Spiritual & Secular Transculturation in Russian America, 1821-1867

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The focus of this essay is to reveal the secular and spiritual transculturation that shaped the relationship between the indigenous Aleut and Alutiiq with colonial Russian America from the time of the second charter of the Russian-America Company (RAC) in 1821 until the end of the colony in 1867. This period was marked by a systematic attempt on the part of the Russian imperial elite to codify (and classify) the offspring and cultural identity of mixed Russian-Native parentage (creole). The syncretism of Orthodoxy and indigenous spirituality, however, simultaneously challenged any attempt by the centre to "Russify" or "Christianize" the local inhabitants. The result of this latter era in the history of Russian America was an alternative model for Empire that eschewed the acculturation/assimilation paradigms inherent in Native-Newcomer relations associated with contemporary European settler societies.

In 1887, Alaskan Governor A.P. Swineford reported that the Russian Orthodox Church, supported by the Russian government, maintained 17 schools in Alaska. Observing the educational effort of the church, Swineford remarked that, "the effectiveness of these schools in the past is evidenced by the fact that large numbers of Aleuts are able to read either in Russian or in their own language, for which last an alphabet and grammar was devised…while not a few of the natives

of southeastern Alaska speak and read the Russian language."[1] This 'peculiarity' worried the U.S. Bureau of Education which echoed the attitudes of the Protestant missionaries entrusted with the task of bringing "our ideas to those people who have not yet reached the Anglo-Saxon frame of mind:"

> One of the most serious obstacles in the way of American schools has been and is now, the demand by the [Orthodox] church that all her children learn Russian so as to understand the church services. Consequently, a great deal of time is wasted in teaching or attempting to teach, the children two languages…It is not that the average native child is dull or stupid, for he is not, but is because the child never hears English spoken except what he hears in the schools.[2]

American school officials appeared to be caught unawares by the cultural sophistication of the territories they had acquired.

Russia 'discovered' Alaska in 1741 and occupied it until 1867, the only non-congruous part of the Empire. In those 126 years, a succession of adventurers, trappers, administrators, explorers, priests, and monks left an indelible mark on the native population, but nowhere was their influence greater or more lasting than in the province of religion.[3] The focus of this essay is to reveal the secular and spiritual transculturation that shaped the relationship of the indigenous Aleut and Alutiiq[4] with colonial Russian America

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[1] Annual Report of the Governor of Alaska, 1887 [716], in Barbara S. Smith, *Orthodoxy and Native Americans: The Alaskan Mission* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1980), 24.
[2] Richard L. Dauenhauer, "Two Missions to Alaska," *An Alaska Anthology: Interpreting the Past* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 83-85.
[3] Barbara S. Smith, *Orthodoxy and Native Americans: The Alaskan Mission (*Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Press, 1980), 7.
[4] "The name 'Alutiiq' is itself a legacy of Western contact. The original self-designation was Sugpiaq ("real person"). 18th century Russian fur traders introduced the term Aleut to refer to the Sugpiat and to several other linguistically and culturally distinct indigenous populations in southern Alaska. This new

from the time of the second charter of the Russian-America Company (RAC) in 1821 until the end of the colony in 1867. This period was marked by a systematic attempt on the part of the Russian imperial elite to codify (and classify) the offspring and cultural identity of mixed Russian-Native parentage (*creole*); a culturally constructed "legal borderland" that served to shape identity and simultaneously challenge it.[5] Concurrently, the mingling of Orthodoxy and indigenous spirituality challenged any attempt by the centre to "Russify" or "Christianize" the local inhabitants. The result of this latter era in the history of Russian America was an alternative model for Empire that challenged the *acculturation/assimilation* paradigms inherent in Native-Newcomer relations associated with contemporary European settler societies, and replaced it with acculturation and *inculturation* (the adaptation and appropriation of a new religion);[6] one which simultaneously revealed the dynamism inherent in mid-19th century cross-cultural discourse. This development has become known as the "syncretic process."[7] The Russian administration attempted to come to terms with an indigenous cultural context that was neither entirely Russian nor aboriginal. One legacy of Russian-Indigenous relations is the contemporary tendency of identifying Orthodoxy with aboriginal spiritual practice in parts of present-day Alaska.

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name—pronounced as Alutiiq in the Sugpiaq language—was eventually accepted by Native people themselves." See Aaron L. Crowell (Ed.), *Looking both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2001), 4. Alutiiq region extends along the southern Alaska coast from Prince William Sound in the east to the Alaska Peninsula in the west, including the Kodiak Island group and parts of the Kenai Peninsula. Also see Lydia Black, *The History and Ethnohistory of the Aleutians East Borough.* (Kingston: Limestone Press, 1999).

[5] Mary L. Dudziak and Leti Volpp, "Legal Borderlands: Law and the Construction of American Borders," *American Quarterly* Vol. 57, no. 3 (Sep. 2005), 593-610.

[6] Carl F. Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-Between*. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press), 10.

[7] Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-Between*, 11

It is interesting to note that the political and religious roots of syncretism have been a source of theoretical, and at times-at least among theologians-fractious debate for two millennia. Indeed, the problem of defining syncretism is related to its complex history and conflicting etymology.[8] Syncretism as a political abstraction first occurred in the treatise of the Greek historian Plutarch (ca. 50 AD-120 AD) with reference to illustrate "how the Cretans did" when they suspended their mutual disagreements and united to face a common enemy.[9] Etymologically the Greek term *syncretismos* stems from a combination of the Greek prefix *syn* with *kretoi*, the word for Cretans, or *krestismos*, "the Cretan behaviour." In this sense, syncretism emphasizes the political meaning of "self-defence" in the attempt to preserve a community in a perilous situation.[10] Religious historians, however, have noted the conflicts of syncretism *within* Christianity.

Religious historian Carl Strokloff has observed that "many religious professionals such as church administrators, pastors, and missionaries" have seen syncretism as "what I have for some time now called a 'ten-letter four-letter word'."[11] In his introduction to the World Council of Churches' "Guidelines of Dialogue", Stanley Samartha wrote:

> Perhaps no other word in the ecumenical vocabulary has aroused more fears, created more unnecessary controversy, and, more of than not, succeeded in sidetracking urgent issues in the life of the churches in pluralist situations than the term syncretism. One reason

[8] Anita M. Leopold and Jeppe S. Jensen (Eds.), *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), 14
[9] Plutarch, *Moralia, Vol. 6*, cited in Leopold and Jensen, *Syncretism in Religion,* 14
[10] Leopold and Jensen, *Syncretism in Religion,* 14.
[11] Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-Between,* 10

> for this is the negative connotation that the term has acquired in the context of mission.[12]

Indeed, deriving from *synkerannum*i -which means to "mix" things that are incompatible- the modern version of syncretism stems from a Reformation-era polemic to denote ecumenical betrayals against the Reformed orthodoxy by Protestant theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries.[13] When considered in this context however, the syncretism debate is contextualized within the acculturation/assimilation paradigm and restrained by a perception of inert historical change.

