

Specificity of Vertical Social Mobility by the Creole Population of Russian America

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Social mobility means capability of a person or a social group to change within the structure of society, moving from one social level into another, or within the limits of the same level. If such mobility occurs on the same level from one layer (strata) or a social commonality into another, then it is a horizontal mobility (for example, transfer of a worker from one factory to another). If transfer occurs from a lower level to a higher level and vice versa, then it is a vertical mobility (when a worker promoted to be a foreman). Last version of mobility is caused and supervised by various institutions of society such as family, school, church, government, and by various professional, economic, political and other organizations and institutions. In Russian America the most important social institution that provided horizontal and vertical mobility of people was a monopolizing semi-governmental the Russian-American Company (RAC) that controlled all of the Russian possessions in the "New World" from 1799 up to the time of its sale to the USA in 1867.

Almost simultaneously with establishment of the RAC the formation of Creoles as an independent social group has begun. In Russian America offsprings from mixed relationships and marriages between the native women of Alaska and the empire newcomers (Russians, Finns, Yakuts, etc.) were called "Creoles". Besides the Russian-American Company some other social institutions had their influence to the social mobility of Creoles. First of all, that was marriage and family institution, where father's social status played major role. However, at the same time social and ethnic origin of a Creole's mother was not so important. It did not really matter if she was an Aleut, Eskimo, Indian or Creole. It was much more essential whether a Creole was born in a legal marriage, or out of wedlock. In the latter case the child's destiny practically completely depended from the RAC. Besides that, the company supervised one more social institution of a colonial society: education, which directly influenced social mobility of Creoles. Almost all of them passed elementary school training paid by the RAC at the colonial schools, and some of them were even sent for continuation of study to Russia (that was decided based on the merits of their parents before the company and based on personal abilities of a person). The church in Russian America also was subordinated to the interests of the RAC and did not play a role of an independent institution, although some Creoles, who have selected for themselves life in spiritual service, used it as some kind of a "social lift" in vertical mobility. The government rendered basically an indirect influence on social mobility of Creoles, operating mainly via RAC, only sometimes directly changing status of some people (for example by authorizing acceptance of

young Creoles into the educational facilities of St. Petersburg, promoting in ranks some of the naval officers, awarding with medals an outstanding employees of the RAC, etc.). In addition, the government legislatively made out the rights and duties of Creoles as a specific social group of a colonial society ("Rules" RAC 1821, *Statutes of the company 1844. Decisions of the State Council of the Empire in 1865 and 1866*) regulating by the related documents possible opportunities of their status growth. Besides various social institutions an essential role during the vertical mobility of Creoles had also played by non-institutional aspects: personal qualities of a specific individual, favorable/adverse coincidence of circumstances and an attitude of the colonial leaders towards Creoles as a whole, or towards individual representatives of this social group, i.e., personal, casual and subjective factors.

Vertical social mobility has two basic types: ascending and descending, when a person or social group either raises their social status or on the contrary moves to a lower step of a social hierarchy. In turn, ascending mobility can be of three basic types:

- 1) Professional (improvement of professional skills),
- 2) Economic (growth of prosperity, enrichment),
- 3) Administrative-political (transition to a higher level of authority).

Let's review all these types on example of Creoles. However, we shall make a reservation at once in relation to gender. This issue was related exclusively to men, as women in the Russian Empire as a rule were not considered to be an independent subject of social relations and usually entirely depended on their men: father, husband or other male-figure relative. Creole women in Russian America carried out mostly roles of housewives. Only some of them were employed by the RAC as midwives, cooks, care-takers at schools for girls, etc. with low salary and low social status. Creole woman had only one way to raise her status, by marrying to a naval officer or to a RAC official. Therefore, marriage was probably the only one social institution that could provide to a woman an ascending mobility in Russian colonies.

