonies in the North Caucasus and Siberia as well. These would-be “German” colonists came from a variety of lands: Baden, Swabia, Bavaria, the Palatine and West Prussia, Württemberg.

**Map 1.** *The migrations from German lands to the Russian Empire, the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries*<sup>7</sup>



In 1800, an administration, under the name *the Guardianship Office for New Russian Foreign Settlers*, was established in Ekaterinoslav city for the management of the affairs of the new colonies established in the Lower Dnipro River and Northern Black Sea. In 1818 it was replaced by a new administration called the *Trustees Committee for Foreign Settlers in the Southern Region of Russia*, with offices in Chisinau and Odessa. The local rural governance with colonist village and district boards and appointed as well as elected clerks arose.

<sup>7</sup>Karte “Deutsche Auswanderung nach Russland im 18. und 19. Jh.” In DIE RUSSLANDDEUTSCHEN: Aus der Geschichte der deutschen Übersiedler. Available: <http://www.arwela.info/8gesch01.htm> , accessed 06-03-2015.

Until 1860s-1870s, the introduction of the Great Reforms, the German colonists enjoyed distinct legal and social status within the estate of peasantry, had a separate administration of the Russian government and elements of self-governance. The colonist rank specified their place within imperial social matrix, relation to the polity, rights and privileges, but also set a number of limitations. Metaphorically speaking, rights and privileges, generous loans and land possessions attributed to the colonist status became a golden, but a cage for its holders, particularly in terms of their physical and social mobility.

However the administrative reforms of 1866-1871 annulled the separate administration of the colonies. The colonists were brought under the wings of general state administration. As a result of dramatic shift in policies, tens of thousands of discontented ex-colonists migrated to America prior to 1914. Among the remnants, twentieth centuries revolutions, civil war, famine, and deportations of the later period caused enormous death tolls and turmoil.

According to Adam Giesinger's estimations, in 1825 the number of German population in the Black Sea settlement area, including Mennonites, was 51 014, in 1841 – 88 110, in 1859 – 143 733, and in 1897 – 377 798.<sup>8</sup>

### **Subjects of the Empire, Objects of Governance: Legal Grounds for the Colonists**

The Russian imperial governance and entire legal order was based on differentiated collectivity, as Jane Burbank notes or “separate deals”, as Eric Lohr calls it. Getting married, buying property, changing one's place of residence was simply regulated according to the estate, confession, ethnicity, or territorial location of the individuals. Age and gender were grounds for further specifications of rights within these categories.<sup>9</sup>

For Germans, Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians and many others, admission to the colonist rank presupposed denaturalization from their “native” citizenship<sup>10</sup> and naturalization into the Russian one. Colonist status as a distinct social condition got its specification during the first decades of the nineteenth century in the set of imperial acts. The legal standing of the colonists embodied some general all imperial features common to all subjects under this designation, but also had some peculiarities, depending on the region of settlement (Volga, Saint Petersburg or Bessarabia). The crystallization of the colonist legal standing went hand in hand with the influx

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<sup>8</sup> For geographical and regional details about the German colonies in the eighteenth–twentieth centuries, see Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Khrushchev: The Story of Russia's Germans* (Lincoln: AHSGR, 1993), pp. 336, 155. Karl Stumpp, *Die Auswanderung aus Deutschland nach Rufiland 1763-1862* (Tubingen: Selbstvetlag, 1972), pp. 23–116. James W. Long, *From Privileged to Dispossessed: The Volga Germans, 1860-1917* (University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Jane Burbank, “An Imperial rights regime: law and citizenship in the Russian Empire”, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 7.3 (2006), p. 407.

<sup>10</sup> By citizenship I mean *poddanstvo*, following Jane Burbank, William Wagner, Eric Lohr, Alexander Morrisson and others at this point.

of new migrants and the foundation of many more settlements-colonies in the Black Sea region, as well as the gradual forging of the vertical of the colonial administration.

