neat plot, but he is as concerned as the novelist with ideas of memory and forgetting. The issue for him in his long, savage, and clear-eyed speech at the end of the book is the same as that for Spanish historians such as Gimeno and Espinosa. How do you remember the war while forgetting the dead of the war, the untold atrocities, the single shots? Changing the names of the streets, putting new heroes on pedestals means nothing to the ordinary dead, just as those who benefit from political change never want to know about them. "Nobody remembers them, you know?" he tells the narrator.

> Nobody. Nobody even remembers why they died, why they didn't have a wife and children and a sunny room; nobody remembers, least of all, those they fought for. There's no lousy street in any lousy town in any fucking country named after any of them, nor will there ever be. Understand? You understand, don't you? Oh, but I remember, I do remember, I remember them all, Lela and Joan and Gabi and Odena and Pipo and Brugada and Gudayol, I don't know why I do but I do, not a single day goes by that I don't think of them.

Miralles and finally the novelist come to see their names as sacred, or as close to sacred as anything can be, which may not, in Miralles's vision, be that close at all. It is part of the importance of Cercas's book for Spain now, and the world outside Spain too, that such issues have been so playfully and powerfully argued and dramatized. □

Russia: Unmanifest Destiny

Robert Cottrell

Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe
by Willard Sunderland.
Cornell University Press,
239 pp., $35.00

History, Memory, and Identity in Post-Soviet Estonia: The End of a Collective Farm
by Sigrid Rausing.
Oxford University Press,
176 pp., $98.00

The Siberian Curse: How Communist Planners Left Russia Out in the Cold
by Fiona Hill and
Clifford G. Gaddy.
Brookings Institution,
303 pp., $46.95; $18.95 (paper)

1.

Foreigners have tended to see Russia as a state with an excessive appetite for land, whereas Russians have tended to see themselves as a naturally restless people. It is a matter of national pride to Russians, even of national identity, that their borders stretch for thousands of miles in every direction, enclosing a space far larger than they can settle or order. Between the middle of the sixteenth century and the end of the seventeenth century Russia added territory equal in size to the Netherlands, on average, every year.[1] In the eighteenth century it continued to expand, pushing deeper into the southern "steppe"—the huge belt of largely treeless prairie running from the Volga region to the Black Sea—and partitioning Poland.

Western Europeans viewed Russia's growth as a sign of fearful vigor, especially once Russia had defeated Napoleon's armies in 1812. Some thought it only a matter of time before Russia overwhelmed all of Europe, much as the barbarians had done the ancient Roman Empire. The comparison was encouraged by the popularity of Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published in 1776–1788. The Western Europeans did not quite see the Russians as barbarians, but they did see enough of the East in them to make them think of Russia as straddling the very edge of civilization.

Richard Pipes has suggested two main reasons for Russia's seeming obsession with territorial gain. One has been the low productivity of Russian agriculture, meaning a constant search for new and better soil. The other has been the deep imprint supposedly left on Russia by the process of state formation in the fourteenth century, when the Muscovite princes established their power by defeating and annexing competing principalities. They and their successors, says Pipes, "instinctively identified sovereignty with the acquisition of territory."[2] To these factors we may venture to add a supplementary, if a rather self-evident, one. Russia took much of its land because the land was there for the taking, often ill-defended (save, notably, for parts of the Caucasus) and bordering on its existing domains.[3] This pattern is a large factor in the colonization of the southern steppe, which is the story told in Willard Sunderland's careful study *Taming the Wild Field*. The settlement of the steppe between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries came more as a matter of incremental opportunity than of foreign policy, once the key military victories were won over the Tatar (or Mongol) strongholds at Kazan and Astrakhan in the seventeenth century, and Crimea in the eighteenth. "There was no sense that the steppe, because it was a place filling with colonists, was itself a colony separated from the metropole. Instead, the prevailing view was that the steppe was simply Russian," writes Sunderland. There is an obvious parallel here with America's opening of the West, save that, for the Russians, the taking of the steppe is overshadowed in national mythology by the settling of Siberia—as if America, after taking the West, had set off to incorporate Canada up to the Arctic.