The historian Petra Pakkanen has termed syncretism a "theoretical invention" that has no correspondence in contextual reality."[14] In response, religious historians Anita M. Leopold & Jeppe S. Jensen have argued that:

> there is not much interest in retaining the category of syncretism if its only application is to describe historical processes that are already evident in the historical data. The benefit of the category should lie, first, in its ability to function as a heuristic tool, to aid us in pointing out a phenomenon and telling us *what* it is, and second, as an aid in explaining, that is, to tell us why and how it is the way it is.[15]

Syncretism is, in the end, a fluid, organic concept; a permanent but mutable cultural construction:

> The syncretic process…seems to be a dynamic built into human nature and a process of all human social and

[12] Ibid., 10
[13] Leopold and Jensen, *Syncretism in Religion,* 14
[14] Ibid., 14.
[15] Leopold and Jensen, *Syncretism in Religion,* 14.

> religious interaction. The syncretic process is a *de facto* human dynamism that is not going to be dismissed…It is…a laudable desire of humans for unity within diversity.[16]

Syncretism is a dialogue of religious enculturation through the interplay of ideas, experiences and praxis.[17] It is also a useful measure of agency, resistance and compromise in a cross-cultural setting.

From Vitus Bering's Second Kamtchaka Expedition of 1741 until the Imperial Charter of the Russian America Company in 1799, Russian expansion along the Aleutian Islands and Peninsula was generally one of exploration, discovery and commercial competition between rival trading companies on the one hand and periodic brutality, forced resettlement, hostage-taking (*amanaty)* and compulsory 'tributes' *(iasak)* imposed on the indigenous Aleut on the other.[18] The Aleutians would often respond in kind. Consequently, there was much ambivalence among Russian officialdom in matters of conquest and possession. When the merchant and future empire-builder Grigorii Shelikhov[19] had pressed for monopolistic rights to the Aleutian fur trade, Catherine II refused, remarking, "It is one thing to trade, quite another to take possession."[20]

What distinguished mid-19th century Russian colonization in Alaska from other colonial empires on the American continent was that settlement, in the sense of settling people and communities on

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[16] Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-Between,* 11.
[17] Ibid., 16
[18] Lydia Black, *Russians in Alaska: 1732-1867* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2004), 209. See Andrei V. Grinev, "Native Amanaty in Russian America," *European Review of Native American Studies* 17:1 (2003), 7-20.
[19] Black, *Russians in Alaska,* 91.
[20] Ibid., 113

the land, was not a primary goal. There was never a government-sponsored plan for establishing a permanent Russian population in Alaska; in fact, the government regulations forbade Russian settlement for the sake of settlement.[21] Russian relationships with the majority of the Native groups were determined by the desirability of continuous, uninterrupted trade. Consequently, the dynamics of inter-group (Russian-Native) and personal relationships and attitudes were qualitatively different from those established later between the people of the United States and Alaska's indigenous peoples.[22]

Although historians of the exploration and development of the American West typically devote little attention to the role of Russians and the Russian American colony in the generation and synthesis of geographic and scientific understanding of northwestern North America and California, a substantial amount of primary and secondary material relating to the history of Russian America has now been translated into English and is widely available.[23] The

[21] Ibid., 79-120. Douglas W. Veltre has argued that of all Alaska Native peoples, Aleuts have the distinction of experiencing the longest and harshest history of contact with Non-Natives, beginning with the Russian fur hunters (promyshlenniki). See Douglas W. Veltre, "Perspectives on Aleut Cultural Change During the Russian Period," in Barbara Sweetland Smith and Redmond J. Barnett, (Eds.), *Russian America: The Forgotten Frontier* (Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1990), 175.

[22] Black, *Russians in Alaska,* xiii. The Russians never had any military presence outside Sitka. Compare this to the remarks of American Major General Halleck, in command of the military Division of the Pacific: "Should our Indian system be introduced here, Indian wars must inevitably follow, and instead of a few companies for its military occupation as many regiments will be called for." (italics added). Ibid., 285. Indeed, the marked differences in Native-Newcomer relations could also be extended to British North America and, to a lesser extent, New France. See Douglas Owram, *The Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

[23] Stephen Haycox, "Russian America: Studies in the English Language," *Pacific Historical Review,* Vol. 59 *(*1990), 231-232. Primary source material on Russia's colonies fall into four general categories: government decrees, instructions, rules and regulations; records of the Russian American Company; accounts by officials sent by the government, the church, the Company and educational and cultural institutions; and memoirs of both Russian and foreign visitors. See Basil Dmythryshyn, E.A.P. Crownhart-Vaughan & Thomas Vaughan, (Eds.), *The Russian*

majority of secondary source literature on Russian America (Russian American Colonies in official documents) to the Second World War was oriented around the twin tenets of disorder and exploitation of both human and animal (especially sea otter) resources on the one hand, and the centrality of "great men" on the other.[24] Early histories of the region also served an important political role in the "Americanization" of the region after 1867.[25] The first Russian history of Russian America was a company-commissioned volume by Mikhail Tikhmenev in 1863, largely a posterity piece.[26] Recognizing that the Russian America story has largely consisted of the stuff of legend, history painted in black and white, and outright cliches,[27] scholars such as Lydia Black, Sergei Kan, Soterios Mousalimas, Antoinette Shalkop, Nora and Richard Dauenhauer, and Ann Fienup-Riordan, among others, have brought to bear the insights of comparative history on both social and political developments in Russia's most remote colony.[28]

In 1799, the Russian-America Company (RAC) was given exclusive monopolistic privileges in the colonies. The RAC was a shareholder-owned enterprise that operated "under the Patronage of His Imperial Majesty." The First Charter granted in 1799 by

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American Colonies, 1798-1867: A Documentary Record (Oregon Historical Society Press, 1989), 550-558. Professor Richard Pierce, formerly of Queen's University and later of the University of Alaska, translated and published over 30 volumes dealing with the history of Russian America through his Limestone Press.

[24] Black, *Russians in Alaska*, xiv-xv.

[25] Hubert Bancroft, *History of Alaska, 1730-1885* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft and Co., 1886).

[26] P.A. Tikhmenev, *A History of the Russian American Company*. Translated by Richard A. Pierce and Alton S. Donnelly (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978).

[27] S. Frederick Starr, "Introduction", in S. Frederick Starr, (Ed.), *Russia's American Colony*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 1.