As to Creole men growth of their skills, improvement of their economic conditions and promotion to more responsible positions entirely depended on the will of the Russian-American Company. The company was interested in Creoles as professional workers because on one hand there was a lack of workers in the colonies, and on the other, the company had aspired to reduce costs on transportation from the Metropolia¹ and back of labor and experts. Therefore, from the very beginning of the activity the management of the RAC tried to recruit Creoles not only as simple workers and sailors, but also to train some of them in crafts, accounting, navigation, etc. Though, the number of professions in the colonies was limited due to their sizes and specificity of the economy that was based on fur craft and trade. However, Creoles practically were not engaged in actual fur craft, as that was the function of the dependent from the RAC natives: Aleuts, Eskimos, Alutiiqs and Indian Den'ina (part of furs Russians also received through a

nonequivalent exchange with the representatives of independent tribes - Indians Tlingit, northern Eskimos and inland Indians Athabascans). Creoles were used in the same fields of activities as Russians whom they would eventually replace, according to the RAC directors' ideas.

Now we shall analyze vertical mobility of the Creole population of Russian America by using social statistics. For this purpose we will use the directory that we prepared by using mainly the archival documents: "Who is who in the history of Russian America"¹. By the method of a content-analysis 650 Creoles were identified whose origin does not cause great doubts. Of this number more than half (330) worked as handymen and sailors²; it is possible to place to the same category all Creoles-interpreters (12 persons) served at various RAC trading stations in Alaska. Their vertical professional mobility was practically equal to zero. The remained part of Creoles had some other professions and qualifications, and they took some various positions in social hierarchy of colonial society. Nevertheless, at times it is not easy to define place of a certain person in a specific social-professional group. For example, Creole Ilya Petrovich Chechenev after training in St. Petersburg in shipbuilding returned to Russian America in 1832 where he served in the colonial capital Novo-Arkhangelsk in different capacities. At first he was an assistant to the shipbuilder Creole O.E. Netsvetov, then from 1839 he was working as a salesman in trade with Tlingits, then he worked as a bookkeeper from 1847, and then in 1860's he was working as an assistant of bookkeeper at the RAC office in Novo-Arkhangelsk.

Usually professional careers of Creoles if they did not receive special education in St. Petersburg began with the lowest positions. For example, a pupil of a brass-works master in due course would become an apprentice and eventually could reach a rank of master. Similarly a Creole assigned by the company to a maritime business for years would be going to voyages on the RAC's ships as a pupil of navigation (ship's boy), then he would become a sailor, then he could be promoted into a boatswain or a chief mate, and sometimes a skipper. For example Creole Feodor Fedorovich Stepanov having begun his career in the middle of 1810's as a pupil of navigation already in 1826 - 1832 was the commander of the ships "Unalaska" and "Bobr" ("Beaver"). Perhaps the maritime field was giving Creoles maximal chances of professional promotion: by the end of existence of Russian America (1840's – 1860's) they have formed an

¹ Grinev A.V. "Who is who in the history of Russian America." *Encyclopedic dictionary-directory*. Ed. Academician N.N. Bolkhovitinova, 2009. Correct: Grinev A.V. Kto est' kto v istorii Russkoi Ameriki [Who is who in the history of Russian America]. *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'-spravochnik* [Encyclopedic dictionary-directory]. Pod red. akademika N. N. Bolkhovitinova [Ed. Academician N.N. Bolkhovitinov]. Moscow, 2009. By analogy note N 2: Otchet Rossiisko-Amerikanskoi kompanii Glavnogo pravleniya za odin god, s 1 yanvarya 1863 goda [Report of the Russian-American Company of the Main board for one year, from January 1st, 1863]. St. Petersburg, 1865: 27-32; Fedorova S.G. Etnicheskie protsessy v Russkoi Amerike [Ethnic processes in Russian America]. In: *Natsional'nye protsessy v SSHA* [National processes in the USA], Moscow, 1973: 169