Colonial administration and elected self-governing organs (village and district boards, chairmen, schulze [village major] and beisitzer [major's assistant]) were called to conduct the overall management and supervision over the colonists. Communal and domestic issues so called "minor disputes and civil claims" were under their consideration. In those proceedings, colonial administration and self-governing organs were guided by *the Instruction for the Internal Order and the Management over the New Russian Foreign Colonies* (16 May 1801) and its *Addition* (7 July 1803). Those legal acts introduced the strict regulation and surveillance over the colonists' economic activities and everyday life, as well as framed their behaviors and personal interactions.<sup>11</sup>

By the late eighteenth century, belonging to a society and owning duties as two legal principles defining what estate<sup>12</sup> meant had been manifested in imperial laws regulating social mobility. The state aims of tax revenues, and military recruits could be easily implemented by restricting mobility. At the same time, the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries was an era of Russia's territorial conquest and followed colonization that changed the economic needs and required at least some social mobility. As a result, the imperial laws were torn between two demands of restricting mobility and its favoring. This was also the time when all imperial subjects were locked into their positions through formal ascription in a particular society. Crucial changes in perceiving social mobility and estates occurred only after the Emancipation in 1861.<sup>13</sup>

The *Decision of the State Council on Colonists' Movement to Other Estates*, adopted in 1812, regulated and specified the colonists' social mobility.<sup>14</sup> By that time, the State was interested in keeping the colonists on place, preventing their settlements from dilution. Only then, in the view of the Russian government, they could perform persistent work and increase the productivity of their farms. According to this *Decision*, it was prohibited to release the foreign colonists of the whole village from the status of the colonists. From this time, the social mobility of the colonists, similar to other groups of peasant and urban population, became bureaucratized.

<sup>11</sup> Instruksiia dlia vnutrennego rasporiadka i upravleniia Novorossiiskikh innostrannykh kolonii (16 May 1801), in *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii (PSZRI)*, vol. 26(1800-1801)(Saint Petersburg, 1830), pp. 635-649; Dopolnenie k instruksii o vnutrennem rasporiadke i upravlenii v Novorossiiskikh koloniiakh (1803), in *Nemtsy v istorii Rossii. Dokumenty vysshikh organov vlasti i voennogo komandovaniia. 1652-1917*, sost. Viktor Diezendorf (Moskva: MFD), pp. 136-142.

<sup>12</sup> Here, by estate I mean *soslovie*, omitting the historiographical debate on the semantics, and conceptual distinction between estate and *soslovie*. For more, see: Simon Dixon, "Review: Russia's Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm Revisited", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol.93, no.4 (October, 2015), pp. 732-736. But also the works by Vasiliï Kliuchevskii, Gregory L. Freeze, Boris Mironov, Alison K. Smith.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *For the Common Good*, pp. 48-51, 78, 150, 208.

<sup>14</sup> Reshenie Gosudarstvennogo Soveta o perekhode kolonistov v drugie sosloviia, utverzhdennoe Aleksandrom I (1812), in *Nemtsy v istorii Rossii*, pp. 171-172.

“An act of exclusion” from the colonist society and “a letter of acceptance” from a new society became crucial documents for the ones willing to change their social affiliation.<sup>15</sup> No one could release from the colonist rank unless one had not definitely chosen “another way of life” and repaid the state debt.

*The Charter of the Colonies of Foreigners in the Empire*, adopted in 1857, was the culmination of almost one century of legislative production regarding the colonists. It compiled the legal acts on foreign colonists all over the empire, adopted during the last third of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. The marriage and family rights of the colonists were declared in the *Charter*, yet specifically regulated by the Statutes of the Evangelical-Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches of the empire, adopted in 1832 and 1857 respectively.

Neither of the documents discussed above, nor the Catherinian decree of 1763, specified or even mentioned the procedure of getting married and divorced among the colonists. Those social practices were condensed into the first sentence of *the Instruction* claiming that “the main obligation of all settlers is to obey the law of their church”.<sup>16</sup> At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, marriage and family issues rested under the full competence of respective churches. But this would not last long.