[28] Starr, *Russia's American Colony,* 1. Also see Richard Pierce, "Archival and Bibliographic Materials on Russian America Outside the USSR, in Starr (Ed.), *Russia's American Colony*, 353-365.

Emperor Paul I served both the company's own commercial interests and the interests of the state by granting a monopoly to the rights of usufruct in the American territory claimed by Russia and in the Kuril archipelago.[29] Nothing in the Charter specified the rights and responsibilities of the Aleutians. Consequently, this period was largely one of widespread indigenous resettlement and involuntary hunting on account of systematic *amanaty* and *iasak* (which had been outlawed by Catherine but the law was not enforced).

Hunting was a dangerous way of life. Furthermore, the mainly Siberian fur hunters and trappers *(promyshlenniki*) were either unable or unwilling to hunt themselves, relying solely on the skills of Aleutian means of subsistence for survival. Even the transition to naval administration after 1818 changed little in terms of the division of labour. Lieutenant Lazarev remarked in 1820:

> If the [Russian-American] company should somehow lose the Aleuts, then it will completely forfeit the hunting of sea animals, because not one Russian knows how to hunt the animals, and none of our settlers has learned how in all the time that the company has had its possessions here.[30]

Between 1792 and 1805, 195 Aleut men were killed or captured in battles with the Tlingit, 280 or 290 drowned, with an additional 100 drowning in *baidara* accidents during stormy weather at Kodiak, and another 64 drowned off Tugidok Island. In addition, in 1799, 135 to 140 men died near Sitka from shellfish poisoning and an additional

[29] Black, *Russians in Alaska,* 255. Also see Andrei Grinev, "The Dynamics of the Administrative Elite of the Russian-American Company," *Alaska History* Vol. 17, no. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 2002), 1-22.

[30] James R. Gibson, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America* (New York: Oxford University Press), 8. Hunting was carried out in either two (or three) person wooden framed and skin covered kayaks (baidarka) or larger open boats (up to 40 persons) with a wooden frame covered with cured sea mammal hides (baidara).

number died en route. The total number of able-bodied men lost was likely 750 or well over 800, depending on the source. This loss represents ten percent of the total population reported for Kodiak by the manager of the Russian-American Company, Alexander Baranov, for 1792 (a third of the male population).[31] Many hunters were lost at sea or murdered by rival indigenous groups (in particular the Tlingit who lived along the coastal bays and inlets along southeastern Alaska) when Company officials sent Aleutian hunters down the southeastern coast when sea otter resources began to dwindle.[32]

The second imperial *ukaz* of September 13, 1821 from Alexander I to the Senate *Renewing the Privileges of the Russian American Company and Approving Regulations for Its Activities* was the first attempt at experimental social legislation.[33] Included in the 70 articles pertaining to regulations governing company activities were several which outlined the status of the *Creoles* and the various Native groups employed by the Company or residing in its territories. Under *Regulations for the Russian American Company,* section II—*Company Obligations to Russian Subjects Living in Areas Entrusted to Company Administration*, article 41 dealt solely with the Creoles:

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[31] Black, *Russians in Alaska,* 133.

[32] The story of Russian relations with the Tlingit (Kolosh) is one of ambivalence, cooperation, resistance and co-existence. See Jonathan Dean, "Their Nature and Qualities Remain Unchanged:" Russian Occupation and Tlingit Resistance," *Alaska History*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 1-17; and Katherine Arndt, "Russian Relations with the Stikine Tlingit," *Alaska History* Vol.3, No.1 (Spring 1998), 27-43. Also see Jonathan R. Dean, "The Sea Otter War of 1810: Russia Encounters the Tsimshians," *Alaska History* Vol.12, No.2 (Fall 1997), 24-31. This article is particularly insightful for its use of oral sources in addition to documentary materials.

[33] Black, *Russians in Alaska*, xiii. The practice of classifying and codifying the indigenous was part of a simultaneously larger imperial-wide policy of stratifying Empire through the establishment of the 'alien' (inorodtsy) class beginning in Siberia.

> Creoles who, according to most recent information, number 180 males and 120 females, and all who are born in the future, must be registered in the [census] lists of the main colonial office. Such persons will henceforth comprise a special category…[34]

Creoles living in the colonies would not be subject to taxation pending a further decree. The Colonial Administrator was to supervise officials of the colonial office to ensure the protection of Creole property. In addition, those Creoles who had entered Company service and distinguished themselves through hard work and ability could, upon review by authorities enjoy the privileges granted to other Russian subjects who had entered Company service:

> Creoles who receive professional training in science or arts and crafts in Russia at the expense of the company are awarded the status of student or medical assistant upon graduation from institutions of higher education. They will have all attendant rights established for universities and the Academy. They must agree to serve in the colonies for at least ten years, to be of service to native inhabitants. They are to receive appropriate wages and maintenance expenses from the company. When the set period has expired they may leave the colonies if they desire and be employed elsewhere, depending on their occupations.[35]

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[34] Basil Dmytryshyn, E.A.P.Crownhart-Vaughan & Thomas Vaughan (Eds.), *To Siberia and Russian America: Three Centuries of Russian Eastward Expansion, Vol. 3* (Portland, Oregon: The Press of the Oreogn Historical Society, 1985), 360.

[35] Creoles were already engaged in shipbuilding and navigation training in Russia. See "Instructions from the Main Administration of the Russian American Company to Aleksandr Baranov Concerning Education for Creoles" (March 22, 1817), Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan & Vaughan, *To Siberia and Russian America,* 244-45.

An official decree on April 2, 1835 *Concerning the Status of Russian American Company Personnel Who Decide to Settle Permanently in the Russian American Colonies* recognized the importance of the creole kinship to the well-being of community and the permanent settlement of the colonies:

> Willingly hired Russian townsmen and peasants who are presently in the Russian American colonies as hired personnel of the company, who have married Creoles or [native] American women….[will be allowed to settle there]…The company must build adequate living quarters for them and supply them with the necessary equipment for hunting and farming, and with livestock, domestic fowl and seed grain….

Creoles who had left Company service and wished to become farmers could also settle according to the same terms above.[36]

Clearly, the Russian colonial authorities were cognizant of the importance of the moral and financial obligations presented by the offspring of mixed parentage. However, the well-meaning intentions of the document also served to ensure that the Company—and the state by extension—would have a much-needed source of human capital in return. In this respect, by the 1830s the Russian Imperial administration viewed the RAC as a conduit for the legitimacy of its claims in Russia America, not just a vehicle for commerce.

