

History with an Attitude: Alaska in Modern Russian Patriotic Rhetoric

Guys, stop your speculations and read books. One of my recent discoveries is Kremlev. Here is a real history of Russia. One reads his books and wants to beat a head against a wall from the realization of how much we lost due to corruption, treason and the stupidity of our rulers – tsars, general secretaries and presidents. What wonderful opportunities we had in the past and how much we have lost!¹

A nationalist blogger about the ultra-patriotic popular history "Russian America: Discovered and Sold" (2005) by Sergei Kremlev

In Russian-American relations, Alaska is doomed to remain a literary-political metaphor – some sort of a stylistic figure of speech whose original meaning faded away being replaced with an imagined one.²

Writer Vladimir Rokot (2007)

On the afternoon of October 18, 1867, a Siberian Line Battalion and a detachment of the US Ninth Infantry faced each other on a central plaza of New Archangel (Figure 1), the capital of Russian America, prepared for the official ceremony of lowering the Russian flag and of raising the Stars and Stripes. This act was to finalize the transfer of Alaska (Figure 2) from Russia to the United States, which bought the territory for \$ 7.2 million. At 4 PM, Captain Aleksei Peshchurov gave orders to lower the Russian flag. After this, Brigadier General Lovell Rousseau, a representative of the US Government, ordered the American flag to be raised. Salutes were fired. This ceremony ended a brief seventy-year presence of the Russian Empire in northwestern North America.³ Driven by short-term strategic goals, Russian emperor Alexander II decided to get rid of his overseas possession, which represented 6 per cent of the Russian Empire territory. Hardly aware of the very existence of Russian America, not many paid attention to the event at that time. As a result, few lamented the sale of Alaska except for shareholders of the Russian-American Company (the RAC), whose financial interests were arbitrarily violated by the sudden decision of the tsar.

Unlike their nineteenth-century predecessors, present-day Russian fiction and non-fiction along with media actively engage in the history of Russian America and its subsequent sale to the United States. One may notice that the level of this engagement increased for the past ten years. This essay points to a source of such keen attention to the Russian presence in northwestern North America and analyzes the content of the print media that shape Russian understanding of Alaska. The goal of this paper is to see what rhet-

1 <http://www.dpnipkov.org> (accessed 09/26/06)

2 ROKOT Knyaz' Russkoy Ameriki, p. 341.

3 BLACK Russians in Alaska, pp. 286–287.

orical outbursts around such a marginal and obscure topic as Russian America might tell us about the content and direction of current Russian nationalist sentiments, which are closely entangled with the idea of empire that at one point had stretched from Finland to California. Alaska might serve as an example of how, in order to enhance these patriotic sentiments, current nationalist rhetoric appropriates and “domesticates” as “ours” the territories that in the past had never been considered Russian ethnic areas. It is argued that the disproportional attention to the history of Russian presence in northwestern North America if compared, for example, with the topic of the nineteenth-century Russian expansion to Central Asia and the Far East, clearly points to anti-Americanism that occupies such a large place in current Russian nationalism.⁴ Although historians and anthropologists have recently produced a number of comprehensive writings dealing with various aspects of history and anthropology of Russian America,⁵ so far no work has discussed Alaska as a historical metaphor in Russian nationalist rhetoric. This paper is designated to fill this gap.

A joke that was taken seriously

The author of this paper became alerted about Alaska as a historical metaphor after a strong reaction in Russia to a humorous newspaper article entitled “Alaska Would Be More at Home in Russia” by Steven Pearlstein. Poking fun at the current Alaskan economy, which is heavily subsidized by the federal government, and at the nepotism of Alaskan politicians, the reporter jokingly suggested that with such “corporate” culture Alaska would feel quite at home in present-day Russia.⁶

Surprisingly, this marginal publication caused a large emotional uproar in Russian patriotic media. Even though the humorous piece was designated for domestic American consumption, writer Rokot colorfully noted, “the idea of the return of Alaska went into the masses and began to live its own life independent of its original context”.⁷ Several authors were very serious about Pearlstein’s sarcastic suggestion to bring Alaska “home” to Russia. Aleksandr Dugin, a prominent nationalist ideologist and proponent of Eurasianism, stressed, “You meant this as a joke, but we did not get it. Let’s sit and discuss the terms of the sale.”⁸ Others viewed the publication as a malicious attempt by the “unscrupulous Yankee” to make fun of Russian weaknesses: “Disgusting American newspaper jokes. What are we to laugh at? At our own misfortunes? People who benefited from this public-

4 The perception that Russia has no choice except opposing the United States has now become commonplace both in elite circles and among the populace. LARUELLE *Russian Eurasianism*, p. 11.

5 For the most significant recent works, see BLACK *Russians in Alaska*; BOLKHOVITINOV (ed.) *Istoriya Russkoy Ameriki*; GRINEV *Tlingit Indians in Russian America*; KAN *Memory Eternal*; LUEHRMANN *Russian Colonialism*; PETROV *Rossiysko-amerikanskaya kompaniya*; VINKOVETSKY *The Russian-American Company*; ZORIN *Indeyskaya vojna v Russkoy Amerike*.

6 LESHUKOV *Pochem nynche Alyaska*.

7 ROKOT *Knyaz’ Russkoy Ameriki*, p. 344.

8 DUGIN *Nam vse nuzhno*.

ation are democratic Russophobes who simply got another chance to make fun of eternal Russian backwardness.”⁹

Despite the variety of views, the majority of the patriotic authors were unanimous in their lamentations about the loss of that large chunk of land that could have provided Russia with an excellent geo-strategic position in the North American continent. Paranoid about an unfavorable demographic situation in the Russian Federation and a looming threat of losing new territories, many patriotic authors have drawn historical analogies between the sale of Alaska in 1867 and present territorial disputes between Russia and her neighbors.¹⁰

Nationalist columnist Sergei Pykhtyn is convinced that the history of the Alaska sale provides serious historical lessons relevant for the present day. Making reference to the 1990 demarcation of Russian and American interests in the Bering Sea area, which he considers a betrayal of Russian interests, Pykhtyn draws parallels between this recent “treason” and the “treason” of 1867, which he views as an original anti-patriotic downfall that opened doors for future land concessions: “If nobody knows why and how Russia’s American possessions were lost, and if in the past and in the present public opinion has treated this historical fact indifferently, then there is a real danger that Russian people might approach our possible future territorial concessions in the same manner.”¹¹

The very fact that part of the Russian Empire was sold to another nation by default was destined to feed wounded patriotic sentiments. What especially heats Alaska-related nationalist rhetoric is that the nation that purchased Alaska was not simply an ordinary foreign country but the United States. For many nationalists and traditionalists the world over, this particular nation serves as the chief symbol of supranational financial and political forces that seek to uproot societies based on soil and tradition. In the current climate of rising anti-Americanism in Russia, the significance of Alaska as a symbolic battle ground between Russia, which is defined by one nationalist historian of Alaska¹² as the carrier of eternal forces of “goodness”, and the leader of the forces of “darkness”, embodied by the United States, acquires an acute meaning.

In a paranoid nationalist imagination, the 1867 Alaska purchase easily turns into a conspiracy of pro-American interests, which plotted to alienate from Russia her most important territorial and geopolitical acquisition. It is obvious that the topic of Alaska in general and its sale to the United States in particular represents a convenient niche for nationalist-oriented authors to channel their frustrations, articulate their expectations, and sample various conspiracy theories currently popular in Russian patriotic circles. Hence, the literature I discuss in this essay is not so much a historiography of the Russian presence in North America but rather a window into the symbolic geography and history constructed by current Russian nationalist media.

9 LESHUKOV *Pochem nynche Alyaska*.

10 LESHUKOV *Pochem nynche Alyaska*.

11 PYKHTYN *Kak prodavali Alyasku* (for the complete text of the article, see also <http://www.rusk.ru> (accessed 03/03/08)). Moreover, writer S. Kazakov directly traces the beginning of what he calls Russian political masochism to the time when Alaska had been sold to the United States. KAZAKOV *Zagadki i legendy russkoy istorii*, S. 201.