All colony land belonged to the colony in perpetuity, not to individual families.<sup>17</sup> The farm land could not be sub-divided but could be inherited by only one of the children, usually the youngest son. At the foundation of the settlements in the Black Sea region, each family head was allocated a house plot of sixty desiatin<sup>18</sup> in the settlement, plus fixated quantity of surrounding farm lands. The land allotment was indivisible, whereas other moveable and unmovable property was divided between all the inheritors equally. If there were no sons, widow and daughters possessed the land, unless one of the daughter get married or widow remarried.<sup>19</sup> This system of land tenure existed up to the 1860s, when government encouraged the equal division of the land between all inheritors.<sup>20</sup> Marrying widows was economically beneficial for landless males and foreigners. It brought political representation, social recognition and economic stability.

Apart from land allotments, the Catherinian decree of 1763 assured 30 years of so called “grace” to the colonists, during which they were freed from any taxes and duties. In 1806, the

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<sup>15</sup> DADO, fund 6.

<sup>16</sup> Instruktsiia dlia vnutrennego rasporiadka i upravleniia Novorossiiskikh innostrannykh kolonii (16 May 1801), in *PSZRI*, vol. 26(1800-1801)(Saint Petersburg, 1830), p. 635.

<sup>17</sup> On Russian inheritance policies see: Roger Bartlett, *Human capital*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>18</sup> 1 desiatina is equal to 1, 09 hectares.

<sup>19</sup> Ustav o koloniiakh inostrantsev v Rossiiskoi imperii, 1857, in *Nemtsy v istorii Rossii*, Diezendorf, pp. 441-442.

<sup>20</sup> Oleksii Zamuraitsev, *Nimets'ki kolonii Pivdnia Ukrainy u drugii polovyni XIX na pochatku XX stolit'*

(Dysertatsiia na zdobuttia naukovogo stupenia kandydata istorychnykh nauk. Rukopys) (Kyiv, 2008), pp. 90-99.

grace years were reduced from 30 to 10 years. At the expiration of “grace years”, colonists were charged with a number of duties, outlined in *the Charter*.<sup>21</sup>

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, in the series of legal acts, the bearers of the colonist status were differentiated into a separate group of peasants, with assigned rights, obligations and attributes, as well as separate colonial administration. Most colonists had also financial obligations to the Russian government, individually imposed on each household. State debt repayment, and transfer or sales of the farm to a fellow colonist were among the reasons for colonists to move to other estates. Multiple meanings were ascribed to the colonist status – an obligation, an opportunity, a belonging, identity, a way of life, and subordination. The chairman, schultze and beisitzer were supposed to control all the complex of agricultural activities, as well as social relations in the colonies. The legal construction of the colonist status as a social category was ongoing and open ended, and occurred in tandem with the colonization in the region, its changing perceptions and aims over time.

### **Governing the Colonists, Approaching their Marriage**

This section discusses the encounters between the colonists and the colonial authorities regarding the marriage conclusion in first decade of the nineteenth century and its character. I mainly focus on the settlers of the colonies of Josephstal, Jamburg, and Danzig founded during the period of 1787-1796. I suppose that discovered evidence is quite typical and representative.

For the Russian monarchs, governance was about control over resources – territory and labor – and the social order required to secure them. In the eyes of the Russian rulers, only through surveillance and guardianship over the colonists, the goals of colonization could have been achieved. In the nineteenth century, imperial subject’s rights in the matter of marriage were established primarily by religion, but also age, sex, occupation, criminal record, and place of settlement were also considered by the law. The right to be married by the rules of one’s own faith was offered to most of imperial subjects. Imperial marriage law, codified and published in 1830s, both recognized differences in marriage practices and made some universalizing assumptions.

Jane Burbank underlines, authorities had to struggle when dealing with subjects whose actions did not clearly fit within a confession or one legal order. Both intermarriage and conversion were painful practices that challenged the premises of the system and imperial governance.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Instruktsiia o vnutrennem rasporiadke i upravlenii v Novorossiiskikh koloniiakh (1801), in *Nemtsy v istorii Rossii*, Diezendorf, p. 117. Boris Malinovskii, “Stavka pozemel’noi podat’i v koloniiakh inostrantsev na territorii Rossiiskoi imperii (rubezh XVIII-XIXvv)”, in *Istoriia torhivli, podat’iv ta myta*, no.1 (7), 2013, pp. 82-86.