Recognition of Creole status was further developed and enshrined on October 11, 1844 with *The Renewal of the Charter of the Russian American Company: The Russian Orthodox Church and of the Russian and NonRussian Inhabitants of the Russian American*

[36] Ibid., 399-400.

Colonies. The government recognized five social categories under colonial administration: contract employees, colonial citizens (voluntary settlers), Creoles, settled foreigners, Natives (*inorodtsy),* and foreigners of religious faiths other than Orthodox (*inovertsy)* not fully dependent on the company*)*. Chapter VIII, Section III, contained 11 articles exclusively concerning the Creoles. In addition to identifying any person born of the union of a European or Siberian father and an American native woman, status was further extended to all offspring of an American native father and a European or Siberian woman. As Russian subjects, Creoles had the right of absolute legal protection of the government on an equal basis with the category of official lower middle class status (*meshchanstvo)*. Creoles were exempt from state taxation and obligations (state or military) as long as they remained in the colonies. Creoles in the service of the RAC also received privileges granted to Russian subjects in Company service.[37] The Empire demonstrated a degree of moral obligation in the midst of a mid-century transition in European ideological perceptions of indigenous culture to one of race.

The Creole population had grown rapidly, from 553 (in 1822) to 1,989 (in 1863), a three-fold increase.[38] The rights of colonial "citizenship" now extended (at least in theory) to a creole class. However, this form of symbolic violence[39] also served to co-

[37] Dmytryshyn, Crownart-Vaughan & Vaughan, *To Siberia and Russian America,* 469. This exemption was "subject to authoritative discretion."
[38] S.G. Federova, *The Russian Population in Alaska and California, late 18th century to 1867* (Kingston: Limstone Press, 1973), 166.
[39]'Symbolic violence', according to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, is the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate. This legitimacy obscures the power relations which permit that imposition to be successful. This is achieved through a process of misrecognition: 'the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder. The mainstay of the exercise of symbolic violence is 'pedagogic action,' including institutionalized education. See Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*

opt the creoles, and all classified indigenous, into an unconscious acquiescence of a structure that was devoid of any kind of consensual discourse. Further, the pedagogical aims of the administration masked an attempt to marshal its cultural capital in the continuation of power.

Even half a world away, however, these aims were influenced by issues emanating from the centre. Anticipating the Great Reforms on the horizon, the "questions" of peasant emancipation and indigenous "citizenship" in the colonies were reflected in the conceptual debates of the time. As the spread of industrial capitalism loosened the hold of an agricultural order characterized by rural serfdom, the class of colonial citizen (which numbered 240 persons in 1858, including their family members) in Russian America was described by the Company in 1858 as "comprising a population who are moral and industrious."[40] .

But was the classification of the creole as colonial citizen in the best interests of the RAC? The *Company Report of 1858* weighed the considerations:

> The question arises as to who are these "other people of the free category who have the right to leave America…….are they emancipated natives who are not mentioned in the information about citizens?…..it would be interesting to know whether natives are divided into free and non-free categories. Are American natives, Aleuts and especially Creoles, colonial citizens? Or when they leave the previous lifestyle of their brothers in colonies of European power, are they subdivided according to the colour of their skin? If they are not

(London: Routledge, 1992), 104-105; and P. Bourdieu and J-C Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 1977), xi-xiii.

[40] Dmytryshyn, Crownart-Vaughan & Vaughan, *To Siberia and Russian America,* 505-506.

> actually bound to the land in the strictest sense of the term, are they not actually independent either? Or are they completely dependent on the colonial administration and deprived of some or many of their rights?[41]

A recognition of the importance of being "bound to the land" notwithstanding, the constructed category of citizenship now consisted of Russian subjects and other persons of the free category who had the right to leave Russian America but remain in Russia proper. Hired townspeople and peasants who were in the Russian American colonies as hired persons who had married either Creoles or American natives could also leave with their families.

As the bonds of serfdom were loosening in the Empire, the presumptions concerning the indigenous of the Russian American colonies are instructive. Reform-minded officials demonstrated the entrenched paternalistic attitudes borne out of a century of resource extraction and the mobilization of (involuntary) human labour. The issues raised in the memorandum were weighty topics but what is more instructive is the essence of the entire report. The RAC wanted the Creole to be a link between the Russians and the indigenous.[42] In one of its final reports, *The Committee for Organization of the Russian-American Colonies,* a fact-finding commission which nonetheless came with preconceived notions about the situation in Alaska and whose members were prejudiced against the company,[43] noted:

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[41] Ibid., 506-507.
[42] Fedorova, *The Russian Population in Alaska and California*, 212.
[43] Black, *Russians in Alaska,* 280-281.

> On the one hand the Creole, feeling in himself European blood, considers himself above the Aleut and does not want to live and work with him. In spite of all efforts by the colonial leadership the Creoles do not join the fur hunting parties themselves nor send their children out in them, thereby depriving themselves of income.[44]

A contemporaneous but separate report commissioned by Grand Duke Constantine was unequivocal in its negative and, at times, pejorative description of the creole. Mindful of the rapidly changing demographics[45], poor health[46] and inability to hunt[47] of the creole, while almost completely uncritical of the RAC, Pavel Golovin recommended a reduction in obligatory service to five years. Furthermore, "it would be even better if the government were to assume the responsibility for education in the colonies and prevent the company from exploiting human labour and capability to the detriment of human rights."[48]

It is useful to analyze Russian America within the context of mid-nineteenth century United States of America and British North America. Colonial thought in the 19th century increasingly constructed Aboriginal people as static, unchanging and confined to a permanent "state of nature."[49] Indeed, according to scholar

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[44] Black, *Russians in Alaska,* 281.
[45] Pavel Golovin, "A Review of the Russian Colonies in North America" 1862, translated in Basil Dmytryshyn, and E.A.P.Crownhart-Vaughan (Eds.), *The End of Russian America: Captain P.N. Golovin's Last Report* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1979), 17.
[46] Golovin in Dmytryshyn and Crownhart-Vaughan (Eds.), *The End of Russian America*, 63, 68.
[47] Ibid., 76.
[48] Golovin in Dmytryshyn and Crownhart-Vaughan (Eds.), *The End of Russian America*, 17-19.
[49] Robin Brownlie, *First Nations and Historical Thinking in Canada* (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, May 2007), 2 Also see Maurren Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827-1863* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004).

Maureen Konkle, the notion of race as inherent difference was well-entrenched in North America by the 1840s, displacing the older Christian framework that saw non-white peoples as being culturally but not biologically inferior, and therefore potentially capable of equality.[50] What about Russian America?