12 KREMLEV *Russkaya Amerika*, S. 5.

Who are the major authors who engage in the topic of Russian America and who are profiled in this paper? Among them one can find writer ALEXANDER KERDAN, a former officer who worked for Soviet army media. After retiring during Gorbachev's *perestroika*, he became a die-hard Russian Orthodox – a natural evolution for many individuals from the Soviet ideological establishment. Having a desire to somehow boost declining patriotism, he turned to writing novels about Russian explorers of Alaska and about Soviet Afghan ventures. Another one is SERGEY KREMLEV who calls himself a “professional patriot”. In Soviet times he was employed in a military industrial complex as an engineer and now is affiliated with the Academy of Military Sciences, a nationalist think tank. Although his writing credentials were limited to occasional contributions to “Murzilka”, a popular monthly for elementary school children in the Soviet Union, he has become the author of many popular histories, including a grand historical narrative “Russkaya Amerika: otkryt' i prodan” (Russian America: Discovered and Sold) (2005), which he advertises as a revision of Alaskan history “from a Russian viewpoint”. A third author who promotes the same viewpoint is above-mentioned reporter PYKHTIN, a nationalist activist and constant contributor to various patriotic media outlets. There is only one professional historian in this group. He is IVAN MIRONOV, a history graduate student from Moscow Pedagogical University, who was also an active member of the nationalist party Rodina (Motherland); this currently extinct group was bred by the Russian elite for election purposes in 2004 and headed by Dimitriy Rogozin, now Russia's representative in NATO headquarters. At one point, along with his friends Mironov participated in a “ritual” burning of “anti-Russian” and “Zionist” literature in the downtown of Moscow. At the same time, in contrast to other nationalist writings on Alaska, his “Rokovaya sdelka: kak prodavali Alyasku” (A Fateful Deal: How Alaska was Sold) (2007) is the only one that uses primary sources, including archives. In 2006, he completed all graduate course work and was just about to defend his dissertation when he was arrested for an alleged participation in an attempt on the life of Anatoliy Chubays, one of the architects of Russian privatization. Although Mironov was not able to receive his candidate of historical sciences degree, during two years he spent in a detention center, he was able to complete his book and, on top of this, acquired a martyr's charisma in the eyes of his comrades. Last but not least, one needs to mention ALEKSANDR BUSHKOV, a prolific bestselling author from Siberia. Bushkov, who started his career the late 1980s specializing in a science-fiction genre, is the author of numerous popular biographies and popular histories, which are always tuned to currently popular sentiments. Obviously sensing a growing fatigue from Stalinism-related topics in the Russian populace and its cravings for heroic themes, he quickly came up with his “Russkaya Amerika; slava i pozor” (Russian America: Glory and Shame) (2006).

Soviet Blueprints

Much of present-day Alaska history written from a “Russian viewpoint” is a direct continuation of the clichés and assessments developed between the 1940s and the 1980s. Before World War II, Soviet historiography treated Russian advances to Siberia and Alaska as a colonization process similar to the expansion of other European nations to non-Western periphery. A good example of such approach is “Russko-Amerikanskaya kompaniya

(The Russian-American Company) by Semen Okun (1939).¹³ With the ascent of Russian-Soviet patriotism during and after World War II, Stalinism began to more frequently massage Great Russian patriotism propagating national symbols and heroes of Russia in order to strengthen its grip over people. In addition, to advance her geo-strategic interests during the unfolding Cold War, Soviet Russia sought to harness the national liberation struggle of colonial peoples by condemning American and English imperialism and simultaneously whitewashing her own past history. Downplaying the colonial heritage of the Russian Empire became an important element of this window-dressing.

With these goals set by shifting official guidelines, Soviet historical scholarship began to emphasize the “progressive nature” of Russian colonization of Siberia and Alaska, the “democratic” class composition of Russian colonizers and their friendly relations with indigenous populations. Russian colonization was now presented as more humane and benevolent than the colonial policies of Western countries. Soon the very expression “colonization” disappeared from Russian historical usage and was replaced by the neutral word “domestication” (*osvoenie*). The revolts of indigenous Siberians and Alaskans against Russian advances were either not mentioned at all or ascribed to subversive activities of foreigners.¹⁴

As applied to Alaska, the blueprints for this “history” were laid at the end of the 1940s by two authors: amateur historian, writer and poet SERGEI MARKOV and writer IVAN KRATT.¹⁵ They were the first to articulate the new “domestication” approach as applied to the Russian presence in Alaska. Another important aspect of these two books was that both of them were tuned to the unfolding official campaign against so-called cosmopolitanism, which was directed to root out all vestiges of Western cultural influences in Soviet Russia. This is especially characteristic for Markov’s books that were published in the late 1940s and that had an obvious anti-American spin – the Cold War had already started in earnest and the campaign against all things Western was taking its first steps.

His predecessor, Kratt, published his “Ostrov Baranova” [The Island of Baranov] at the very end of World War II in one of the “thick” literary magazines.¹⁶ The novel is a story about the adventures of Alexander Baranov (1746–1819), the first chief administrator of the RAC, and his comrades. Kratt portrays Baranov not so much as a commercial director of the fur company but as an empire builder and especially as a caretaker of Russian imperial glory. At the end of the novel Baranov is shown standing on the top of a hill overlooking the newly acquired possession; the chief administration firmly secured his presence in the Sitka area by successfully defeating hostile Tlingit Indians and evil English and American “pirates”. Looking at the surroundings, in a patriotic frenzy he exclaims, “Russia! This is ours, this is dear to us.”¹⁷

Incidentally, one can see the same post-war Alaska-related patriotic motives in a Soviet Army march song “Leading Singer” (*Zapevala*) (1952) that contains the following verses:

13 For the English translation of this book, see OKUN *The Russian-American Company*.

14 GRINEV *Russkaya kolonizatsiya Alyaski*.

15 For a brief analysis of Kratt’s and Markov’s novels, see SLEZKINE *Arctic Mirrors*, pp. 324–327.

16 KRATT *Ostrov Baranova*.

17 KRATT *Ostrov Baranova*, p. 154.

Our great grandfathers ventured
 Beyond the Kuril Islands
 Making home in those rough lands
 Causing trouble to no one

Over the Yukon River in Alaska
 Over Rocky Mountain ranges
 People know Russians by names
 People remember Russians to this day

It is notable that “Russkie na Alyaske” (Russians in Alaska) by Markov (1946) (Figure 3), the first popular history of Alaska published in the Soviet Union after the Second World War, was printed by the Soviet military publishing house in the series “Officer’s Library”. It is a popular chronicle that glorifies Russian deeds in northwest North America.¹⁸ Next year, the same author released a novel, “Yukonskiy voron” (The Yukon Raven) (1947). In this particular book one finds all the clichés that later became a staple part of Soviet/Russian literature on Alaska, which, as YURI SLEZKINE has shown in his “Arctic Mirrors”, was an integral part of the post war literary narratives of Siberian exploration. Tied to the unfolding Cold War confrontation and anti-Western sentiments, these texts sampled righteous Slavs clashing with foreign (especially American) villains, and with native side-kicks standing and waiting to be blessed by the light of Russian civilization.¹⁹

Based on an actual travel account of explorer Lieutenant Lavrentiy Zagoskin, who was the first European to map the Lower Yukon River basin in the 1840s,²⁰ the novel portrays the explorer as a cultural hero in the indigenous wilderness. Zagoskin and other Russian characters, “blue-eyed giants”, are presented as carriers of “high culture” for the native folk. In addition, Markov turns Zagoskin into a closet revolutionary, an ardent patriot who is critical of corrupt tsarist bureaucrats who do not care about the prosperity of the fatherland, and of English and American interests that infringe on Russia’s North American possessions. The novel also widely portrays superhuman abilities of Russian explorers whose physical strength and stamina dwarfs local Indians and visiting American captains.²¹

Inspired by Markov’s novel, in his “Posledniy god” (The Last Year) (1961) another writer, MIKHAIL ZUEV-ORDYNETS, created the character of Andrei Gagarin – a literary clone of Zagoskin. In fact, Gagarin is a caricature of the lieutenant-explorer. While Markov’s Zagoskin is a revolutionary sympathizer, Gagarin is a member of an underground revolutionary group. Betrayed by his fiancée, he escapes from the secret police to Alaska, where he retreats into wilderness and becomes a mountain man. Boldly fighting the elements, he runs across and befriends a group of inland Indians still untouched by civilization, teaches them the basics of agriculture and crafts, and eventually becomes their chief. The plot of

18 MARKOV *Russkie na Alyaske*.

19 SLEZKINE *Arctic Mirrors*, pp. 323–335.

20 ZAGOSKIN *Peshkhodnaia opis’*. For the English translation, see ZAGOSKIN *Lieutenant Zagoskin’s travels in Russian America*.

21 MARKOV *Yukonskiy voron* (1947). Since 1947 the book saw numerous reprints with a total number of printed copies reaching one million. The latest edition brings together *Yukon Raven and Alaska Chronicle: MARKOV Yukonskiy voron; Letopis’ Alyaski*. Moskva 2001.

the novel is set in 1867 and 1868, the years when Russian America was turning into a United States territory. Gagarin detects the signs of the “predatory” Yankee in Alaska wilderness like a dead body of an American miner with a hunting knife that has a handle engraved symbolically with a golden dollar. At the same time, cut off from the greater world, the revolutionary-turned mountain man is not aware that Alaska had been already sold to the United States. When Gagarin finally learns about the news, his patriotic soul does not want to accept the “rotten deal”. Having acquired rifles and ammunition, he takes his Indian band on a warpath, beginning a guerrilla resistance against the advance of profit-seeking Americans, who not only have swallowed the chunk of what he considers part of his motherland, but who also want to corrupt the native populations with alcohol and materialism. Although the book clearly alludes to the then popular ideological agenda – national-liberation movements supported by the Soviet Russia – it is still currently in print. It appears that part of the popularity of the novel is not only an action-packed plot but also its strong anti-American sentiments.²²