Fedor Aleksandrovich Vasilev: The Thaw, *1871*

State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

The special value of Sunderland's book lies in its emphasis on the texture of steppe life in the period of colonization, with the actions and policies of the central government taking second place. Sunderland has drawn on archives in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but also on those in the regional cities of the old steppe provinces, which were much less accessible to foreigners in Communist times. These additional sources, Sunderland says, have not provided "obvious documentary evidence that would lead to wholesale reinterpretations" of the period. But he comes away from his foraging in Orenburg and Ufa, Odessa and Simferopol, feeling that the effort has been essential to his book. He finds that

> working from the vantage point of the old steppe provinces as opposed to the imperial centers of Petersburg and Moscow, one perceives the empire differently. The center seems far away; the region looks more like a world unto itself. One can still follow the lines of high imperial policy emanating from the capital, but one also sees more clearly the diversities and complexities of regional life and the frequent disconnect between regional realities and metropolitan expectations.... Governors writing to St Petersburg...created generalizations and discarded vignettes, aimed for clarity and smoothed over contradiction.

The imperial Russian government emerges from these pages as a thin presence on the steppe itself, where chaos often reigns as old and new arrivals jostle for land. The distant bureaucrats in St. Petersburg seem at times to view the advance into virgin lands less as a national triumph, and more as an inconvenience to their established routines. Their endless decrees and instructions, their elaborate codes of permits and paperwork, are intended to "move colonists at the pace bureaucratic exactitude required," Sunderland notes. But "land hunger and simply hunger," he finds, "determined a different pace."

In the early years the government worried that if it spared too many peasants to settle the steppe, it would depopulate the interior and anger the landowners who wanted their serfs at home. Catherine the Great found one obvious partial solution. She invited foreigners to make up the numbers, and 100,000 came, one fifth of all the steppe settlers during her reign. She was encouraged by advisers such as Peter Simon Pallas, a German-born zoologist. "The Russian peasant is good only for [arable] farming," Pallas told her, whereas the Black Sea region demanded "orchard planting, viticulture, silk farming.... To realize these possibilities, we will need instead Asiatic colonists or hard-working emigrants from France, Germany or Italy." The advice was followed, and the Black Sea shores became a jollier and more cosmopolitan place. Odessa retains to this day, for all its post-Soviet fatigue, a blend of Mediterranean and Levantine charm.

But resentment of the cost of importing foreigners, coupled with anxiety over having too many of them in the country, encouraged Catherine's successors to close the door soon after 1800. By then Russia's new lands and crops were encouraging a demographic boom which made the foreigners much less needed. The population of Russia rose from fewer than 18 million in 1750 to 69 million in 1850, and would almost double again in the half-century that followed. The steppe swelled and prospered. By the late 1880s there were steamers running down the Volga, an opera house opening in Odessa as grand as that of Vienna, and Petersburgers wallowing in

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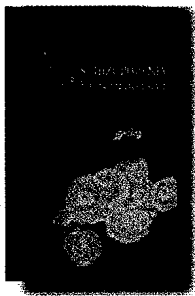
[1] Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (Scribner, 1974), p. 83.

[2] Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, pp. 118–119.

[3] Russian troops did encounter some fierce popular resistance, notably in the Caucasus region, which it suppressed brutally. Chechnya's fight against Russian rule has continued, through Soviet times, to this day, giving rise most recently to the hostage-taking and massacre in Beslan, North Ossetia.



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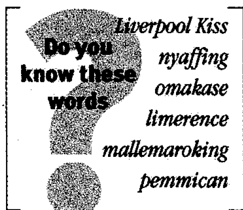

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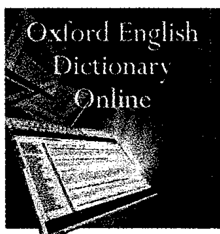

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mud spas at Astrakhan. To Russian historians of the nineteenth century who evaluated this congenial outcome, Sunderland writes, "it was not clear in every instance whether [the Russians] had colonized their own country or someone else's."

2.

That formulation, and variants upon it, have been something of a favorite among scholars of Russia. Sunderland cites the nineteenth-century historian Vasily Kliuchevsky, who famously asserted as "the basic fact of Russian history" that Russia was "a country that colonizes itself." This practice would not preclude colonizing other countries as well, but Russians saw the steppe as so handsome and so integral a part of their own country that they quickly persuaded themselves that it must always have been theirs. The eighteenth-century polymath Vasily Tatishchev—to whom we owe the idea of the Urals as the boundary between Europe and Asia—supplied a revised history of the steppe which fitted the Russian mood. He declared that the Slavs had resided "from time immemorial in the environs of the Black and Caspian Seas," before they had migrated westward, meaning that the steppe was the Russians' most ancient home. As for the touches of exoticism which the steppe had brought with it—such as the Buddhist Kalmyks who had arrived there from Xinjiang in 1608, and the Turkic Bashkirs noted by travelers down the Volga as far back as 922—they served as a pleasing reminder to Russians that their country was, if European by disposition, something much greater and stranger by geography.