<sup>22</sup> Burbank, *An Imperial Rights Regime*, pp. 408-409.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was either overseer, a colonial inspector, of the respective colony or schulze who notified the *Guardianship Office* on colonists' intention to marry and asked for its marriage approval on a behalf of the colonists. During 1801-1807, Pavel Peleshnikov, Vasilii Develdeev, Ivan Gsell, the overseers of the colonies, reported about the intentions of the residents of Josephstal, Jamburg and Rybalsk colonies to marry. They also claimed "no obstacles", assuring lack of any negative consequences of the would-be unions to the colonist societies' well-being, and asked for the *Guardianship Office's* resolution.

The documented evidence provides no hints on what was behind overseer's statement of the lack of obstacles for the marriage conclusion, what were the criteria of evaluation if any, whether it was any sort of investigation conducted before, yet not documented. No colonist personal petitions to marry were identified in the archive. During the first years of the nineteenth century, as evidence suggests, the intentions of the colonists of Jamburg and Jozephstal colonies to marry were met with positive resolutions of the *Guardianship Office*, only with a few exceptions of additional proceedings. In case if one of the partners had under age children or property than some additional commitments were required in order to get marriage approval.<sup>23</sup>

Due to the lack of any official directives and guidelines on how to approach and administer cross-border marriages, the *Guardianship Office* considered appropriate to simply ban it. That happened, for instance, to Anna Katharina Neumeier and Johann Michael Becker in 1801. Colonial administration justified its ban by the aspiration to keep the marriage market save and restrained from the outsiders, non-colonists. It became particularly relevant in the situations, when possible marriage would result in women's change of social belonging and leave the colonist status. From pastor Carl Biller's point of view, Becker's not belonging to the colonist status was not an obstacle for the marriage conclusion.

Intermarriage had been a delicate area, since it challenged the principle that people belonged to collectives and would follow their rights and obligations. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the intermarriages and cross-border marriages of the colonists were not specified and regulated. But the situation has not remained unchanged.

### **Married to the Empire: Bureaucratization of the Colonist Marriage**

In the 1810s several legal acts were adopted specifically targeting the colonist marriage that became not only the object of lawmaking, but also a social category in need of regulation, supervision and correlation.

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<sup>23</sup> DAOO, fund 6.

On March 1816, the *Ministry of State Domains* prescribed to conclude marriages of the colonists on the basis of local authorities' permission. It particularly induced the clergy not to marry colonists without a written certificate from the overseers of the colonies and mayors of the district boards confirming no legal obstacles for marriage conclusion.<sup>24</sup> From now on, marriages of the colonists were to be concluded merely on the grounds of the colonist authority's approval. Colonist administration's vertical was de jure introduced into marital domain and ascribed the control over it.

Remarkable is the amount of copies and reminders of the *March Recommendation* in the colonial archive during 1810-1830s, indicating its frequent violation. Although the *March Recommendation* was to be sent to all district boards of the Black Sea colonies, the *Trustees Committee* repeatedly reminded ecclesiastical authorities, particularly the Roman Catholic ones, about the ban of marriage conclusion without secular authorities' permission.

In the Russian Empire, as Anatolyi Remnev claims, the administrative problem of the center and the region included a dialogue of two sides whose positions often did not coincide, thus the steady flow of instructions from the center could be dampened successfully by their non-fulfillment in the periphery.<sup>25</sup> Even if marriages were concluded after gross negligence, in the most situations, colonist authorities could do nothing but recognize such marriages.

As to the cross-border marriages, the official guidelines on how to deal with them in the Black Sea colonies appeared only in early 1820s. By January 1820, the *Trustees Committee* specified the requirements for marriage conclusion particularly between the colonists and non-colonists. Marriages could not be concluded without the knowledge of the colonial authorities in case, when the colonist male marry non-colonist female, and colonist female marry non-colonist male, "because the adoption into the rank of the colonists and exclusion thereof require a special permit".<sup>26</sup> Indebted colonist widows and daughters were prohibited to marry non-colonists and leave the colonist rank unless their share of debt would be repaid by themselves or after them.