Soon professional historians, anthropologists, and geographers joined that literary trend. Geographer G. A. AGRANAT contrasted and compared the “predatory” activities of the English Hudson Bay Company (HBC) in Canada with the “benevolent” policies of the RAC. According to this scholar, HBC “conquered” and “robbed” the Indians, whereas “the progressive Russian colonization of Alaska” led to the establishment of a benevolent regime for Alaskan natives.²³ In reality, as a commercial enterprise, HBC was interested in a stable supply of pelts and had little desire to conquer Indian territories. Trying to keep peaceful relations with indigenous communities, the company simply tied indigenous hunters to their trade forts through an elaborate credit system. In contrast, the RAC turned dependent indigenous populations of coastal Alaska into indentured servants, who were obligated to procure sea otter furs for the company. Replicating the serfdom system of the mother country, the RAC also bound natives to particular villages and forbade them to leave without official permission. While the majority of Alaska indigenous population resided beyond the reach of the RAC, which helped them to maintain sovereignty, the status of the coastal native groups closely resembled that of peasant serfs in mainland Russia.²⁴

22 ZUEV-ORDYNETS *Posledniy god*. It is notable that, after delving into this novel, one of its recent readers became so loaded with bizarre patriotic myths about Alaska that he decided to share his emotions in a web review of the book: “When you read this book, you want to cry! So brilliantly does the author show the Russian tragedy – the senseless, foolish, and cunning sale of Russian America, our richest territory, for pennies! All Alaska is covered with bones of Russian people and poured with rivers of their blood and sweat. It was only this great reformer, Aleksandr II, who was capable of making such a stupid decision [to sell Alaska], especially at the time when oil, gold and coal deposits had been already discovered there. Read this book and you will see how one feels when his land with the graves of ancestors is given away to aliens without any fight and when he is forced to drop everything and leave.” Aleksandr Kiselev, <http://www.labyrinth-shop.ru/books/90246> (accessed 08/15/08). The latter sentence almost literally reflects the current sentiments of those Russians who lament the loss of the Soviet Empire and those who had to leave countries of the near abroad after 1991.

23 AGRANAT *Ob osovoenii russkimi Alyaski*.

24 The most succinct description of the status of Alaska’s indigenous population under Russian domination can be found in LUEHRMANN *Russian Colonialism and the Asiatic Mode of Production*, p. 855.

Soviet scholars also revisited the history of armed conflicts between indigenous Alaskans and Russians, putting the responsibility for these clashes and wars on Western merchants. It was stressed (by VASILII DIVIN) that in their attempts to undermine the Russian presence in North America, Western nations such as England, United States, and Spain armed indigenous people and instigated them to attack Russian settlements and ships. Other authors (RAISA MAKAROVA) simply ignored the facts of confrontation between the indigenous population and Russians. Some works (R. G. LYAPUNOVA) drew idealized pictures of Russian-indigenous relations: team work, mutual respect, tolerance, and the lack of ethnic prejudices. These idyllic scenes were contrasted with brutal and genocidal policies of Western powers against Native Americans.²⁵

Alaska as Part of the Symbolic Geography of Russian Nationalism

Russian expansion as a peaceful “domestication” of the Alaskan frontier is one of the most popular myths in present-day patriotic literature and historiography dealing with Russian America. According to the “domestication” approach, Russians acted as cultural heroes, the carriers of high moral values eagerly embraced by many natives. Moreover, patriotic literature layers another myth over this one: Alaska was closely linked to the Russian Empire not only culturally and politically but also spiritually through a special “organic” bond. Historian MIRONOV stresses, “Unlike the colonies of England, France, Spain and Portugal, the Russian overseas possession was tied to the mother country by a strong spiritual bond.” He also adds that at the time when Western powers were quickly losing their colonies Alaska remained a firm stronghold of the Russian empire and had all potential “to become a foundation for the further Russian expansion to North America”.²⁶

For modern Russian nationalists, “Russianness” comprises not only European Russia but also those populations east of the Ural Mountains that were converted to the Orthodox Church and intermarried with Russians. In fact, as early as in the nineteenth century, Russian nationalist writers treated this mixture as part of the formation of the Russian nation.²⁷ Because Russians moved to Siberia and Alaska, and because some natives of these areas entered into mixed marriages with the newcomers and adopted the Russian language, current nationalist geography maps these lands as “ours”. Symbolic geography of nationalism does not necessarily coincide with state borders.

Modern Russian nationalist imagination symbolically “explores” and “incorporates” particular territories into the Russian ethnic domain. As a result of this intellectual “domestication”, the nineteenth-century imperial colonial periphery becomes Russian ethnic territory. In fact, that is precisely what many Eurasianists are doing in present-day Russia. As French historian MARLÈNE LARUELLE convincingly argues, much of this most popular mainstream version of Russian nationalism strives to present Russia and “Russianness” as the matrix for entire Eurasia, and to renew the country’s imperial calling.²⁸ Alaska is an

25 DIVIN *Russkie moreplavaniya na Tikhom okeane v XVIII veke*; MAKAROVA *Russians in the Pacific*; LYAPUNOVA *Ocherki po etnografii Aleutov*. The detailed discussion of the Soviet historiography of Alaska can be found in GRINEV *Russkaya kolonizatsiya Alyaski*, pp. 15–25.

26 MIRONOV *Rokovaya sdelka*, pp. 253, 77.

27 MILLER *The Empire and the Nation in the Imagination of Russian Nationalism*, p. 19.

28 LARUELLE *Russian Eurasianism*, pp. 5, 9–10.

integral part of this symbolic Eurasian geography, which naturally leads to the re-reading of Alaska's entire history from a "Russian viewpoint". For example, patriotic media argues that Russian culture in Alaska not only overrode all other traditions but endured to the present day, which is simply untrue. The most exotic attempts to "domesticate" Alaska are writings that speculate about how Russians had already explored this territory as early as the 1500s and established their settlements there.²⁹

The perception of Alaska as a Russian ethnic territory is best of all expressed in the notorious song "Don't Fool Around, America" (1991) by the patriotic band *Lyube* (a favorite band of former President Vladimir Putin):

You don't fool around, America
Here are wool boots to keep you warm.
In Siberia and in Alaska – on both shores
Steam bath, vodka, accordion and salmon
Steam bath, vodka, accordion and salmon

You don't fool around, America
We don't hurt you, I say.
Only give us Alaska land back
Give us back our dear native land
Give us back our dear native land³⁰

Present-day patriotic authors insist that the Alaskan population was peacefully incorporated into the empire and voluntarily adopted the traits of Russian culture and language. In a matter-of-fact manner, nationalist historiography points to the smooth and benevolent advances of Russians into Alaska. Thus, MIRONOV, the only professional historian among the patriotic authors discussed in this paper, finds in Russian America a "special spirit of Russian vassalage" that was reflected in the gentle attitudes of Russian missionaries toward native Alaskans and "well-thought policies of gradual assimilation of aboriginal populations into Russian society through education, medical service, patronage, admission into imperial service of the offspring of mixed marriages and through providing them with social benefits". Speaking about uniquely benevolent imperial policies in Siberia and Alaska, he insists that they "sharply contrasted with cruel colonial policies of other Europeans".³¹

ALEKSANDR BUSHKOV, mystery fiction writer-turned popular historian, does stress that at least in the beginning, Russians were responsible for abusing indigenous populations of the Aleutian Islands. At the same time, comparing this expansion with the English colonization of North America, he claims that those acts of violence were simply the extremes

29 KORSHUNOV *Rossiia kakoy ona mogla byt'*, S. 31–32; ZHDANOVICH *K voprosu o prodazhe Alyaski*.

30 The band *Lyube* enhanced these ultra-patriotic sentiments replaying the song in their recent music video clip that samples a number of vivid symbols: a gun shooting Alaska off the map of the United States, the band leader dressed in military uniform sternly gazing through binoculars at the American shore, and marching Red Army soldiers of the early Soviet times. *Lyube* band, "Ne valyay duraka, Amerika", video clip, <http://www.youtube.com/user/kunschikov> (accessed 03/12/08).

31 MIRONOV *Rokovaya sdelka*, pp. 77, 63–64.

of early chaotic colonization. The Russian advancement was a major contrast to the colonization of North America by the English, who, as he argues, had a grand plan of total extermination of indigenous populations. In addition to other evil doings, Bushkov holds the English responsible for such exotic crimes as “Trans-Atlantic trade in children” and “bacteriological warfare against the Indians”.³²

Ultra-nationalist author SERGEI KREMLEV writes in his popular history of Russian America (Figure 4), “The West at first sent to its overseas possessions predatory adventurers, and only after them did missionaries, administrators, and colonists come. In contrast, Russian Ivan came to new lands with an open soul as the carrier of all-Russian good will. Even though on the surface it looked like he was coming to extract tribute and furs, in reality he was coming to secure the destiny of Russian land.”³³ KERDAN, the author of “Bereg dal’niy” (Faraway Coast) (2003), a novel about Alaska explorers, adds, “When Russians were moving to the coasts of the Pacific and Alaska, they were driven by an idea. Our trail blazers advanced without dispossessing other peoples, whereas hordes of conquerors in other lands destroyed religions, languages and cultures.” Moreover, to stress the good moral qualities of their compatriots who ventured to Alaska, some authors downplay or completely deny any profit motives in Russian advances to the Northern Pacific. Bushkov, the author of a popular history of Russian America (Figure 5), makes in passing a stunning statement that they did not pursue personal profit and stresses that the major goal of the Russian trail-blazers was the prosperity of the motherland.³⁴ In contrast to the benevolent influence of Russian culture, later American presence is usually associated with the predatory despoil of Alaskan resources and economic decline. As Kremlev colorfully remarks, “Earlier the land was tended by good caretakers, now it became populated by predators and jackals.”³⁵

