

# Colonial Push and Pull:

## Toward a Typology of Circumpolar Relocations and Resettlements

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### Introduction

The threat of erosion and flooding, which many Alaskan and other northern communities are facing, serves as a reminder that small rural communities throughout the circumpolar North have a long history of being relocated. Unlike Newtok, Shishmaref, and Kivalina, these earlier relocations were typically not prompted by environmental causes but by paternalistic policies of colonial states. In the high North, these colonial policies often didn't start until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For many semi-nomadic groups in the circumpolar North, the first result of state intervention was often sedentarization, which made these groups easier to administer and brought them into the orbit of churches, schools, and trading posts.

With the possible exception of Fennoscandia, communities throughout the North experienced state-induced relocations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Schweitzer and Marino 2005). From the Soviet policies of *ukrupnenie* ("consolidation") to the relocation of Alaskan Aleuts to the Canadian High Arctic relocations to the Greenlandic relocation attempts as part of post-World War II modernization programs, southern states seemed to be engaged in constructing "high modernism" (Scott 1998), which often meant that village locations that were rooted in ecology and tradition had to be abandoned. In the following, we will focus on Alaska and the Chukchi Peninsula, Russian Federation, for comparative purposes. These two neighboring areas, only separated by Bering Strait, have been divided by radically different political systems during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Toward a Typology of Circumpolar Relocation Events

There is a long history of distinguishing between forced and voluntary migration (Fairchild 1925), which has also been used in the field of relocation and displacement studies (e.g., Schmidt-Soltau and Brockington 2007; Oliver-Smith 2009). At the same time, it has been understood that the situation on the ground and the actual decision processes underlying migration and relocation events cannot easily be reduced to this dichotomy (e.g., Turton 2003).

Once we recognize that many of the relocation events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century do not fit the dichotomy of "forced" versus "voluntary" relocations, an alternative classificatory device seems needed. Here, we suggest a continuum of constellations combining "push" and "pull" factors, in which state-sponsored infrastructure plays a critical role. Any continuum has an unlimited number of positions between its extremes. For convenience's sake, we are limiting our continuum to four points: "push without pull" – which marks the "forced" end of the continuum –, "push through state-induced infrastructure closure" – which involves the closure of infrastructure by state officials and agencies –, "pull through state-induced infrastructure availability" – which involves locating state-sponsored infrastructure elsewhere –, and "pull without push" – which brings us to the "voluntary" end of the continuum.

### Regional Data: Alaska

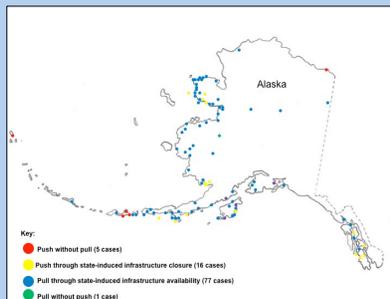
At this point, we have 103 documented cases of abandonment/closure in Alaska for the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (four of them were environmentally induced and are not further considered here). As you can see from map 1, we have more documented cases from the Seward Peninsula than from elsewhere in the state (there are more than 30 Inupiat villages among them). On the one hand, this reflects the researchers' bias, since our interest is focused on the Bering Strait region. On the other hand, the gold rush of 1898 and the influenza pandemic of 1918 were transformative (demographic) events, which led to high many incidents of village abandonment.

If we look at the categories just established, "push without pull" in Alaska is represented by 5 cases, all of which have to do with the military. During World War II, nine Aleutian communities were relocated to internment camps in response to the Japanese assault on Dutch Harbor and invasion of Kiska Island. After the war the US government neglected to restore four of these communities - Attu, Biorka, Kashega, Makushin - and their residents were forced to resettle in the surrounding communities of Akutan, Atka, Nikolski, and Unalaska. Another case concerned the Inupiat community Kaktovik, which was forcibly relocated on three separate occasions between 1947-1963 in order to make way for the construction and expansions of a Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line station.

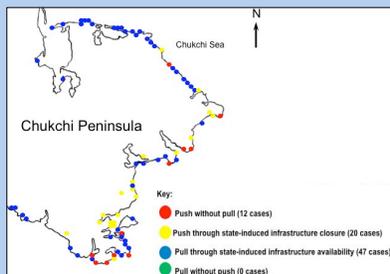
The category "push through state-induced infrastructure closure" is most prominently represented by King Island. Another similar but less well-known example is Mary's Igloo. Originally a Qawiarmiut settlement, it became a gold rush town in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sometime before 1917, the majority of the non-native population had moved away to the nearby town of Shelton. The native population was between 300-400 people at the time, but was subsequently decimated by the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918. A portion of the remaining population stayed in the area until 1952, although many families had chosen prior to this time to move to Teller, Nome, and Anchorage. Triggered by low population numbers, the Alaska Native school and post office were closed, and the remaining people relocated to either Teller or Nome. There has been some interest expressed in resettling the original settlement since the community's closure.