Certainly the decisions and correspondence of colonial officers appeared to reflect those values of "nationality, Orthodoxy, and Autocracy" promulgated early in the reign of Nicholas I (1825-1855). The concepts of creole and 'citizen' seemed a trope for *Russian* and (wage) labourer. One could further argue that 'citizenship' masked a racially-based 'civilization' mission underway in the United States and British North America, but in asserting this, one is concurrently writing out the Native presence. There is little doubt that Russian colonial officials compartmentalized the indigenous populations they came in contact with through the 'provincial' usefulness of the local populations in the general political economy of the centre. However, the colonial Russian approach was inflected by a peculiar blend of moral imperative, geographical consciousness and the offspring of Native-Newcomer relationships. There was a tacit recognition of the difficulties of maintaining an incongruous landmass within the Empire. Consequently, the classification in law of the creole category raises some important questions of what legal historian Jean manore labels the "ideas of citizenship and the borderlands of identity they create through inclusions and exclusion [as well as] ideas of law and legal regimes and how they create borderlands of

[50] Brownlie, *First Nations and Historical Thinking in Canada* 5-6, citing Konkle, 40.

identity within national and colonial constructions."[51] Mary Dudziak and Leti Valpp identify legal borderlands as

> contact zones between distinct physical spaces; they can be interstitial zones of hybridization. They can constitute spaces that challenge paradigms and that therefore reveal the criteria that determine what fits into hose paradigms. Borderlands can also function not as literal physical spaces but as contact zones as spaces of ideological ambiguity that can open up new possibilities of both oppression and liberation.[52]

For Dudziak and Valpp, "we might see in law not an inescapable hegemony but a role in an ascribed identity. Law does mark bodies (as citizen, as alien), but it can also be drawn upon in construction of self."[53] The complexities inherent in colonial attempts to "Russify" the local inhabitants through legal taxonomy were accompanied by attempts to "Christianize" the Aleutians, resulting in a dialogue with local norms with a view to *indigenizing* the nascent yet fledging faith.

By the early 1860s, there was much uncertainty as to what the intentions of the government were with respect to its possessions in Russian Alaska. It was unclear if the RAC would even be given a fourth charter. Relations between the RAC and the imperial government had always been predicated on commerce first, settlement second; indigenous concerns in general (and the creoles in particular) were always seen through the lens of both. It is no surprise that the RAC had trouble co-existing with the Orthodox

[51] Jean L. Manore, "Treaty 9 and the Borderland of Northern Ontario: Liberalism, Colonialism and native Resistance to State Expansion" (Paper Presented at Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, May 2007).
[52] Mary L. Dudziak and Leti Valpp, "Law and the Construction of American Borderlands," *American Quarterly,* Vol. 57, no. 3 (September, 2005): 595-596.
[53] Dudziak and Valpp, "Law and the Construction of American Borderlands," 595.

Church which had a different set of priorities. The first group of ten monks and two novices under the direction of Archimandrite Iosif Bolotiv arrived on September 24, 1794, the beginning of the church's first overseas mission and the start of its work in Alaska. On their way to Kodiak Island, the missionaries baptized over one hundred Aleuts in Unalshka and consecrated the first Alaskan Orthodox Church in St. Paul's Harbor. In 1795, Iosaf reported that on Kodiak, the nearby islands, and the Alaska Peninsula, 6,740 natives (mostly Unangan and Alutiiq) had been baptized. In the same year, Hieromonk Iuvenalii baptized 700 Alutiiq of Prince William Sound, and from there went to the Kenai Peninsula, where a substantial number of Athapaskans were brought into the church. In the meantime, Fr. Makarii laboured with the Aleutians, baptizing 2,442 persons and performing 536 marriages, including 36 between Russians and Aleutians.[54] In 1823, an ukaz of the 'Most Holy Synod' created a mission on Unalashka and the Aleutian Islands. Yet indigenous ceremonies and shamanism coexisted with the new faith for decades, even after most Alutiiq had received Christian baptism.[55]

Historian David Norlander argues convincingly the influence and legacy of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska:

> While secondary to other institutions of Russian polity in Alaska during the period of imperial rule between 1741 and 1867, the Russian Orthodox Church was in fact more influential than those institutions in both the magnitude and duration of its presence. In nearly every corner of the explored regions of Russian America, Orthodox clergy propagated the faith and introduced practices that stemmed from the ancient Byzantine

[54] Black, *Russians in Alaska,* 223-253.
[55] Crowell, *Looking Both Ways,*190.

> religion. Moreover, the priests and monks inculcated norms of Russian life and culture that profoundly affected native customs. Two centuries after its introduction, a thriving Orthodox community still stands as the legacy of that initial proselytizing work. Citing its official origins as the arrival on Kodiak Island of several Russian monks in 1794, the church today is the only living remnant from the era of Russian America.[56]

The continuing influence of the church in Alaska is due in no small part to the fact that over the course of two centuries in southern Alaska, the Russian Orthodox Church has absorbed influences from Alutiiq culture in return. Indeed, to this day, celebrations still held in many villages around the time of Russian Christmas combine Christian symbols and indigenized Russian folk traditions.[57] One such example is the 10-day "Starring" (*Selaviq)* celebration—the cross-cultural, ethnically diverse, and regionally unique celebration of Russian Orthodox Christmas which begins on January 6. The roots of *Selaviq* are instructive:

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[56] David Norlander, Innokentii Veniaminov and the Expansion of Orthodoxy in Russian America," *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 65, no.1 (1995), 19-36. In an archaeological study of the Russian Orthodox Church as a Native Institution Among the Koniag (misidentified as Aleut by Russians), Archaeologist Robert R. Rathburn remarked: "A Russian folk saying states: 'to be Orthodox is to be Russian;' for the Koniag it might be said that 'to be Orthodox is to be Koniag.'" Although he argues that the Russian Orthodox Church cannot be understood "simply as a transplanted foreign institution," Rathburn maintains that through a process of "selective assimilation" the Russian Orthodox Church has become a native institution for the Koniag Eskimo of Kodiak Island, Alaska. See Robert R. Rathburn, "The Russian Orthodox Church as a Native Institution Among the Koniag Eskimo of Kodiak Island, Alaska," *Arctic Anthropology*, Vol. 18, no. 1 (1981): 12-22.

[57] Crowell, *Looking Both Ways,* 190. Traditional Alutiiq belief distinguished between the personified consciousness (suq) of an animal, plant, place, thing, natural force or human form and another type of spiritual entity—the soul (sugunha) . This reincarnation—or cycles of the soul—ensured the return of new game animals and the regeneration of human communities. Today, Alutiiq men and women take care in returning the soul-parts of animals back to the environment. On the Alaska Peninsula today, bear hunters face a killed animal's head toward the east, the direction "that Christ is going to come," according to [Elder] Virginia Aleck of Chugnik Lake. This may be a reinterpretation in Christian terms of the same concept of animal rebirth." Crowell, 191-194.