² In reality there were much more of these individuals, but in documents almost all creoles had Russian names and surnames, therefore, not always they could be precisely identified, especially if they did not serve on significant positions.

appreciable share among navigators, chief mates and skippers of the colonial flotilla of the RAC, making from 1/3 and up to 1/2 from the general number of civil seafarers³. That was not a coincidence that the highest statuses reached by the Alaska Creoles belonged to seamen: Alexander Filippovich Kashevarov, Major General of the Corps of Naval Navigators (CNN) and Nikolai Christoforovich Benzeman, Lieutenant Colonel of the CNN. Some Creole navigators successfully supervised expeditions organized by the RAC on a dry land for exploring Alaska, and sometimes they were appointed to be chiefs of redoubts (fortified trading posts) and small, unfortified trading posts, as for example Andrey Kondratievich Glazunov, Peter Fedorovich Kolmakov and Peter Vasilievich Malakhov. At sea Creoles often served as navigators and chief mates. However, Creole captains were leading mostly only small vessels of the colonial flotilla. All the large RAC ships were controlled by the Navy officers and skilled civil skippers from Finland. There was not one Creole who had led a round-the-world expedition to St. Petersburg or back. All of them served exclusively in the colonies.

In other professional circles the representation of Creoles was various. Amongst them were registered a couple of dozen penmen (writers-clerks) of the 1st and 2nd categories, and approximately as many salesmen and bookkeepers, and some of them were occasionally appointed to a higher positions as, for example, Nikolai Ilyich Klimovskiy. Since October 1825 through 1830 he served as the secretary of the Senior Governor of the colonies P.E. Chistyakov in the city of Novo-Arkhangelsk. However, hardly any other Creole was able to make really brilliant professional career as Grigory Klimentievich Terentyev did. Already from 1805 he was employed by the RAC, worked at the office in Novo-Arkhangelsk and in 1818 had travelled to St. Petersburg for presenting a report to the Main Board (MB) of the company about the financial accounts of the office. After returning, he served in the colony on high positions and for his diligent work he was awarded in the beginning of 1830's with a silver medal with an inscription "For Efficacy" on the Vladimir ribbon. From 1838 Terentyev worked as the deputy chief of the company's office in Novo-Arkhangelsk, and in 1841-1845 he served as the chief of the RAC office in Atkha. Thus, he became a unique Alaska Creole who was able to reach the position of chief of a colonial district, i.e. of an extensive American area possessed by Russia.

Somewhat limited was an ascending mobility amongst the Creoles who have selected their careers in the field of "spiritual service". In overwhelming majority of cases they held the lowest positions in church hierarchy of the colonies - ushers, sextons, deacons. Only five Creoles have received a position of priest: Yakov Egorovich Netsvetov (1829), Lavrenty Semenovich Salomatov (1844), Innokenty Kasianovich Shayashnikov (1848), Peter Filippovich Kashevarov (1850) and Vasiliy Mikhailovich Shabalin (1864). At the same time none of the Creoles had ever reached a position of bishop or dean of the Novo-Arkhangelsk Cathedral.

³ *Report of the Russian-American Company of the Main board for one year, from January 1st, 1863.* St. Petersburg, 1865: 27-32; Fedorova S.G. "Ethnic processes in Russian America." *National processes in the USA*, 1973: 169.

For Creoles situation in the area of handicraft industry was even less favorable. Even though since 1810 and up to 1867 a few dozens of masters Creoles worked in colonies (smiths, mechanics, ship masters, carpenters, etc.), we can name only two engineers Creoles: Peter Petrovich Andreev and Anton Filippovich Kashevarov. One of them eventually had retrained for a new profession as a teacher of Russian language and arithmetic. Only one Creole teacher received his training in St. Petersburg, where he took special course on Lancaster system of education: Osip Larionov. He worked on Kodiak Island from 1825 through 1840's. Other, rather few in number, teachers Creoles were either graduates of local schools with a low level of general knowledge, or clergymen. However, the least successful was an ascending mobility of Creoles in medicine. Although, an overwhelming part of medical personnel in colonies consisted of doctor's pupils and medical assistants from Creoles, but none of the Creoles had a doctor's diploma. All of the doctors were men from Metropolia.