Colonist female's marriage with non-colonist male was inevitably perceived as female's way out of the colonist rank that essentially changed her social belonging. In order to be released from the colonist rank and admitted to another estate, a share of female's colonist debt was to be repaid.

Most legislation on the social mobility and estate membership, Alison Smith argues, "either ignored women or treated them as mere appendages to their male relatives". Men were legally registered in order to ensure fulfillment of their duties, but because women had no such

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<sup>24</sup> DAOO, fund 252.

<sup>25</sup> Anatolyi Remnev, "Siberia and the Russian Far East in the Imperial Geography of Power", in *Russian Empire*, Burbank, von Hagen, Remnev, p. 432.

<sup>26</sup> DAOO, fund 6.

connection to the duties attributed to their social position, claims Smith, “communities had to register them only in the interests of keeping track of the larger population”.<sup>27</sup>

However, different pattern was identified in respect to the colonist women of the Black Sea Steppe.

The imperial law neither regarded nor officially regulated the situations when Russian subjects belonged to no estate. Leaving and joining estate were often restricted by the issues of duty. Colonist debts and solvency turned to become the restraining factors for colonist marriage conclusion. Most colonist population in the Empire was charged by coverable and irrevocable debts. Feed and travel money, expenses for church erections, and salary for clergy during grace years, purchase of lands, as irrevocable expenses, were to be paid in cases of immigration from the Russian Empire or moving to another estate. The authorities excessively provided colonists with enormous interest-free loans for dwelling, purchase of agricultural tools and cattle, which were to be progressively repaid by the colonists, after grace period of ten years. The state loan was enrolled not on each colonist, but it was a community that was obliged for repayment of state debts in case of colonists’ withdrawal. The Catherinian decree provided no-tax repayment of this state loan after ten grace years, in equal shares, during three years. However, these terms had been repeatedly extended due to the colonists’ lack of solvency.<sup>28</sup>

The debt was equally imposed and calculated on all members of the farm, regardless of sex and age; the head of the farm was responsible for its repayment.<sup>29</sup> Frequently many colonists got into debt bondage that restrained their social and physical mobility.

In contrast to Smith’s argument regarding women and their shifting place in imperial social order, it was the colonist females and their marriageability that were particularly legislated and regulated, and in a connection to their colonist duties. Colonist women had similar duties to colonist men. Moreover, it was a woman who was seen as the one potentially changing her social status through marriage.

In practice, when assuming the office, religious servitors and clerks were not provided with a step-by-step algorithm on how to marry and divorce the colonists. The orders and prescriptions regarding marriage conclusions procedure were inconsistent and dispersed. Despite a certain procedure of announcing new legal acts and prescriptions to the colonists, the evidence gives a strong impression about the colonists usually getting to know, if at all, about the new legal acts

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<sup>27</sup> Alison K. Smith, “The Shifting Place of Women in Imperial Russia’s Social Order”, *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, vol.51, no.2 (2010), p. 2, 7-8.

<sup>28</sup> Doklad Ministra vnutrennikh del o pravilakh priema i poseleniia kolonistov, utverzhdenykh Aleksandrom I (1804), Reshenie Gosudarstvennogo Soveta o perekhode kolonistov v drugie sosloviia, utverzhdennoe Aleksandrom I (1812), in *Nemtsy v istorii Rossii*, Diezendorf, pp. 144-147, 171-172. Ustav o koloniiakh inostrantsev v Rossiiskoi imperii (1857), in *Nemtsy v istorii Rossii*, Diezendorf, pp. 458-459.

<sup>29</sup> DAOO, fund 6.

in the course of the social practices these were supposed to regulate, or even *post factum*, after legal violations had been disclosed.