The idea that any wrong might have been done to the tribes and peoples, of Mongol and other descent, that were colonized along with the steppe did not strike Russians forcefully at the time, nor has it done so since. After notions of anthropology took hold in the eighteenth century, and the loss of older cultures became a matter for scholarly regret, the Russian rulers tempered that regret with the belief that they were "natural" and "tolerant" in their treatment of conquered people, and certainly more so than their European counterparts. They also believed that they had been much more sinned against than sinning in their dealings down the centuries with the Tatars (as they called the Mongols). They chafed still, five hundred years later, at the Mongols' harassment of the Russian principalities in the thirteenth century, which they called the "Tatar yoke." They saw the Tatars, Sunderland observes, not as the Russians' victims, but as their "primordial victimizers."

Viewed from the other side, of course, colonization is rarely the enlightened process that it will appear later from the records of the colonizers. We cannot hope now to know how the steppe tribes evaluated their experience of the Russians. But an abundant literature is available, and growing rapidly, on the experiences of those who lived under the Russian Empire in its most recent incarnation, as the Soviet Union. Sigrid Rausing has made an intriguing addition to this literature with her *History, Memory, and Identity in Post-Soviet Estonia*, an anthropological study which takes as its subject a collective farm in the west of Estonia, on a peninsula inhabited before the Communist period by a Swedish-speaking minority. Most of the Swedish speakers fled before the Soviet occupation began in 1944, but the sentimental ties were strong enough to encourage a flow of Swedish aid and Swedish visitors to the peninsula after the occupation ended in 1991. Rausing bases her book on fieldwork done in 1993, and adds an epilogue written in 2002. Much of it is given over to a striking and subtle analysis of the interplay between Swedish and Estonian cultures; but of central interest here are the relations of the Estonians with the Russians (or Soviets).

Many of the views of the Russians which Rausing collects will be immediately recognizable, in their tone and preoccupation, to anyone who has visited the Baltic countries since. She finds that

> the idea of the Russians, or rather the idea of the working-class Russians, was a national obsession in Estonia. There was a constructed opposition between the two cultures, so that what the Estonians were, the Russians were not.... The dirt and disorder of the Russians were described as disturbing the order and cleanliness of the Estonians. Like the Turks, the Russians in Estonia were seen as only borderline Europeans.... They were described as pushy, cruel, rootless, dangerous, powerful, deceitful and sentimental. At the same time they were seen as intelligent, hospitable, and impulsive. They were regarded as followers of leaders, lacking proper individuality as well as thrift and forethought. They hovered in between the roles of colonizers and natives; happy-go-lucky and hospitable, lacking industry, application and predictability, drinking and letting themselves down.

The more surprising part of Rausing's book comes in her discussion of Soviet policy toward "nationalities" such as the Estonians, and the effects of it which she detects even in post-Soviet Estonia. She finds that the Estonians "became largely Soviet" during the Communist era, "retaining only fragments of the pre-war urban and intellectual culture, and receiving instead a large dose of objectified folk culture in which to articulate their Estonian identity." This reconfiguring of Estonian identity at Soviet hands, she argues, meant that

> the concept of the nation of Estonia as a community of Estonians, or, in other words, the predominantly ethnic conception of the nation, is connected with the Soviet system of citizenship, nationality, and ethnicity. Similarly, whilst the post-1991 construction of the new [Estonian] republic is...based on an ostensibly anti-Soviet discourse, it is also at least partially framed by fragments of the ideology, or world view, of Soviet socialism.

I call this argument "surprising," but I can imagine Estonians of my acquaintance receiving it with astonishment and anger. It is too cruel and dizzying a thought that the Soviet occupation might have stolen or destroyed even the Estonians' sense of their own nationhood, and concealed the theft by leaving a fake version of the Estonian nation in its place. I recoil from this conclusion, but I have to admit that it is seriously argued and thought-provoking. Against it, I would say that an ethnic conception of the nation among Estonians can be explained without any appeal to Soviet-era doctrines of ethnicity.