> The Starring tradition originated in the Carpathian Mountains of the Ukraine in the sixteenth century as a grass-roots response by Orthodox laity to the forced latinization of the Russian Orthodox Church. As originally developed, the Starring songs and customs of the "Little Russians" were unknown in other parts of Russia and helped maintain a separate Orthodox identity in regions of western Russia occupied by Poland in the mid-twentieth century. Ironically, perhaps, *Selaviq* has placed aspects of this Slavonic folkloric tradition within a framework of Yup'ik interpretation and style to produce an event as central to the maintenance and expression of local identity as was its original.[58]

Older villagers remember the introduction of *Selaviq* by Russian Orthodox priests, possibly Ukrainian-born Father Iakov Korchinskii in the late 1800s or Hieromonk Amfilokhii in the early 1900s.[59] Selaviq is an excellent example of the enculturation that arises out of the localization of an aspect of (unofficial) Orthodoxy; the willingness of both missionaries and Alutiiq to take up a specific type of Orthodoxy.

Sergei Kan has argued that there were two different approaches to evangelization among Orthodox missionaries. The first favoured a more forceful elimination of "pagan" religions and emphasized the missionaries' roles as both messengers of the Word of God and representatives of the Russian state, whose job included introducing natives to the Russian language and culture, thus

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[58] Crowell, *Looking Both Ways,*190.. "The song service opened with Russian Orthodox hymns sung in both Old Church Slavonic and Yup'ik. Along with the hymns were Ukrainian kolyadi (Christmas carols) of up to ten verses each, sung alternatively in Ukrainian and English. The villagers consider both kolyadi and the Orthodox hymns equally "traditional, that is having to do with the unique oral history of the Yup'ik people" Ann Fienup-Riordan, "Following the Star: From the Ukraine to the Yukon," in *Russian America*, 229. For more on Selaviq and Russian Orthodox New Year, see Crowell, 213-217.

[59] Crowell, *Looking both Ways,* 213-217.

speeding up their incorporation into the Russian empire. The second approach stressed the importance of a more gradual and cautious missionization, which included tolerating the less objectionable indigenous customs (at least temporarily) and using native languages in communicating with the new converts and in the church service. This latter tradition drew on the legacy of Saints. Cyril and Methodius, who used a vernacular language to bring the gospel to the Slavs, and the experience of the Russian clerics who had been obliged to tolerate some of the pre-Christian beliefs and practices of the Orthodox Russian peasants.[60] It also emphasized the need for missionaries to distance themselves somewhat from the local secular Russian authorities and not to identify Christianization with Russification. Adherents of this approach were particularly conscious of the need to discourage converts from accepting "harmful" Russian customs, on the one hand, and abandoning "useful indigenous economic and social traditions," on the other."[61]

Arguing that the more tolerant approach to proselytizing was a characteristic of Orthodoxy in Alaska, Kan also asserts that, "missionization is both a sociopolitical and an ideological process and cannot be properly understood without an analysis of the wider colonial endeavor and the missionizers' culture."[62] Furthermore, an ethno history (or a cultural history) of Christianization must also pay careful attention to the culture of the missionized and their perceptions of and attitudes toward the missionizers.[63]

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[60] Sergei Kan, "Russian Orthodox Missionaries at Home and Abroad: The Case of Siberian and Alaskan Indigenous Peoples," in Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarovsky, Eds.*Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia.* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 173-174.
[61] Kan, "Russian Orthodox Missionaries at Home and Abroad," 174
[62] Ibid.,175.
[63] Ibid.

Solteris Mousalimas has identified the transition from shamanism to Orthodoxy as "an indigenous movement involving a transformation of the ancient."[64] The key element to the syncretism of indigenous and Orthodox spirituality has been what Mousalimas calls *Panentheism,* or "all-in-God" of traditional Aleut/Alutiiq cultures which is a distinct contrast to the "simple immanence" in *pantheism* (all-[is]-God) and the separation of divinity from nature in *deism* (apart-from-[God]).[65] The point of convergence between Orthodoxy and shamanism—what Mousalimas identifies as "divine panentheistic participation"—can be seen through iconography and ritual masking (*maskalataq*).[66]

> We may see at a glance the similarity between icons and ritual masks, by reading two quotations juxtaposed: the first from theology, the *Life of St. Stephan the Younger* (+c.764) written by Stephan deacon of Constantinople in the later eighth century;
>
> "The icon is a door"

Mousalimas compares the above to the second quotation from Fienup-Riordan:

> [Masks are] eyes into a world or worlds beyond the mundane.[67]

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[64] S.A. Mousalimas, *The Transition From Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska*, (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn Books, 1995), 1.
[65] Mousalimas, *The Transition From Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska,* 114-116. Mousalimas quotes the character Maria in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's The Possessed , "God and nature are one and the same thing." On panentheism in Russian popular literature, folk tradition and liturgical tradition, see Mousalimas, 118-122.
[66] Mousalimas, *The Transition From Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska,* 131. Also see Crowell, 215-218.
[67] Mousalimas, *The Transition From Shamanism to Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska,* 131-138.

One important aspect of Orthodoxy in Russia, especially in the early years before 1799, was its active intervention on behalf of the indigenous in the face of the "wild atmosphere" of Alexander Baranov, the first governor of Russia America (1802-1818), and the only leader to come from the merchant class.[68] There was no love lost between Baranov and the clergy:

> We have a hermit here now by the name of Herman….He is a great talker and likes to write. Even though he keeps himself in his cell most of the time, not even going to church out of fear of worldly temptations, he knows nevertheless everything that we think and do, not only at daytime but even at night. By means of pious cajoling, he extracts all the information that he wants from his pupils, and sometimes from his own men.[69]

Baranov also accused the clergy of taking sides in a labour dispute involving Russian workers and employees seconded to the company from the navy:

> I was punished by anxiety and my temper was sorely tried, because the clergy and the government employees were entirely out of bounds and for half the winter tried to instigate a uprising among the hunters and especially among the islanders.[70]

Missionaries felt an obligation to protect their laity. On August 1, 1804, *A Report to the Holy Governing Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church from Missionaries in Russian America Detailing Complaints against Aleksander A. Baranov* explained the difficulties:

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[68] Ibid., 138, fn. 33.
[69] Black, *Russians in Alaska,* 237.
[70] Ibid.