According to patriotic authors, Alaska was not only culturally and spiritually linked to the mother country but was also a prosperous colony with a vibrant economic and cultural life. Thus, in his impressionistic history of Russian America KREMLEV portrays Alaska before 1867 as a stronghold of civilization in the Pacific. In his rendition, Russian America sported officers’ balls, libraries, schools where children learned French, and even built a highly developed industry. In his patriotic imagination, another author, ROMAN ZHDANOVICH, goes even further, boosting the Russian and native subject populations of Alaska and fantasizing about thriving well-protected cities: “In 1837, in Russian America there were 11,000 Russians and Creoles, 50,000 Aleuts and mixed-bloods, who were Russian subjects. All major cities were protected by forts and artillery batteries.”³⁶

In reality, the Russian presence in North America was far from overwhelming. First and foremost, the exploration of Alaska was never a purely Russian enterprise. Using modern day jargon, one can call it a multicultural venture. Prior to the sale of the colony, “Russian” population of Alaska, which consisted of Russians, Finns, Swedes, Baltic Germans, Poles, and indigenous Siberians (Sakha, Itel’men and Evenki), never exceeded 550 persons. Of these 550 “Russians”, only 113 individuals were allowed to be registered as

32 KREMLEV *Russkaya Amerika: otkryt’ i prodat’*, p. 500.

33 KREMLEV *Russkaya Amerika: otkryt’ i prodat’*, p. 594.

34 BUSHKOV *Russkaia Amerika: slava i pozor*, pp. 32–33.

35 KREMLEV *Russkaya Amerika: otkryt’ i prodat’*, p. 500.

36 ZHDANOVICH *K voprosu o prodazhe Alyaski*.

colonial citizens, which meant that only these particular individuals had a legal right to stay in the colony on a permanent basis.³⁷ The rest of the new arrivals were considered temporary residents who were expected to return to Russia upon the expiration of their contracts with the RAC. The sad reality of Russian America was that neither the Russian autocratic government nor the RAC itself were interested in the colonization of this frontier area.

The empire was very reluctant to permit people to move freely to Alaska because it was afraid that such free movement of people would undermine the established system of registration and taxation. Officials constantly sabotaged even modest requests of the RAC to allow the company to recruit skilled craftsmen that belonged to various categories of serfs. Given this attitude of the authorities, it was only natural that many people employed by the RAC came from Finland and the Baltic lands – Western Russian borderland areas that were free from serfdom. Local registration and a mandatory passport system were important stumbling blocks that prevented the movement of people to Alaska. Last but not least, the RAC treated the colony as the source of fur resources and was never interested in encouraging a mass movement to its North American possession, which would have been impossible anyway for climatic reasons. In addition, the RAC did not want to place on its shoulders the unnecessary burden of relocation expenses of potential settlers.

Nationalist writers also ignore the fact that of about 30,000 Indians, Aleut and Inuit people, the indigenous residents of Alaska, the vast majority was hardly aware of their status as subjects of the empire. In fact, the RAC itself officially classified many of them as independent and partially dependent natives. Moreover, the RAC people never felt secure in their own backyard – the New Archangel (Sitka) fort, which was the capital of Russian America. In this area, “Russians” had to deal with the war-like and well-armed Tlingit Indians who maintained total sovereignty through the entire existence of the colony threatening the fort as late as the 1855.³⁸ It certainly did not help that the RAC established its presence only in coastal areas of Alaska. Inland areas of the colony remained literally *terra incognita* to the very end of Russian America. This means that the greater part of its territory was not a land in Russian possession but rather an area free from claims of other nations. It was not surprising that for a long time the RAC was not even aware that west of the Canadian-Alaskan border line, right within the formal borders of Russian America, the English HBC had established its Fort Yukon (1847) (Figure 6) and conducted a lucrative fur trade with local Indians.

Finally, the status of Alaska as a “contract colony” ruled by the RAC encouraged only loose connections between the empire and its North American possessions. Russian America lacked an established Russian administrative and judicial system. For example, individuals who committed various crimes in Alaska had to be sent to the mainland to Kamchatka because there were no courts to try them. The measures designated to admin-

37 GRINEV *Rossiyskiy politarizm kak glavnaya prichina prodazhi Alyaski*, pp. 178–179.

38 For the detailed account of Russian-Tlingit relations, including military engagements and the attack on Sitka in 1855, see GRINEV *Tlingit Indians in Russian America*; KAN *Memory Eternal*, pp. 42–173. Furthermore, Russian historian Aleksandr Zorin has recently produced a special work dealing exclusively with Tlingit warfare against Russians: ZORIN *Indeyskaya vojna v Russkoy Amerike*. All three studies stress that RAC never exercised any direct control over this major indigenous group of Alaska.

istratively unify Alaska with the rest of the empire that were adopted in the middle of the 1860s came too late and remained mostly on paper. Contracting the colony to the RAC allowed the empire to avoid excessive financial and political obligations to maintain the distant territory. At the same time, if needed, the RAC as a semi-governmental monopolist was a convenient tool to promote imperial interests in the Northern Pacific. In case of a diplomatic failure, it was also convenient to place all responsibility on the RAC.³⁹ With its peculiar status, Russian America in a literal sense represented a borderland area, whose administrative status was never clearly defined, where the majority of indigenous people did not view themselves as part of the empire, and where newcomers were treated as temporary contract workers who were expected to return to the mainland. Given these circumstances, and in contrast to the assertions of patriotic authors, Alaska would never have become a stronghold of the empire in the northern Pacific.

Good Russians and Germans, Child-like Natives and Evil Anglo-Saxons

In modern Russian fiction and non-fiction dealing with Alaska, one also finds several typical characters who move from book to book. First of all, these are empire builders such as Baranov and Rezanov. The second group of characters include explorers such as the above-mentioned Zagoskin. As the most colorful and assertive, Baranov, the first chief administrator of Alaska, is the favorite of many fiction and non-fiction writers. He is usually portrayed as a selfless patriot, whose sole obsession was not the RAC's profits but the advancement of Russian interests. As early as 1945, KRATT set the obligatory tone in his novel "Ostrov Baranova" (Baranov's Island): "It was not the personal glory that he searched for. The glory of the Russian Empire was his goal. He gave all his life to the motherland."⁴⁰ Many current books simply replicate this assessment of Baranov. For example, in his novel "Klyuchi ot zakoldovannogo zamka" (The Keys to Enchanted Castle) (1980), which was reprinted twice in the 1990s, KONSTANTIN BADIGIN reiterates that, although Baranov certainly had to take care of commercial interests of the RAC, "his chief concern, which he always kept in mind, was the glory of Russia and her benefit. For the sake of Russia he did not spare himself and was ready to make any sacrifice".⁴¹

In patriotic Alaskana, indigenous people usually act as passive pawns to be acted upon depending on who would take control over them. It is implied that Indians, Inuit and Aleuts did not resist Russians on their own because by nature Russians were good and brought model civilization to "savages". Those indigenous characters that clashed and fought with the RAC people are routinely portrayed as retrograde savages who simply did not appreciate Russian benevolence and civilization (Figure 7). Again, with his "Baranov's Island" Kratt set the trend in the assessment of natives. Writing about Kotlean (Figure 8), an actual Indian leader who resisted Russian advances onto the Tlingit lands in the early nineteenth century, Kratt philosophizes, "For many years the old chief grimly and aggressively struggled not only to save his coastal lands and islands but also to preserve the old way of life. Russians carried new life. Russians defended themselves. Many

39 The analysis of Alaska as a contract colony can be found in VINKOVETSKY *The Russian-American Company*.

40 KRATT *Ostrov Baranova*, p. 207.

41 BADIGIN *Klyuchi ot zakoldovannogo zamka*, p. 178.

of them died spilling the land they founded with their blood. Still, they did not back off but rather continued to build and create. Russians were becoming dangerous because they were invincible.”⁴²

According to patriotic authors, if such natives as Kotlean revolted against Russians, it was only because the Americans or the English instigated them to do so. Moreover, KREMLEV goes farther by instructing the students of Alaska history who might think otherwise: “Russian historians should look at all our conflicts with the Indians as conspiracies and provocations of Anglo-Saxons.”⁴³ In his turn, BUSHKOV adds that the Tlingit Indians, the most formidable opponents of the RAC, were simply not smart enough to start the organized warfare against the Russians on their own. As a result, he ascribes the creation of the “Indian NATO” to the strategic genius of Anglo-Saxon sea captains such as Henry Barber or William Cunningham.⁴⁴

Barber and Cunningham, who are actual historical personalities, along with their real and imagined compatriots are favorite villain characters in patriotic Alaskana (Kratt, Kremlev, Bushkov, Kerdan, and Badigin). These Anglo-Americans are usually portrayed as whiskey and gun smugglers and slave traders. They are also carriers of capitalist predatory ethics and betray people left and right for the sake of profit. In Badigin’s novel, captain Robert Hailey instructs power hungry Kotlean in the following manner, “It is necessary to seize the Sitka fortress and eliminate Russians along the coast.” Not satisfied with these instructions, the Englishman makes Kotlean take the following oath, “I promise to destroy the fortress on the Sitka Island and to kill all Russians on my land.”⁴⁵ Eventually the Anglo-Saxon predatory capitalist kills two birds with one stone. He has the Russians wiped out and double-crosses the Indians. When the Tlingit finish off the Russians in the New Archangel fort, the Englishman lures the allies to his ship and executes them. As a result, the sea otter furs procured by the Russians end up in the hands of the smuggler. In contrast to this simplistic portrayal of the Tlingit as pawns and the Anglo-American captains as master minds of native revolts such professional historians as GRINEV, KAN, ZORIN, and DAUENHAUERS who studied Russian-Tlingit relations in detail, show that the Indians acted as independent agents, who freely fought, traded, negotiated, and struck alliances with Russians, English and American navigators, and their native neighbors.⁴⁶ Moreover, in his book “Indeyskaya voyna v Russkoy Amerike” (The Indian War in Russian America), analyzing historical records on the activities of Barber and Cunningham, Zorin comes to the conclusion that in fact much of the imagery of Anglo-American navigators as masterminds of native revolts originated from the reports of the RAC, which, with its limited resources, was not able to control Alaska and frequently blamed foreigners for its own mismanagement and failures.