Bettmann/Corbis

White Russian troops in Siberia during the civil war, 1919

The Estonians (and even more so their neighbors, the Latvians) still see themselves as struggling for political power with the Russian speakers who arrived as settlers during Soviet times. The struggle is played out mainly through controversy over language, because language is the great marker distinguishing the communities, but it is an ethnic struggle nonetheless. An ethnic conception of the nation will predominate among Estonians until they believe that their struggle has been won and that a civic conception of their nation can safely take its place.

I suspect also that Rausing may have underestimated the access which Estonians enjoy to information about the pre-Communist period, and to memories of it, which they can use to reconnect with their pre-Communist forebears. Rausing believes it to be "an important fact about post-Soviet societies, that most of the pre-Soviet local history has been lost and forgotten." It may indeed have seemed that way in the Estonia of 1993, and it may be the case still in localities where whole populations were displaced or landscapes transformed. But, generally, by now it is the history of the Soviet period which is on the verge of being lost in the Baltic countries, while pre-Soviet history is being lovingly recalled.

Rausing, to her credit, spots something of this too: she speaks of an "assimilation...and forgetting, of the Soviet past" among the Swedish Estonians whom she is studying, a "temporary amnesia about the Soviet years."

She relates this to the Marxist belief that the consciousness of a people is a manifestation of its economic system. This proposition, if true, could indeed lead a people undergoing a sudden change in economic conditions, as the Estonians were doing in 1993, to undergo a comparable change in mentality and memory. Thus amnesia about the Soviet years, after the Soviet collapse, would, as Rausing says, make "perfect sense within the cultural logic of the Soviet system." This nicely turned conclusion is ironic, infuriating, and irrefutable.

Despite these minor differences with her, I can only admire Rausing's discussion of the ways in which the rulers of the Soviet Union went about constructing picturesque versions of the "nationalities" within their empire, first to provide an innocuous outlet for national feeling which might otherwise have nourished dissent, and second in order to prove to themselves and to the world what friendly and accommodating rulers they were. Recognized ethnic groups were urged to take pride and pleasure in the ritualized display of national costumes and national customs, much as normal countries might do in the performance of a national sports team. These displays were captured in coffee-table books which could be read, Rausing says, as "pictorial handbook[s] of how to be in the Soviet Union." Such books taught that the duty of national minorities was to be happy, diverse, and loyal. Russians depicted in such company were often wearing plain uniforms representing, in Rausing's words, "the essence of the Soviet Union itself." This "essence" included the victory over Hitler, which gave the Soviet Union a moral legitimacy strong enough to suppress Lenin's "nationality problem" for the next forty years.

3.

Whatever the nationality policies of the Soviet Union might have been at different times, they were not potent enough to survive the Soviet collapse. Estonia and its Baltic neighbors began the dismemberment of the Union with their declarations of independence in 1990–1991. Other Soviet republics followed suit, even Russia. The government in Moscow still ruled the biggest country in the world, but lost its claim to sovereignty over Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Belarus, and Ukraine.

Even the Russian Federation itself seemed in danger of falling apart under the chaotic rule of President Boris Yeltsin, a danger which receded when President Vladimir Putin restored some central authority. But the problems of maintaining adequate political control and of economic development across so vast a country have continued to tax the Kremlin. Siberia, with its huge inaccessible spaces and its forbidding subzero climate, poses a special set of problems. Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy offer original and provocative answers to them in their study *The Siberian Curse*. They argue that Russia should be concentrating on getting people out of Siberia, not wondering how to get them in. They blame communism's central planners for having filled the region arbitrarily with cities and factories, oblivious to the huge costs of supplying and maintaining them. They say that many of Siberia's big cities should be drastically shrunk or even "torn down," releasing their populations to work more productively elsewhere. Some labor would still be needed for Siberia's rich mineral resources, but crews could be shipped in and out, or housed temporarily in camps, as they are in other countries with extremely difficult working conditions.

Hill and Gaddy trace Siberia's history back through tsarist times when it attracted soldiers, settlers, traders, and adventurers on a modest scale, first for the fur trade, then with the building of the Trans-Siberian Railway in the 1890s. Convicts, exiled to Siberia since 1648, were another source of population. But Siberia's prospects changed dramatically with the Communist revolution. Its trackless wastes offered megalomaniac central planners the chance to make what Hill and Gaddy call "mistakes on a huge and unprecedented scale" as they attempted to prove the ingenuity and superiority of Soviet construction. "Where the tsars had placed forts, villages, and towns in Siberia, the Soviets built cities of over a million." The cold was seen not as a deterrent to building, but as a challenge. To retreat from it would smack of "bourgeois defeatism."