Thus, if to analyze ascending professional mobility of Creoles as a whole, it shows certain limitation parallel to the tendency of gradual growth on a quantitative scale. Consequently the overwhelming part of Creoles could not advance upwards in professional hierarchy further than to an average level. On the other hand, a quantitative growth of experts amongst persons of mixed origin was observed in colonies. It has been caused both by a general constant increase in Creole population and by the RAC Board's of Directors intentions (especially from 1840's) to replace significant number of their employees working in the colonies by Creoles. At the same time a number of factors constrained ascending professional mobility of Creoles. Many of them did not have sufficient capabilities and qualifications; they were lazy, abused alcohol, fallen ill, and died at young age due to poor health. Therefore, in various industries the best professionals were usually not the natives from colonies, but instead they were Russians, Finns and other foreign experts⁴. The unique area of professional activities, where vertical social mobility of Creoles has yielded some significant results, was service at sea.

The professional vertical mobility was indeed connected to an economic mobility as increase of a professional status in most cases entailed growth of prosperity, especially because the RAC always tried to provide a ruble incentive for a quality work. Nevertheless, an ascending economic mobility of Creoles had certain specificity. According to the RAC's policy documents, they were obliged to work off in the company for no less than 15 years if they were trained in the colonies, and no less than 10 years if they have received their education in Russia paid by the RAC. Only the latest category of Creoles after returning to a colony was able to earn quite decent salary, noticeably larger than the salary of simple Russian workers (350 rubles/year plus a food ration: 40 pounds of flour per month). Those who began service in the colonies from 16 years of age (that was an overwhelming part of Creoles) were hired as a rule to the lowest positions and for work they received only clothes and food. They were able to earn a regular salary usually only when they reached 20 years of age on a low scale: from 60 up to 120 rubles/year. Then their

⁴Sarafian W.L. *Russian-American Company Employee Policies and Practices, 1799 - 1867*. Ann Arbor, Michigan. University Microfilms Inc., 1971: 140-141.

salary was slowly rising during their employment in view of qualification and diligence up to 250-350 rubles/year⁵, and at times it happened even more towards 28 years of age when the term of their obligatory service for the company was completed. Raise to salary usually had master-handicraftsmen, office employees from Creoles, seafarers, medical assistants and other experts. Besides, assiduous workers could count on bonuses and on extra raises of wages. Nonetheless, still as a whole the economic status of a significant part of the Creole population was lower than of the Metropolia men, therefore it is reasonable to speak about the economic discrimination of the natives from colonies.

Creoles' debts to the RAC were hindering their improvement of economic conditions. Financial dependency of an overwhelming part of the Creole population as a matter of fact was practically "programmed" by their low salary at the initial stage of their professional career. In addition, there was Creoles' own lack of foresight and usual readiness of the RAC offices to give out credits to them for their further "enslavement", since debtors could not leave the company before paying off their loans. The problem of debts played overwhelmingly negative role on the psychological conditions of Creoles. It practically paralyzed their working enthusiasm and consequently constrained their economic and professional mobility, as it was noted in the report of the Senior Governor of Russian America Baron F.P. Wrangle to the Board of Directors of the RAC in 1832⁶. However, he had no success in his attempts to solve this problem by: increasing of minimal wages of Creoles up to 120 rubles, prohibiting the RAC offices to issue them new loans before their completion payments on the old ones and by requesting from the directors of the company to write off their debts. The management of the RAC in St. Petersburg refused to write off the debts of Creoles, having probably no desire to lose leverage of economic compulsion to work, and of financial dependency of the employees-Creoles.