It will be an overestimation to claim somewhat unified and standardized procedure for the colonists in obtaining marriage permission. It varied depending on case, time and circumstances. On the initial stage, the approval of marriage by parents or guardians was needed. If parents or guardians disapproved marriage, they were required to provide justified reasons for that. After obtaining parents' and village assembly's approvals (in case of cross-border marriages), a couple was to address the *Guardianship Office/the Trustees Committee* but through the overseer of the colony, who submitted a request for a marriage conclusion. The colonists' direct address to the *Guardianship Office* was prohibited; thus overseer exercised two-way mediator between colonial administration and colonists regarding all practicalities. Marriage approval by the district board, which usually based its decision on village assembly's verdict, was important.

If there were no obstacles from the *Guardianship Offices'* point of view, it approved marriage and issued a marriage certificate to be further submitted to the clergy. Marriage permission certificate was personally handed to the colonist couple by overseer. Priests and pastors were supposed to check additionally age and kinship requirements, as well as voluntariness of marriage, confessional affiliation, and then made three announcements in the Church before actual wedding ceremony. The routine of obtaining marriage permissions varied. However, parents, village assembly in cases of cross-border marriages, and district board's approvals were significant and usually ensured the *Guardianship Office's* authorization of marriages.

In the most optimistic cases, receiving a paper certificate permitting to conclude marriage took a month or so from the moment a couple expressed openly its will to marry. In such cases, the time was mainly needed to inquiry on the couple. In more complicated cases, connected with property and underage children, in cases of remarriages, waiting time for marriage permission could have been extended up to one year. The wedding ceremony could have also been delayed due to Lent and other religious holidays, non-availability of priests in the colony, arrangements regarding custody over property or juvenile children. The personal life of the colonists was highly affected by economic and administrative factors and frequently found itself in limbo.

In the second decade of the nineteenth century, the regulations explicitly targeting marriage formation of the colonists were introduced. The surveillance and management, as the core duties of the colonial administration vertical, became gradually extended on the colonist marriage formation and dissolution. Expanding the control of village and district mayors and guardianship offices over marriage formation of the colonists engendered heavily bureaucratized procedure of marriage conclusion.

## **Conclusions**

Colonists were assigned a crucial mission in the colonization project: by populating the Steppe terrains, to promote the economic development of the region, and to facilitate the integration of the Black Sea Steppe with the rest of the empire. This was in exchange for land possession, other rights and attributes, assigned by the Russian monarchs. A golden cage.

Along with universal requirements to the colonist marriage as age, health and kinship considerations, derived from their Catholic and Protestant confessions, some particular demands arose from the colonist rank, assigned rights, obligations and attributes, and financial obligations to the Russian state. Marriage routine for the colonists was additionally specified by governmental orders and colonial administration's prescriptions due to their social status and debts to the Treasury. As soon as the legislation on the colonist status and its boundaries within the imperial social system was designed, in the 1810-1820s, the legal restrictions were imposed on colonist marriage. Introduced laws, regulating colonist marriage formation, aimed at predicting and keeping a track on interpersonal interactions, maintaining and securing the social boundaries and duties fulfillment associated with the colonist status. Finally, from official perspective, establishing marriage order would influence positively the colonist productivity and ensure the prosperity of the colonizing region.

Legal restrictions on marriage imposed by the Russian government particularly targeted those females' who intended to marry non-colonists. Russian government viewed them as the ones who would necessarily leave the colonist rank and join husbands in their estate. In this case mandatory repayment of state debt became a condition for marriage conclusion.

Colonist marriages were deeply fraught with political implications of colonization. Far from representing a private matter of importance only to individuals, families or local communities, such unions had considerable significance for the imperial governance of the region and colonization. Colonist marriage formation was conditioned to their financial obligations and debts imposed on each family unit. Colonist land possessions and farmsteads became restraining factors for marriages and social mobility. In this article, I have argued that the colonists' marriage came to be regarded not only as social institution to maintain good morals and sexual expression, but primary as bedrock of the economic sufficiency, success of colonization and welfare of the colonizing Northern Black Sea region, imperial rule security in a region.