> [Missionaries] are responsible not only for tending and instructing the orphans who live with us in our quarters; which of us is also, as able, trying to instruct the local native people. To do this we need to have friendly relations with these people. However, the administration of the Company, the …merchant Aleksander Baranov has imposed a heavy burden on the natives, both men and women, through [forced] Company labour and excessive demands, because he is so jealous of the love the natives have shown towards us. Through the tremendous power he wields over them he reveals his anger towards us.[71]

The report describes a litany of abusive language directed towards clergy, enforced separation of natives and church (i.e. locking the church and confining the priests), and use of *amanaty* to intimidate those who had been baptized and wished to swear an oath of allegiance to the new Tsar Alexander I. Baranov responded, "They promised the islanders independence and freedom to live according to their customs if they would take the oath of allegiance….their freedom consists in robbery and in everlasting bloody barbarism."[72]

Ambivalence and conflict marked the first two decades of Company-clergy relations in the 19th century. Nikolai P. Reznov, a major shareholder in the RAC, contrasted the so-called proselytizing work of the Orthodox clergy with the Jesuits in South America:

> Our monks have never followed the path of the Jesuits in Paraguay by trying to develop the mentality of the savages, and have never known how to enter into extensive plans of the Government or company. They have just been 'bathing' [baptizing by immersion] the Americans and when, due to their ability to cope, the

[71] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan & Vaughan, *To Siberia and Russian America,* 62
[72] Black, *Russians in Alaska,* 237

> latter learn in half an hour to make the sign of the cross, our missionaries return, proud of their success, thinking their job is done.[73]

Georg H. von Langsdorff, a doctor of medicine who toured Russian America and California with Rezanov in 1814, commended the Catholic mission in California for cooperating with their own government. However, of the Russian missionary activities in the Kodiak area, he wrote that, "of the Russo-Greek religion they [the natives] scarcely know anything more than how to make the sign of the Cross, yet there is a church and an ecclesiastical establishment."[74]

Ioannin Veniaminov arrived in the colonies in 1824. He was undoubtedly the most important figure in the history of the Russian Orthodox mission. Offspring of mixed Siberian-indigenous parenthood, it was his vision and labour that were largely responsible for the establishment of the Alaska diocese, and he served as its first bishop.[75] A charismatic priest, outstanding scholar, and astute politician, Veniaminov tried to rely on a more enlightened approach to missionization, which had been advocated by some of his superiors and teachers in Irkutsk but had rarely been put into practice in Siberia. He was also instrumental in the accurate translation of Slavic church catechism into Aleutian orthography with the contributions of the Aleutian chief Ivan Pan'kov. He also collaborated with the Atkan Creole priest Iakov Netsvetov to translate catechisms into Aleutian. These contributions laid the

[73] Mousalimas, *The Transition from Shamanism to Orthodoxy,* 212.
[74] Mousalimas, *The Transition from Shamanism to Orthodoxy,*, 212. Russian travelers also observed and commented on instances of abuse in Catholic missions as well. See Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan & Vaughan, 370-372.
[75] Kan, "Russian Orthodox Missionaries at Home and Abroad," 184.

foundation for the conversion of Aleut society into an essentially literate nation.[76]

Veniaminov's views on human nature and society combined Orthodox theology with Enlightenment rationalism.[77] For Veniaminov, the question of religion and culture had been settled in apostolic times: one *could* be socially, linguistically, and ethnically different from other members of the church locally, nationally, or worldwide, and still participate in the liturgical fullness of the church through its sacraments.[78] In other words, unlike many Western missionaries of his era, Veniaminov did not equate Christianization with the imposition of European culture, arguing that it did not make sense for Native Alaskans to abandon their subsistence activities.[79] He also practiced a measure of self-reflexivity set out in the *"Instructions to Alaskan Missionaries:"*

> A clergyman had to gain the natives' trust and a sense of their culture and language, and should explain to them in simple words (instead of preaching) the "Light of Truth." After establishing a rapport with the natives he was visiting, a missionary should ask his hosts ("with curiosity") about their own "faith and religious practices [*zakon i bogosluzhenie*]….Only after spending a considerable amount of time in these dialogues with the

[76] Michael E. Keauss, "Alaska Native Languages in Russian America", in *Russian America*, 206-208. Also see Lydia Black, "Ivan Pan'kov: Architect of Aleut Literacy", in *An Alaska Anthology* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), Stephen W. Haycox and Childers Mangusso, (Eds.), 76-88 .
[77] Kan, "Russian Orthodox Missionaries at Home and Abroad," 185
[78] For a comparison of pedagogy and religion in Russia-America compared two post-1867, see Richard Dauenhauer, "Two Missions to Alaska," in *An Alaska Anthology,* 43-65.
[79] Kan, "Russian Orthodox Missionaries at Home and Abroad," 187.

> natives was the missionary advised to offer them the sacrament of baptism.[80]

As for the association with the Russian-America Company, Veniaminov stressed the importance of separating the appearance of "any government" or "some kind of official functionary" role from public worship; "but appear in the guise of a poor wanderer, a sincere well-wisher to his fellow-men." Furthermore, "ancient customs, so long as they are not contrary to Christianity, need not be too abruptly broken up; but it should be explained to converts that they are merely tolerated." Veniamonov was also mindful of the possible ramifications of the dietary demands of religious practice and a subsistence lifestyle:

> The nature of these countries makes it almost impossible for the inhabitants to observe the fasts after the usual manner, i.e. by changing animal flesh diet to a wholly vegetable diet, and *their fasting can more conveniently modify not so much the quality as the quantity of the food and the time of taking it.* Therefore they should not be compelled to observe the fasts by change of diet; but they should, according to circumstances, diminish the quantity of the food they take, and not take that in the early hours of the day (Original Italics).[81]

Veniaminov's *Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District* is an encyclopedic work that deals with the geography, geology, climate, plant and animal life, ethnography, languages and history of

[80] Ivan Veniaminov, "Instructions to Alaskan Missionaries," cited in Kan, "Russian Orthodox Missionaries at Home and Abroad," 187.
[81] Veniaminov, "Instructions," in Barbara S. Smith, *Orthodoxy and the Native Americans: The Alaskan Mission* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 28-29.

that portion of the Aleutian Islands.[82] His notes are also one of the earliest comprehensive population studies of the Russian American colonies in historical context.[83] They reveal a level of detail and insight generally absent in earlier ethnographic reports (which were usually written by navigators and naval officials). One of the most insightful aspects of his observations is the syncretism that was emerging out of the transculturation of Orthodoxy and panentheisitic ontology:

> The customs of the Aleuts today are a mixture of their former customs with customs of the Russians, or at the very least, they follow both of them. Consequently, in describing Aleut customs, I shall speak of both [old and new ones]. I must confess, though, that despite all my effort to learn their former customs, I could not fully attain this because of their excessive shyness and reluctance to relate what now seems to them either ridiculous or improper. However, [it seems that] what I could not learn pertains mostly to what is, indeed, unseemly or too insignificant.[84]

However, there were some customs regarding which Veniaminov demonstrated a peculiar ambivalency. With respect to the custom of killing slaves at funerals and memorial feasts in honour of kin:

> Upon acceptance of the Christian faith the Aleuts completely abandoned all such customs which are contrary to Christianity. But neither can they make humane last testaments because no one has slaves nowadays. However, on the other hand, there are still some Aleuts who, although secretly and incompletely,

[82] Richard Pierce (Ed.), "Introduction", *in Ivan Venaminov, Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District* (Kingston: Limestone Press, 1984), vi.
[83] Veniaminov, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District,* 245-259.
[84] Veniaminov, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District*, 188.