Last type of vertical social mobility of Creoles is administrative political. It was definitely interrelated with the other two, but also possessed its own specificity. Prior to 1840's promotion of Creoles to administrative positions was more likely an exception rather than a rule, although there was a first case in 1802 of management by a Creole (Vasiliy Kochesov) of a small hunting party of the RAC employees. After that, prior to 1820's, only Creoles-navigators were present in the power hierarchy of colonies. The first attempt to promote a Creole as a managing director of one key trading station in 1824 when Afanasiy Ilyich Klimovskiy was appointed by the chief of Konstantinovskiy redoubt turned out to be not very successful. Already in the summer of 1825 the senior governor of colonies had to remove Klimovskiy from that position

⁵ Khlebnikov K.T. *Russkaya Amerika v "Zapiskakh" Kirila Khlebnikova: Novo-Arkhangel'sk* [Russian America in Notes of Kirill Khlebnikov: Novo-Arkhangelsk]. Sostavlenie, predisl. i comment. S. G. Fedorova [Composition, Preface, and Commentaries by S.G. Fedorova]. Moscow, 1985: C.63, 99.

⁶ National Archives and Record Administration, Records of the Russian-American Company. Record Group 261 (NARA. RG.261. RRAC), microfilm Roll 34: 171-172.

because of disobedience to him of the Russian promyshlenniks who lived there⁷. After that Creoles were appointed as chiefs of redoubts six more times, mostly for not very long term. Simeon Ivanovich Lukin had the most successful experience by supervising the Kolmakov redoubt in 1836-1855. The only one truly unique Creole who indeed was able to reach really high position in colonial administration was already mentioned above G.K. Terentyev. He supervised Atkha district in the first half of 1840's. On the other hand, beginning from this period many Creoles began to take positions at a local administrative level. They served as chiefs of artels, parties, small trading posts, islands' managers, foremen, total of about 50 persons. Creole Stepan Ivanovich Krukov had his special career. In April of 1840 he became the Senior Aleutian Toen (chief) of the western part of Unalaska district, and in 1849 he was appointed to the position of Senior Toen of the entire district, and he kept this position up to 1862. Somewhat successful careers had only about a dozen of Creoles as civil skippers and three of them as officers of the Corps of Naval Navigators. They were commanders on a various ships of colonial flotilla. However as a whole, as well as in case of professional and economic mobility, professional mobility shows the same trait: besides some rare exceptions the top level of ascending mobility of Creoles were average level statuses.

Alongside with ascending mobility of Creoles a descending social mobility took place as well. Its essence consisted in translation into lower positions and salaries, i.e. loss of the social status in one or another sphere. Descending mobility usually happened as a consequence of infringement of social norms, or of some orders of the colonial supervisors, workplace violations, etc. For example, F.P. von Wrangell ordered in 1832 to terminate skipper Creole F.F. Stepanov from his command of the entrusted vessels and to demote him to a position of chief-mate due to inappropriate behavior at work. During the passage from Novo-Arkhangelsk to Kodiak he was drinking alcohol and miraculously did not crash the ship entrusted to him⁸. Other example: according to the order № 280 of the Novo-Arkhangelsk office of the RAC from October 26th, 1833 Wrangle ordered to collect the shortage discovered in a rum store (warehouse) from the former manager Creole Alexei Ivanovich Repin, who was demoted from his position, and his salary was reduced to 350 rubles, from which the losses of the company had to be taken⁹. Similar negative mobility, according to the RAC documents, was not such an unusual occurrence, including amongst individuals of clergy. For example Creole Yemelyan Ivanovich Molchanov in 1847 became a sexton, and then promoted to be a deacon of the Novo-Arkhangelsk's cathedral, but his further church career was hindered by his inappropriate behavior and alcohol abuse.