The manner in which patriotic Alaskana views different groups of Western colonizers betrays current ethnic sympathies and biases of nationalist authors. Holding the West responsible for the genocide and oppression of indigenous people, patriotic writers some-

42 BUSHKOV *Russkaya Amerika: slava i pozor*, p. 128, 135.

43 KREMLEV *Russkaya Amerika: otkryt’ i prodan*, S. 533.

44 BUSHKOV *Russkaya Amerika: slava i pozor*, p. 128, 135.

45 BADIGIN *Klyuchi ot zakoldovannogo zamka*, p. 112–113.

46 GRINEV *Tlingit Indians in Russian America*; KAN *Memory Eternal*; ZORIN *Indeyskaya voyna v Russkoy Amerike*; DAUENHAUER / DAUENHAUER / BLACK *Anooshi Lingit Aani Ka*.

times exclude from the list of culprits “benevolent” Spanish and French colonizers and contrast them with the “predatory” English and Americans. Being more traditionalist and absolutist, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish and French empires obviously appeal more to the patriots’ tastes than the cosmopolitan and materialistic Anglo-Saxon society.

BUSHKOV pairs Russian colonizers of Siberia and Alaska with other “benevolent” colonizers such as the Spaniards and French. For example, he portrays Hernando Cortez, the conqueror of the Aztec kingdom, as a visionary who was concerned not only with the prosperity of the Spanish empire but also (like his Russian counterparts) about bringing natives and newcomers together into a peaceful commonwealth.⁴⁷ In contrast, the writer views the English, “the nation of shopkeepers and profit-makers”, as the worst of the worst. At the same time, the Welsh, Irish and Scottish appear to him as inherently good people simply because they had been conquered by the English and become victims.

Bushkov’s animosity toward the English reaches irrational proportions. First, the novelist-turned historian openly announces that he hates the English as people. Second, he stresses, “On the whole, in many of my books I defend a simple but true thesis: whatever disgusting acts Russians and other European people committed in history, nobody in the entire world overdid the evils committed by the English.”⁴⁸ When the author deals with examples of English benevolence in Alaska like in the case of Captain John Henry Cox, who provided food to starving Russians in 1791, Bushkov has the following explanation: “For the English navigator this act is unbelievably noble. Such chivalry is not characteristic of the English. I strongly suspect that Cox was either a Scot, or an Irish, or a Welsh, but certainly not an Englishman.” About captain Hugh Moor with whom Baranov established friendly relations, Bushkov remarks in passing, “Moor, not an Englishman but Irishman, was rather a decent man.” In the eyes of the writer famous explorer George Vancouver also becomes a “decent man”. Unlike his equally famous compatriot James Cook, Vancouver did not attach English place names to the areas of Alaska that had been already explored and mapped by Russians. Instead, Vancouver duly credited Russians for being the first trail blazers in this part of the Pacific. This behavior certainly appeals to Bushkov, and for this reason he issues the following verdict: “A strange and incorrect Englishman. English people usually do not behave in this manner. Vancouver surely had Welsh, Irish or Scottish roots.”⁴⁹

In patriotic Alaskana, one also finds several characters of Poles who act as traitors. This is a clear reference to Polish separatism whose specter has been haunting Russian minds since the 1860s. They are usually the RAC workers, who wait for the right moment to betray Russian interests and switch to the English or American side. In KRATT’S novel, this is Leshchinskiy, a Polish traitor who wants no more and nor less than to separate Alaska from Russia and to turn it into an independent territory allied with the United States and England.⁵⁰ In a recent novel by KERDAN, one finds another mean Pole named Guznishchevskiy. Unlike Leshchinskiy, Guznishchevskiy has no clear ideological or political agenda. It appears that he is simply mean and evil by default because he is a Pole.

47 BUSHKOV *Russkaya Amerika: slava i pozor*, pp. 34–35.

48 BUSHKOV *Russkaya Amerika: slava i pozor*, p. 117.

49 BUSHKOV *Russkaya Amerika: slava i pozor*, p. 88, 89, 104.

50 KRATT *Ostrov Baranova*, pp. 58, 181.

A corrupt and unscrupulous agent of the RAC, who does not hesitate to pocket the company's money, Guznishchevskiy ends up as a member of a gang of rovers who rob people of the Kamchatka peninsula.⁵¹

The characters of Baltic Germans and Germans, who served as Russian naval officers and RAC workers, are more ambivalent. In KRATT's novel that was written at the end of World War II, when Germans clearly did not look good in the eyes of the Russians, they are portrayed as evil. Conversely, in present fiction and non-fiction (BADIGIN, BUSHKOV, and KREMLEV), Germans are always good, which reveals traditional sympathies of patriotic writers to Germany. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Russian intellectuals of a traditionalist and patriotic orientation have usually been, more often than not, warm to Germany and Germans. With their alleged love of tradition and national soil, Germans clearly look more attractive than rationalist and cosmopolitan Anglo-Saxons.⁵²

It is interesting to trace how the character of Russian navigator Johann Adam Krusenstern evolved over time. In KRATT's novel (1945) this naval officer of a Baltic German origin, who in real life was an outspoken imperialist, is a selfish, mean and petty bureaucrat. By living and studying in England, he becomes corrupted with the spirit of "the nation of shop keepers". Driven by careerist motives, Krusenstern hinders Ryazanov's efforts to expand Russian influence in the Pacific. Strangely, according to Kratt, Yuriy Lisyanskiy, an ethnic Russian, who studied in England along with Krusenstern, somehow preserved his Russian soul intact and was not infected with the "English evil spirit".

In contrast, BADIGIN (2003) and BUSHKOV (2006) portray the navigator not as "Johann Adam" but as a passionate patriot of the empire, Ivan Fedorovich Krusenstern (the Russian version of his name). Moreover, ultranationalist writer KREMLEV goes farther. To him, all Germans in Russian service were good people. They were not rootless cosmopolitans. More than any other Western people, they could appreciate the beauty of serving a motherland. Moreover, Kremlev states that one of the major messages of his Alaskan history book is that strategically Russia should always side with Germany avoiding the United States, which, in his view, represents the den of cosmopolitanism, universalism, Free Masonry, and the enemy of all countries that strive for nationhood.

It is notable that Bushkov and Kremlev take on the "traitors" with Russian names such as Alexander II and his brother Grand Duke Konstantine, the chief spearhead of the Alaska sale, and contrast their "wicked" nature with the behavior of such model Russian patriots with foreign names such as Krusenstern, Ferdinand von Wrangel, a former chief administrator of Russian America, and Fedor von Osten-Sacken, a middle-level official from the Asian Department of the Foreign Ministry, who ardently advocated a Russian presence in the Northern Pacific. Moreover, Badigin generalizes about the fate of Russian patriots with foreign names: "Unbearably hard is the fate of an alien in Russia! You could be incredibly smart and a hundred times better patriot of Russia than any Great Russian with a pure Russian lineage! Still, among contemporaries or descendants there will be always some scum who will point to your origin and find a selfish motive in whatever you do."⁵³

51 Kerdan *Bereg otdalennyi*.

52 Chamberlain *Motherland*, pp. 101–102, 121, 154.

53 Badigin *Klyuchi ot zakoldovannogo zamka*, p. 123.

Unlike other like-minded authors, Bushkov goes as far as exonerating Karl Nesselrode (1780–1862), the foreign minister under Nicholas I. Patriotic authors (Kremlev) do not blame Nesselrode directly for neglecting the interests of the Russian Empire, but simply stress that he was the son of a Jewish woman converted to Protestantism, which to them by default implies a hidden anti-Russian agenda; Nesselrode's father was a Baltic-German who served as a Russian ambassador to Portugal. In contrast, Bushkov portrays the mixed-blood foreign minister as a good official who did his job well, successfully promoting the interests of the Russian Empire. For example, the writer stresses that during his time, Nesselrode firmly secured for Russia Fort Ross, a RAC outpost in California from 1812 to 1841.⁵⁴ In addition, the foreign minister of cosmopolitan origin presided over a successful penetration of the empire into Japan and also advanced the imperial presence in the Balkans.