The great mineral wealth of Siberia—including oil and gas, nickel and gold—gave some justification for development. So too did the desire to bury defense plants deep in the middle of Russia where invaders would find them harder to seize or destroy. But by the time the planners had finished designing factories for the region big enough to supply products to the entire Soviet Union, and cities to house all the workers that these and future factories might ever need, and all the workers needed to make the cities work, fully one tenth of the Russian population was living in these frozen concrete follies.

In the very far north, where climate and terrain deterred (or killed) the most foolhardy of voluntary settlers, the prison system was used to supply the slaves that the central planners needed. When the Soviet government set up the network of labor camps known as the "gulag," in 1929, it specified that the camps would assist in colonizing "the least accessible and most difficult to develop" regions of the country. The Soviet prison camp population at that time was 23,000. By 1938 the gulags held two million people, half of them charged with nothing worse than theft. At its peak between 1949 and 1953, Hill and Gaddy write, the system accounted for between 15 and 18 percent of all Russian industrial output and industrial employment. Large camps were classified as "towns" to mask the role of prison labor in the economy.[4]

Hill and Gaddy frame the problems of Siberia more clearly, and offer policy recommendations which are more concrete and coherent, than any previous analyses of Siberia from Russian or foreign sources of which I am aware. They appear pessimistic, but they are merely unsentimental. They say, in effect, that there is no point in trying to make this Siberian economy work, when much of it should not exist in the first place. From an economic point of view they are surely right. But Russia is not a nation of economists. Its people have tended to view Siberia through a prism of what Hill and Gaddy call "mythologization and ideologization." They cite Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who called Siberia

> ...a reminder that Russia is the northeast of the planet, that our ocean is the Arctic, not the Indian. ...These boundless expanses, senselessly left stagnant and icily barren for four centuries, await our hands, our sacrifices, our zeal and our love.[5]

And even less romantic Russians—for example, those in government—have always viewed the populating of land as a necessary part of possessing it, which is not an unreasonable leap of logic. If a nation cannot be bothered to settle a territory, it is going to risk sending a strong signal to neighbors that it is not overly committed to hanging on to it. Russia worries chronically about sending such a signal to China.

With those thoughts in mind, one can scarcely conceive of the possibility that Russia will ever embark willingly upon a policy of systematically and substantially depopulating Siberia. It is much more likely to let it muddle along expensively in the hope that its fundamental attractions will somehow improve miraculously in the future—that global warming will come to the rescue, say, or a new population boom. The most that Russia may allow in the meantime, and through weakness rather than policy, will be a "natural" reduction in population as a result of the national demographic crisis and the modest mobility of labor. The situation is different for some very remote and thinly settled areas, where extreme poverty and limited resettlement programs have brought about drastic falls in already small populations. The Chukotka region, on the Bering Strait, lost two thirds of its residents between 1989 and 2002. But as Hill and Gaddy point out, the benefits of these local reductions are much reduced if the people in question move to cities elsewhere in Siberia that ought themselves to be depopulated.

Siberia may thus continue to weigh on Russia's economy. It will certainly continue to weigh on Russia's image of itself as a very big country which cannot, whatever its temporary weaknesses, be relegated to a smaller place in world affairs. It makes Russia a country of both East and West, capable in theory of shifting its energies and engagements in either direction. And its vacant expanses reinforce Russia's sense of being a country still full of potential, a country still under construction—which Russia is and always has been. That is the source of its extraordinary vitality. But at some point, one imagines, even Russia will have to decide what it wants to be when it is finished. □

[4]In their discussion of the Gulag, Hill and Gaddy note their debt to Anne Applebaum's much-praised recent study, *GULAG: A History* (Doubleday, 2003).

[5]From "Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations," in Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *From Under the Rubble*, translated by A.M. Brock and others (Little, Brown, 1975), p. 141.

PATRICK MCGRATH

In *The Designated Mourner*, there is a sense that the liberal intelligentsia may be impotent, irresponsible, hypothetical, but at the same time, when they go, everything of value goes with them.

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WALLACE SHAWN

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