> perform in part the conjugal mourning [of killing a slave or her/his offspring] not so much from dread and fear of being subjected to suffering, but form love.[85]

In another passage, Veniaminov explores the discourse between indigenous religion and the missionization process

> The Aleuts believed and taught their children that daylight is life for all while the night is ruin and death…Therefore, for health and physical strength and for longevity, everyone had to perform the following custom or rule: not to sleep through the dawn, but at the first light, to go naked outside and stand facing the east or where the dawn appears. Opening the mouth wide, one should swallow the light and the wind (Original emphasis).[86]

Veniaminov also notes how Orthodoxy has transformed interpersonal relationships:

> Formerly [Aleut] hospitality consisted not only in treating guests to food (only visitors from afar were considered guests) but in offering them enjoyment, shelter, and furnishing supplies for their [return] journey. Now many of the Aleuts, especially those in the service of the company, are beginning to invite one another (which was not done formerly) and even invite important Russians to their home as guests, for instance, on one's name's [saint's] day.[87]

In Part II, Section 1(6) of this *Notes* --the "religious faith" of the Aleuts—Veniaminov comments that "the Aleuts believed and

[85] Ibid., 198.
[86] Ibid., 211, fn. 37.
[87] Lydia Black comments, "This practice is still observed today in the Aleutians, where the name day is much more important an occasion than a birthday," Veniaminov, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District,* 216.

acknowledged that there is and must be a Creator of everything visible and invisible, whom they called *Agugux*, that is Creator." Later in the same section Veniaminov concludes:

> The Aleuts may, with all justice, be called exemplary Christians. [Because] just as soon as they adopted Christianity, they immediately abandoned shamanism, and not only shamanism itself but the very signs of it such as false faces and masks [*lichiny i maski]* which they used in dances and shamanistic seances, and even the very songs, which remind one slightly of their previous faith and rites—all have been abandoned, and abandoned without coercion.[88]

Veniaminov's observations seem to contradict an earlier passage where he describes masking in detail. In describing a village presentation (*igrushka*) or play meant to commemorate the lineage of the "nobles",

> [The nobles] came out onto the stage…they did not appear in order to dance but to demonstrate or rather to witness the deeds of their lineage. All the others coming on stage wore different masks and acted out anything they imagined [i.e. they improvised]; for instance, a battle, a victory, a peace, taking of animals…[89]

Veniaminov's journals reveal a wider transcultural context grounded by a discourse of ontology and interdependency in a challenging (and at times temperamental) ecology. The inconsistencies in Veniaminov's journal, however, should not mitigate the more profound (and certainly enduring) syncretism of Orthodoxy and indigenous spiritual practice. The state's

[88] Ibid., 229.
[89] Veniaminov, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District*, 201.

preoccupation with the classification of—and moral obligations to—the *Creole* offspring of Russian-Aleutian heritage should be seen in this context of blurred boundaries.

The circumstances of the Russian withdrawal in 1867 were varied and conflicted.[90] As the Russian flag was lowered and the US flag raised at the administrative headquarters of Novo Arkhangelsk, American spectators from the vessels in port numbered over a hundred, and perhaps sixty other civilians. Few Russian subjects attended the ceremony. Tlingit [natives] watched from the sea, from their canoes.[91]

The terms of the *Treaty Ceding Alaska to the United States of America*[92] allowed for the church to keep its lands and freedom of practice for the faithful. In addition, any Russian citizen had up to three years to return to Russia. If a citizen chose to remain, he/she would enjoy all the rights of US citizenship, unless a member of the "uncivilized tribes."[93] Lydia Black summarized the immediate aftermath of the changeover:

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[90]A good overview of the myriad of reasons for the inviobility of Russian America is offered in James R. Gibson, "Tsarist Russia in Colonial America: Critical Constraints", in Alan Wood (Ed.), *The History of Siberia: From Russian Conquest to Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1991), 92-116; and Raisa Makarova, "Toward a History of the Liquidation of the Russian American Company", in S. Frederick Starr (Ed.), *Russia's American Colony* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 63-71. Also see Andrei V. Grinev, "Why Russia Sold Alaska: The view From Russia", *Alaska History* 19 (Spring/Fall 2004), 1-22. For an analysis of the complex nature of the American reaction see Richard E. Welch, Jr., "American Public Opinion and the Purchase of Russian America", *American Slavic and East European Review* Vol. 17, no. 4 (Dec. 1958), 481-94; reprinted in *An Alaska Anthology*, 102-117. The American purchase also left many expecting further annexation into British Columbia, still a British colony. See Richard E. Neunherz, " 'Hemmed In': Reactions in British Columbia to the Purchase of Russian America", in *An Alaska Anthology*, 118-134.

[91] Black, *Russians in Alaska*, 286-287.

[92] Dmytryshyn, Crownhart-Vaughan & Vaughan, *To Siberia and Russian America,* 544-548.

[93] Ibid., 547.

> Within three years, few of Russia's subjects not native to the land would remain; many of those who remained would be dispossessed. The proud Creoles would become the contemptible half-breeds. The Natives would become wards of the state and would not gain their civil rights as citizens of the United States until the twentieth century. [94]

The fate of indigenous Alaskans would become part of the larger narrative of twentieth century dispossession, resistance and, for some, reconciliation.

The majority of Russia's nineteenth century colonial possessions were lands geographically congruous to the centre, but testament to the immensity, not to mention complexity and fluidity, of the empire was its overseas element in the Western hemisphere. Through secular and religious institutions, Russian-indigenous relations, in general, and with the Aleutian people, in particular, were characterized by a syncretism of Orthodoxy and panentheistic spirituality which challenged any attempt by the centre to "Russify" or "Christianize" the local inhabitants. The creole offspring of Russian-Indigenous parentage and transcultural nature of religious practice demonstrate that if Russia 'discovered' America, the reverse is also true.

[94] Black, *Russians in Alaska,* 287.