Bushkov is sincerely puzzled by the fact that under Nicholas I, a great number of high officials were people with foreign ancestry rather than ethnic Russians. Yet, continues the writer, it was precisely during this time that Russia advanced her interests and was free from the “corrupt liberalism” of Alexander II that, according to patriotic thinking, began to undermine the empire.⁵⁵ Bushkov even takes on his patriotic colleagues for extending various Judeo-Masonic conspiracy theories to the history of Russian America. Although loaded with ethnic biases of his own, Bushkov stresses that the origin of a particular official did not matter. What mattered most was how well one promoted the interests of the Russian Empire. Bushkov's rationale, which reeks of nineteenth-century nationalism and imperialism, is very simple: whatever benefits Russia is acceptable and noble, even if it involves a crime, a violation of human rights or of the sovereignty of other nations. Moreover, moving from past to present events, the writer enlightens his readers that to apply a force or a deceit is a good thing if it helps to expand the borders of one's own nation.

Liberal Traitors, Jews and Free Masons

In the distorted mirror of the patriotic historiography, the sale of Alaska is presented as a secret plot of cosmopolitan liberal forces to undermine the strategic interests of the Russian Empire in the northern Pacific. This assertion is usually accompanied by mandatory historical parallels with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which in the nationalists' view, shrank Russian ethnic territory. To patriotic writers, both 1867 and 1991 are examples of a worldwide conspiracy against Russian territorial interests. Juxtaposing two events, patriotic writers speculate about the continuity of an anti-national liberal agenda from the nineteenth century to the present. A historical lesson these authors usually draw from this analogy is that the first concession of a Russian territory to a foreign nation in 1867 created a dangerous precedent that eased future territorial losses.

Patriotic writers ascribe the sale of Alaska not to the arbitrary decision of Alexander II, an autocrat who, like all his predecessors, acted without the slightest regard for public opinion, but to the “harmful” effects of his liberal reforms. The tsar is usually contrasted

54 BUSHKOV *Russkaya Amerika: slava i pozor*, p. 245.

55 Following their Slavophile predecessors, current patriotic writers consider the reforms of Peter the Great and Alexander II a harmful Western imposition that presumably led to chaos and disruption of Russian traditional life.

with his patriotic and conservative predecessor and successor, Nicholas I and Alexander III. Thus, MIRONOV stresses, “Only such a person as liberal Alexander was able to execute this deal [the Alaska sale]. His father, Nicholas I and more so ‘reactionary’ Alexander III could not even have considered trading a piece of Russian land.”⁵⁶ Some authors do not spare curse words to condemn Alexander II as the tsar-traitor. Indignant BUSHKOV writes, “Who would imagine that the throne would be occupied by the scum who shamelessly sold out for pennies what had been acquired by his father and grandfather,”⁵⁷

Patriotic writers cannot write about the sale of Alaska dispassionately. Thus, in his retrospective rage against Alexander II, KREMLEV speculates that he wished he had a time machine to propel himself to that fateful day in March of 1883 to add his own grenade to the revolutionary bomb that killed the tsar-reformer. He also informs his readers that when he looks at the present map of Alaska colored as part of the United States, he feels an instinctive urge to grab an AK-47 assault rifle.⁵⁸ Fortunately, Kremlev prefers to release his frustrations on paper. His younger colleague, MIRONOV, who also has cravings for action, went farther. In December of 2006, this young ultra-nationalist historian from Moscow, who was about to defend a PhD dissertation on the sale of Russian America, was arrested for his alleged involvement into the attempted murder of Anatoliy Chubays.⁵⁹ To the current Russian nationalists, Chubays, one of the chief intellectual architects of the 1990s privatization program, serves as the devil reincarnate, an embodiment of all evils of Western capitalism and cosmopolitanism.

In the eyes of patriotic writers, the very fact that Alexander II and his liberal circle volunteered to discuss the sale of a piece of the imperial domain relegates them to the rank of traitors. Mironov remarks that such an attitude would have been natural for Americans and the English with their corrupt mercantile spirit. But for Russians, who, in his view, are inherently endowed with an organic approach to land, the idea of the land sale is totally unacceptable. Invoking the familiar “blood and soil” metaphor, he stresses, “It is hard for the Russian mind to comprehend that a territory acquired by sweat and blood can become an object of a mercantile manipulation.”⁶⁰

Instead of blaming abstract liberal pro-Western forces for the demise of Russian America, some authors try to be more specific. For example, KREMLEV directly suggests that the Alaska sale was a conspiracy of Judeo-Masonic supranational forces (with the United States and England as their loyal tools) to drive Russia out of the Pacific Northwest. VIKT-

56 MIRONOV *Bez Alyaski*.

57 BUSHKOV *Russkaya Amerika: slava i pozor*, p. 330.

58 KREMLEV *Russkaya Amerika: otkryt' i prodan'*, pp. 504–505.

59 “Pochti miting na vystavochnom stende”, <http://www.anti-glob.ru/raznoe/Algo.htm> (accessed 03/14/08); ZHDANOVICH Ivana Mironova sudyat za istoricheskuyu pravdu. While in prison Mironov reworked the manuscript of the dissertation into the book “Rokovaya sdelka” (The Fateful Deal). Advertising this work, patriotic publisher “Algoritm” has stressed in its blurb, “Ivan Mironov is a patriot and the man of a strong will. His book is the voice of truth about how Russian territories were given away and sold in the nineteenth century. He has gathered unique facts and has named those people who are guilty in partitioning Alaska from the Russian Empire. This is a very acute problem because from time to time press leaks appear about current plans of the West to partition Russia.” MIRONOV *Rokovaya sdelka*, back cover. For the digest of “Rokovaya sdelka”, see MIRONOV *Predatel'skaya glupost'*.

60 MIRONOV *Rokovaya sdelka*, p. 238.

OR FILATOV, a retired major-general and a former editor of “Voenno-patrioticheskiy zhurnal” (The Military-Patriotic Magazine), takes this conspiracy theory to the extreme. In his view, the Alaska purchase was orchestrated by a particular lobby group – American Jewish merchants who craved to tap Russian resources in the northwestern part of North America. Speculating about the Jewish factor in Alaska history, the retired major-general claims that Jews actually began to penetrate Russian America prior to its sale to the United States. As evidence, he points to Nikolai Rosenberg, one of chief administrators of Russian America in the 1850s.⁶¹ Unfortunately, Filatov is not aware that Rosenberg was a Russian naval officer who originated from an old Baltic German lineage, which settled in Latvia in the sixteenth century.⁶²

In his “Rokovaya sdelka” (A Fateful Deal) (2007) (Figure 9), MIRONOV offers another explanation of the “Jewish factor” and how it possibly contributed to the demise of Russian America. The historian suggests that the master minds of the sale were Russian railroad companies acting on behalf of Western Jewish railroad and banking circles headed by the notorious House of Rothschild; members of the Rothschild clan are favorite characters in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories both in the East and the West. What prompted Mironov to speculate about the role of the railroad companies in the “fateful deal” was the fact that 90 percent of the money received by Russia from the Alaska sale was actually spent on the spot in the United States to purchase locomotives, and equipment for the railroad industry that was booming in Russia in the 1860s and 1870s. Incidentally, as a result of the railroad construction that involved private companies, Russian rail mileage increased from 1,000 (1862) to around 14,000 (1878). Yet, to Mironov, this particular project as well as attempts to integrate Russia into the world’s economy and the entire modernization program appear to be a grand conspiracy against Russia.⁶³

In addition to Jews and the “weak” liberal Alexander II, patriotic writers are keenly interested in identifying other major perpetrators, who were responsible for the sale of Alaska, as well as those individuals who supposedly benefited from that deal. It is known that the spearhead of the deal was Grand Duke Konstantin, Aleksandr’s brother and a major proponent of liberal reforms in Russia in the 1860s and 1870s. KREMLEV and MIRONOV suggest that during his extensive travels over Western countries, Konstantin was bribed and turned into an “agent of influence”⁶⁴ of Western Judeo-Masonic and financial interests.⁶⁵ To be exact, corruption was indeed part of the Alaska sale, but the bribes went not to highly positioned people in the Russian government but to several US Congressmen

61 FILATOV *Novye iyudeyskie voyny*, p. 148–164.

62 Although Filatov does not cite his sources, there is a strong possibility that his speculations are based on the information he might have borrowed from a Jewish web portal that contains an essay “Jewish Merchants Bought Alaska” by Mariya Lifshits, who proudly highlights the role of Jewish merchants in Alaska history by piling together all names that sound Jewish to her ears, including Rosenberg. LIFSHITS *Evreyskie torgovtsy kupili Alyasku*. If this is the case, it is an interesting example of how opposing nationalist mythologies cross-fertilize each other.

63 MIRONOV *Rokovaya sdelka*.

64 In addition to the Rothschild clan and Judeo-Masons, the agent of influence is another favorite metaphor in current patriotic discourse in Russia. The expression is frequently used to label politicians, writers and cultural workers who sympathize with Western cultural and political tradition and promote cosmopolitan agenda, including the integration of Russian into world economy and world civilization.

who were expected to speed up the closing of the deal. In addition, Alexander II officially awarded Russia's envoy in the United States Edouard de Stoeckl (1804–1892) a special monetary bonus for negotiating the sale.