### Acknowledgments

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under the grant "Moved by the State: Perspectives on Relocation and Resettlement in the Circumpolar North" (Grant No. 0713896; PI Peter Schweitzer). This presentation would have been impossible without the assistance of Dr. Tobias Holzlehner and Elizabeth Mikow (both at the University of Alaska Fairbanks). The base maps were drawn by Holzlehner, who also provided the data for the Chukchi Peninsula. Mikow provided the data for Alaska. The image to the left depicts the closed community of Nuaimo, Chukchi Peninsula; the photo was taken by Tobias Holzlehner. The image to the right depicts Shishmaref in Alaska and was taken by Tony Weyouanna.



Map 1: Relocations in Alaska, 1800s to the Present



Map 2: Relocations on the Chukchi Peninsula, 1800s to the Present

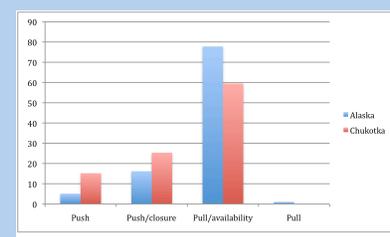


Chart 1: Comparison between Alaska and Chukotka regarding relocation categories (percent)

"Pull through state-induced infrastructure availability" account for more than three fourth of all documented Alaskan relocations. For example, Millitavik, a former Kingmiut settlement, which was hard hit by the influenza pandemic of 1918; the survivors eventually moved to Wales, where much more government-sponsored infrastructure was available. Finally, there is only one example of "pull without push," the move from Holikachuk to Grayling. This relocation of an Athabaskan community in 1962 was prompted by a number of factors, including travel difficulties due to low water, bad water for human consumption, lack of employment opportunities, high freight costs, the changing course of the Innok River, lack of firewood, and internal disputes. The community as a whole decided that a relocation of the community was the best option. They utilized the Alaska State Housing Authority program and most of the labor building homes and structures at the new location was provided by the people themselves.

### Regional Data: Chukchi Peninsula

At this point, we have 79 documented cases of communities closed or abandoned on the Chukchi Peninsula during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

There are twelve cases of "push without pull". The most infamous of these were the closure of Naukan and Chaplino (Ungazik) in 1958, which in the case of Naukan led to the establishment of a diasporic community, which maintains its separate identity until today. It is noteworthy that almost all of these twelve cases concerned Eskimo (Yupik and Inupiat) communities, rather than Chukchi villages. This might be an indication that Eskimos were viewed more suspiciously because of their proximity to the United States and their kinship bonds across Bering Strait.

It is not always easy to distinguish between "push through state-induced infrastructure closure" and "push through state-induced infrastructure availability" on the Chukchi Peninsula. Largely, this is an artifact of the limited historical knowledge we have about the particulars of these relocations, especially when they happened before World War II. Together, these two categories account for almost 85% of the Chukotkan cases. As can be seen from map 2, the majority of "pull ..." (blue) cases can be found on the north coast of the Chukchi Peninsula. This is ecological marginal zone, where "pull" often did the job of relocating (small) communities. The (yellow) "push ..." cases are clustered along the coast of Bering Strait, a highly productive zone where government relocation plans necessitated at least some "push".

Interestingly, we could not find a single incident of "pull without push," which was not triggered by state-induced infrastructure availability.

### Summary and Discussion

As you can see from chart 1, there are differences between Alaska and Chukotka, but they are not as significant as the diametrically opposed political systems would want one make believe. There are more Chukotkan cases on the push end of the continuum, while Alaska has higher percentages toward the pull end of the spectrum. Still, the patterns seem similar enough to interpret them in support of an overarching colonial mindset, which was only slightly modified by different political systems.

This becomes even more evident when we break down the 20<sup>th</sup> century into at least two periods, before World War II and during and after World War II. All of the "push without pull" cases on both sides of Bering Strait occurred during the second period. Actually, both categories on the "forced" end of the continuum (red and yellow) are predominantly phenomena of World War II and after. This indicates that war and cold war attitudes played a role in these relocations. At the same time, the 1950s and 1960s, when most of these "push" events happened, were the heydays of paternalist modernization programs throughout the North. Relocating small (mostly indigenous) communities to areas that made sense to government officials but not to local residents was a clear expression of such a colonial mind-set.

Interestingly, infrastructure has emerged as a determining factor in distinguishing various relocation events during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To be more specific, we have seen that the absence of infrastructure within a given community can serve as a powerful push to relocate, while the presence of these services elsewhere can serve as pull. Given that a number of environmentally induced relocations are lurking, we should use this as a reminder of how critical the availability of infrastructure for community viability is. The extent to which local input will prevail over bureaucratic decisions in that context will be the litmus test of having moved beyond colonial push and pull.

### References

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