Summarizing general indicators of vertical mobility it is possible to state with enough confidence that Creoles in general were behind the men of Metropolia who possessed a set of the highest achievable statuses in a colonial society. It is enough to tell that not one Creole was ever

⁷ Ibid. Roll 29: 236-237.

⁸ Ibid. Roll 34: 407-408.

⁹ Ibid. Roll35: 166.

promoted to a status of senior governor of the colonies or became his deputy. Therefore, hardly it is possible to agree with an opinion of some researchers that Creoles ostensibly possessed privileged positions in the Russian colonies in America¹⁰. Certainly parameters of their professional, economic, administrative mobility were closer to Russians than to natives, and moreover tended towards rapprochement with the parameters of Russians, nonetheless, it was still far enough on the scale of similarity. For example, among 15 chiefs of Ozerskiy redoubt during the period of 50 years (1817 - 1867) was only one Creole. Complete rapprochement of statuses of Creoles and men from Metropolia, on which in the beginning of 1860's some statesmen of Russian Empire insisted (governmental auditor S.A. Kostlivtsov, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich Romanov¹¹), was interrupted by the sale of Alaska to the USA in 1867.

TABLE

Of the Statuses of the Creole population of Russian America

Profession, status	Number of people	% from the whole number of people
Simple workers (total workers, unskilled workers)	230	35.2
Interpreters	12	1.8
Foremen, canoeists and port workers (chiefs of artels and parties)	11	1.7
Managers of singles (canoeists), deputy chiefs of redoubts	19	2.9
Chiefs of Creole settlements	2	0.3

¹⁰ Black L.T. *Russians in Alaska 1732-1867*. Fairbanks, Alaska, 2004: 218; Piterskaya E.C. "Creoles of Alaska in a view of intercultural interaction processes." *The Ethnographic review*. 2007, № 6: 102. The similar point of view was shared by the modern descendants of Creoles of Alaska (personal message to the author from Mr. Perry R. Eton on Jan. 26, 2010, St. Petersburg).

¹¹ Prilozheniya k dokladu Komiteta ob ustroistve russkikh amerikanskikh kolonii [Appendices to the Report of the Committee on the Establishment of the Russian American Colonies]. St. Petersburg, 1863: 42; Bolkhovitinov N.N. (compilation and author of the preamble). Velikii knyaz' Konstantin Nikolaevich o proekte novogo ustava Rossiisko-Amerikanskoi kompanii. 18 fevralya (2 marta) 1861 goda [Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich [Romanov K.N.] about the Project of the New Statutes of the Russian-American Company. February 18th (March, 2nd) 1861]. In: *Amerikanskii ezhegodnik 1991 [American Annual Journal, 1991]*. Moscow, 1992: 150.

Island managers	13	2
Redoubts managers	8	1
Toen of Aleutian settlements in Unalaska branch	1	0.15
Governor of the Atkha office	1	0.15
Sailors	101	15.5
Boatswains	15	2.3
Civil navigators and skippers	25	3.8
Officers of the Colonial Fleet Corps, Army	4	0.6
Craftsmen pupils and apprentices	12	1.8
Masters-handicraftsmen	56	8.6
Engineers	2	0.3
Office workers: penmen (writers-clerks) of 2 nd and 1 st category, correspondents, secretaries	21	3.2
Salesmen of 2 nd and 1 st category, directors of inventories (supply managers)	14	2.15
Pupils of bookkeepers, assistants of bookkeepers, bookkeepers	7	1
Teachers	4	0.6
Caretakers of the schools for girls	2	0.3
Clergy students	22	3,4

Ushers, psalm-readers, sextons,	24	3.7
Deacons, celibate deacons	13	2
Priests	5	0.8
Doctors' pupils	8	1.2
Midwives	6	0.9
Medical assistants	13	2
Director of the hospital for women	1	0.15
Total	652	100

¹ Metropolia (definition): in ancient Greece it is a government in possession of foreign colonies [translator's note].