According to patriotic historians of Alaska, in addition to Konstantin, the group of “conspirators” also included Mikhail Reutern (1820–1890), the finance minister who presided over the railroad construction project and Russia's economic modernization in general. Another major “culprit” was Nikolai Krabbe (1814–1870), a navy minister who promoted modernization of the Russian navy and who in fact expanded Russian presence in the Far East. Two others were foreign minister Aleksandr Gorchakov (1798–1883) and the envoy de Stoeckl.

Another popular argument of patriotic authors is that the RAC was an incredibly successful company that stood in the way of the anti-national conspiracy of Konstantin and his liberal circle. According to MIRONOV, KREMLEV, and PYKHTIN, to remove this obstacle, Konstantin decided to drive RAC to bankruptcy to make his case more convincing. Mironov writes, “The sale of Alaska was preceded by many years of activities of a small group of high governmental officials, who conspired to drive the colony to bankruptcy in order to create artificial prerequisites to demolish Russia's North American territories and to transfer them to the United States.”⁶⁶ Drawing parallels between Russian America and the present-day situation, Mironov treats the 1867 event as a historical prelude to the chaotic 1990s, when factories and industrial plants were intentionally drawn to bankruptcy to be handed out to particular “oligarchs”.

In reality, the RAC began to lose its revenues in the late 1850s with the general decline of the fur trade. Contrary to the arguments of patriotic writers, the RAC was not always a successful company. Although from 1857 to 1861 the sale of furs brought the company 4,228,632 rubles of profit, its administrative expenses reached 5,268,143 rubles, which means that financial losses exceeded 1 million rubles. The company partially resolved the problem by raising the prices for goods sold in the colony. Even after this, its deficit represented 113,326 rubles.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the RAC was not a pure private business enterprise, but rather a governmental commercial monopolist that in its structure reminds of the present-day semi-governmental energy giant Gazprom. The composition of its “management” vividly illustrates its status. With the exception of Baranov, the chief administrators of Russian America were all senior naval officers, who were not exactly good business managers. Moreover, in the 1850s and 1860s, one can observe the same professional composition among the RAC directors in St. Petersburg, who were naval and military generals. It was only in 1865 that merchant N. Lubavin was added to the group of the military men. Even if it had survived, with such “business” leadership the company would have never been able to prosper at the open market in the 1860s and the 1870s.⁶⁸ What actually

65 Another exotic version of the Jewish conspiracy to steal Alaska from Russia can be found in an article by Aleksandr Zinukhov and in popular *Zagadki i legendy russkoy istorii* (2007) by KAZAKOV. They argue that, through his agents, certain August Balmont, a banker representing the House of Rothschilds, allegedly influenced Konstantin's decision to sell Alaska. ZINUKHOV *Kak prodali Alyasku*; KAZAKOV *Zagadki i legendy russkoy istorii*, pp. 196, 198.

66 MIRONOV *Rokovaya sdelka*, p. 254.

67 GRINEV *Russkaya Amerika v 1850-e gody i Krymskaya voyna*, p. 368.

68 For more on RAC leadership, see GRINEV *The Dynamics of the Administrative Elite of the Russian American Company*.

generated RAC profits throughout the entire existence of Russian America was the indentured labor of native and Creole populations who were bound to their villages and occupations and obligated to perform particular tasks for the RAC. The fact that the RAC was not ready for economic competition in the open market explains why the company wanted so much to continue its monopolist status and privileges, including the right to exploit indentured labor.

Holding Konstantin responsible for anti-patriotic behavior and for conspiring to betray the interests of the empire does not withstand a serious scrutiny. For example, among other things, the “chief culprit” did much to modernize the Russian navy, replacing old sail ships with iron clad steamboats, which eventually built up the military potential of the empire. Patriotic writers usually do not like to mention that the first person to come up with the idea of selling Alaska to the United States was Count Murav’ev-Amurskiy, an ardent Russian patriot who worked hard to advance Russian influence in the Far East. He suggested that, instead of dispersing her resources all over the northern Pacific, the empire would gain more by curtailing her weak presence in Alaska and concentrating on the expansion southward to the Far East, which could serve as Russia’s breadbasket.⁶⁹

The factors that added credibility to Murav’ev-Amurskiy’s plan were the shift in the empire’s strategic priorities in the 1860s toward the expansion not only into the Far East but also into Central Asia, the source of cotton. In fact, while losing an interest in her northwestern American possession, the empire was extending her borders far southward. Thus, in 1867 (the year of the Alaska sale) she completed the conquest of Central Asia by establishing a Turkestan general-governorship. The far-away and scarcely populated Russian America certainly did not appear as an important strategic asset worthy of imperial protection; large gold deposits, which are usually cited as the major Alaskan resources, were not yet discovered. Hence, there is little room for a patriotic rhetoric about the shrinking imperial domain.

No less important was the fact that the RAC did not fit the modernization scheme advocated by Alexander II and Konstantin, especially after the abolition of serfdom in Russia. To Konstantin, the RAC, as the monopolist that enjoyed special privileges by exploiting the indentured labor of indigenous and mixed-blood employees, appeared as a pre-modern bureaucratic structure, which stood in the way of modernization. In the works of nationalist authors, the measures that terminated the RAC monopoly and that should be viewed in the context of the modernization reforms of the 1860s, are presented as a carefully planned conspiracy sponsored by Judeo-Masonic interests. Without accepting the conspiracy thesis so popular among patriotic writers, GRINEV contends that in reality the entire “plot” of Konstantin and his associates simply represented a poor strategic step made in the conditions of the autocratic state, where no political decisions were ever publicly discussed.⁷⁰ It is notable that the company’s directors, whom the tsarist court did not even inform about the negotiations with the United States, learned about the sale from telegraph news that reached Russia from abroad.

69 About the Russian Empire’s expansion to the Far East and about how the government and educated classes rationalized it, see BASSIN *Imperial Visions*.

70 For a detailed discussion of the causes that led to the Alaska sale, see GRINEV *Why Russia Sold Alaska*.

Epilogue: Russians' Alaska Reading List

Patriotic writers attack those historians who refuse to speculate about the Alaska purchase as a well-planned conspiracy of cosmopolitan financial interests against national interests of Russia and who do not want to glorify the Russian presence in Alaska. Bushkov, Pykhtin and Kremlev take on so-called Bolkhovitintsy, a term they invented to label academic authors (Bolkhovitinov, Grinev, Aleksei Istomin, Aleksandr Petrov and several others) who wrote the three-volume comprehensive "History of Russian America" edited by Bolkhovitinov.⁷¹ The patriots call intellectual traitors those academicians who refuse to write Alaska history "from a Russian viewpoint".

The major intellectual "culprit" is Bolkhovitinov, who wrote a special study (1990) that put the sale of Alaska in the general context of Russian-American relations in the nineteenth century.⁷² According to nationalist columnist PŸKHTYN, this particular book carries the stamp of the Gorbachev "time of troubles" and the "Yeltsyn-Chubays" xenophile attitudes. Pykhtyn stresses, "This book has been written not from the Russian viewpoint but from an objectivist abstract position. A special Russian scholarly work dealing with the cession of Russian America to the United States has not yet been written." KREMLEV adds a more emotionally colored statement: "Spiritually he [Bolkhovitinov] is no different from Krabbe, Stoeckl, and Reutern who sold Russian America."⁷³ Blaming the academic authors, whom he ironically calls the "keepers of universal human values", for their attempt to reconstruct the history of Russian America from multiple angles, BUSHKOV denounces the aforementioned three-volume Alaska history as the product of the "rotten breath of perestrojka", a project manufactured by a "noisy intelligentsiya" that "for a short while received a chance to fool fellow-citizens during the chaotic 1990s".⁷⁴

Although in the imagined geography and history of patriotic Alaskana particular dates, areas, events, and names are freely twisted, distorted, and even erased, for Russians this literature currently represents the major source of information on Alaska.⁷⁵ Histories of Alaska written from a "Russian viewpoint" by Bushkov, Filatov, Kerdan, Kremlev, Mironov are widely available in bookstores, in magazine racks at airports and railroad depots, and certainly in public and university libraries. This literature is clearly an offshoot of rising patriotic sentiments among many Russians, who welcome national revival after the "humiliating" 1990s. These authors, some of whom are active members of radical nationalist organizations, cater to such sentiments. Incidentally, one of them (KERDAN) directly

71 BOLKHOVITINOV (ed.) *Istoriya Russkoy Ameriki*.

72 For the English translation of the book, see BOLKHOVITINOV *Russian-American Relations and the Sale of Alaska*.

73 KREMLEV *Russkaya Amerika: otkryt' i prodat'*, p. 578.

74 BUSHKOV *Russkaya Amerika: slava i pozor*, p. 189.

75 The notable exception is ROKOT *Knyaz' Russkoy Ameriki*. Although his major emphasis is Dmitriy Maksyutov, the last chief administrator of Russian America, Rokot provides a well-written, popular and balanced review of the entire history of Alaska, when it was part of the Russian Empire. He is especially good in showing that the colonization of Russian America was a multiethnic enterprise. Among popular histories of Alaska published in Russia, so far it is the only account that is free from hysterical patriotic outbursts against evil Westerners and Judeo-Masonic interests. In fact, the writer hints that he considers his book as a challenge to aggressive patriotic authors who have recently hijacked the topic of Russian America.

stresses that the driving force that promoted him to write his novel about Russian explorers of Alaska was a desire “to maintain Russian identity (*samobytnost*)”. This retired Soviet colonel turned fiction writer also adds, “Since Russia is now craving for a national idea, it is important to take a good look back at those times, when the passionarianism⁷⁶ of the Russian people was on the rise.”⁷⁷

The books and articles discussed in this review essay represent a small segment of a larger and booming phenomenon – patriotic history print media, which now increasingly molds Russians’ perceptions of their history, contributing to the rise of nationalism, which recently has become very assertive both inside and outside the country. Observers note that the current Russian book market is literally flooded with anti-liberal texts that preach grand visions of Russia’s rebirth and apocalyptic world views.⁷⁸ This media, which has become part of Russia’s cultural mainstream, is usually infested with virulent anti-American sentiments and paranoid theories about Western and Judeo-Masonic conspiracies against Russia. As a result, it helps to build up the image of Russia as a “national fortress” besieged by hostile forces.

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76 The expression *Passionarianism*, which can be rendered as the biological and ecological ability of society for growth and expansion, was coined by dissident historian and one of the spearheads of Eurasianism Lev Gumilev (1912–1992), who has acquired a cult-like status in present Russia. This term implies that certain organic cosmic spirit is involved into the rise, development and decline of various cultures and civilizations. Vital cultures, which are endowed with this spirit, expand in time and space domesticating and conquering new territories. When a culture loses its organic spirit, it also loses its ability to grow and expand. Today, Gumilev’s best-selling books and his concept of *passionarianism* are not only favorites of patriotic media and historiography but also parts of the cultural mainstream in Russia (education, television, and radio). Thus, his texts are assigned as supplementary readings in many middle and high schools. Andreas UMLAND *The Great Danger if Russia Stays on the Path It’s On*. For the most complete recent analysis of Gumilev’s ideas, see LARUELLE *Russian Eurasianism*, pp. 10–11, 50–82. See also his apologetic biography: DEMIN *Lev Gumilev*.

77 KERDAN *Bereg otdalennyi*.

78 UMLAND *The Philosophy behind the Nationalism*.

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Figures



Figure 1: New Archangel or Sitka, capital of Russian America. Drawing by Frederick Wympere. Wympere, Frederick An Artist in Alaska, in: Harper's Magazine, 38 (1869), p. 590.

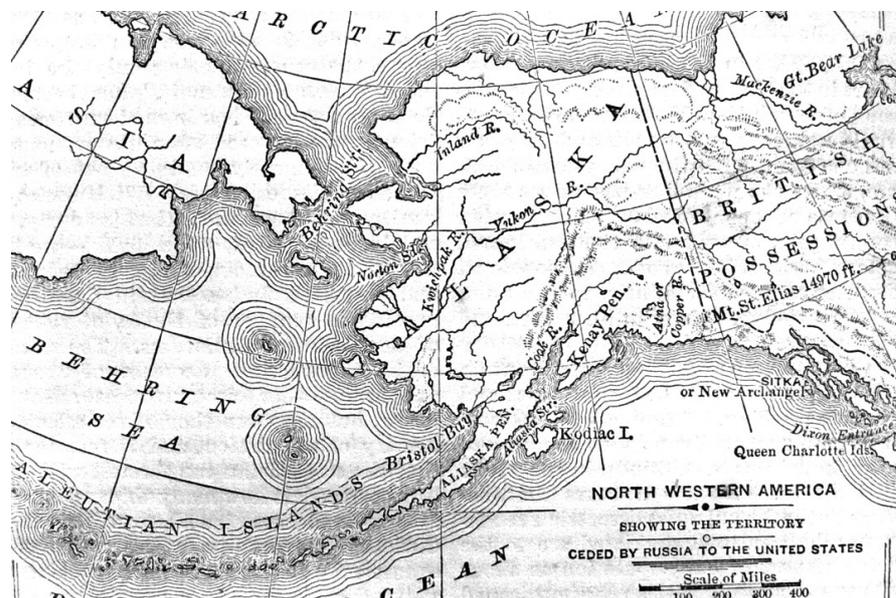


Figure 2: Map of Alaska composed six years after the territory was sold to the United States. Harper's Magazine 47 (1873) p. 42.

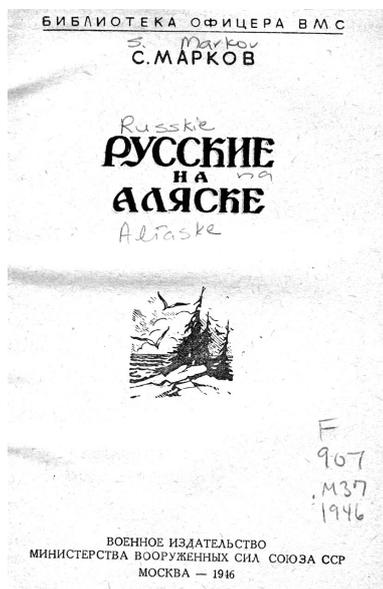


Figure 3: Cover of SERGEI MARKOV's *Russians in Alaska*. Moskva 1946, the first popular history of Russian America.



Figure 4: Cover of SERGEI KREMLEV'S Russian America Discovered and Sold (2005), ultranationalist history that links the sale of Alaska to a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy directed to undermining the strategic interests of Russia.

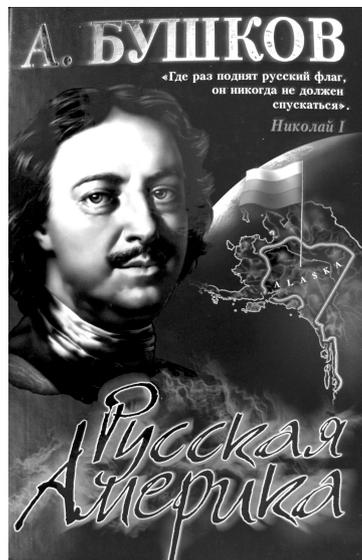


Figure 5: “Where Russian flag is once raised, it should never go down” – novelist ALEKSANDR BUSHKOV selected this phrase uttered by Nicholas I to introduce his Russian America: Glory and Disgrace (2006).

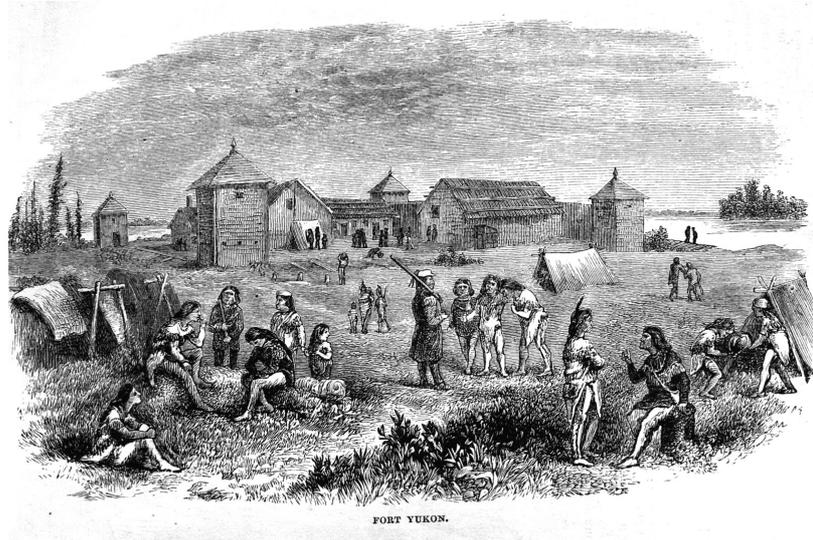


Figure 6: In 1847, English Hudson Bay Company built its Fort Yukon right in the heart of Alaska, but the Russian American Company was not aware of it for a long time. Drawing by FREDERICK WYMPER *An Artist in Alaska*, in: *Harper's Magazine*, 38 (1869), p. 599.



Figure 7: Well-built Russian supermen fighting Indian “savages.” An illustration from novel *The Keys to Enchanted Castle* (1993) by KONSTANTIN BADIGIN.



Figure 8: Tlingit chief Kotlean, a favorite “evil Indian” of Russian patriotic fiction and non-fiction dealing with Alaska. Watercolor by Mikhail Tikhonov (c.1818–1819). V. M. GOLOVIN *Sochineniya*, p. 335.

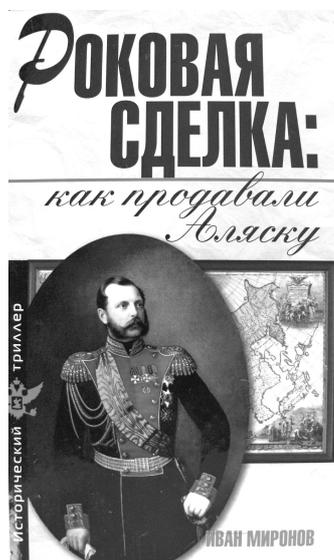


Figure 9: Bribed by Western banking and railroad interests, Russian officials ceded Alaska to the United States – the major thesis of *Fateful Deal* (2007) by IVAN MIRONOV. This nationalist activist and historian finished his book while incarcerated for an alleged involvement into an attempted murder of Anatoliy Chubays.