

ADMINISTRATIVE RESETTLEMENT AND THE PURSUIT OF ECONOMY: THE CASE OF CHUKOTKA¹

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An anthropologist specializing in the Russian North surveys the recent implementation of a resettlement program for residents of the Chukchi Autonomous Okrug. As a joint World Bank and Russian Federal Government resettlement program commences, intended to resettle several thousand residents from the far northeast region to temperate zones of Russia, this study of a smaller but thus far unique experiment in rapid resettlement provides a relevant preview of participant experiences and problems in uptake and implementation. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in Chukotka and communities of former northerners now resettled in central Russia, this paper outlines the logistical and adaptational difficulties resettlers face, and explores the sources of resistance to resettlement and restructuring in northern communities. The author also addresses the risks to the sustainability of northern economies and indigenous communities posed by a policy of achieving cost economies in northern regions through rapid depopulation.

INTRODUCTION

Along with the extraction of resource wealth and the “enlightenment” of indigenous peoples, a key feature of Soviet mastery in the Far North was the creation of a large and permanent settler population. The Soviet-era migrants recruited for this task now constitute a population of millions, living in the wreckage of an economically and ideologically unsustainable project of northern development. Many present-day northerners migrated to the North to harvest the generous package of northern benefits, intending to later resume life in southern parts of the country. The “uncertain transition” that followed the Soviet collapse devastated northern living standards and sabotaged their plans. In the past decade, northern regions have witnessed a dramatic depopulation. As Soviet standards of transport, investment, and income failed, former settlers migrated back to the economic and cultural heartlands of their new titular republics to seek security in family networks and the emerging capitalist economies. Although programs initiated by Moscow and northern regions themselves attempted to facilitate out-migration by providing material assistance for resettlement out of the North, financing shortfalls were perennial. As a result, while many have now abandoned the North, most accomplished this entrepreneurially, using their own initiative and resources.

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Despite a decade of out-migration, the Russian North remains relatively densely populated by circumpolar standards, and the economic crisis has exposed the high subsidy cost to the state of maintaining supplies and services.² For this reason, federal authorities have repeatedly recommended a departure from haphazard, unsupported out-migration and the adoption of an ambitious planned and financed restructuring of the northern population, involving large-scale resettlement to achieve cost economies in the North.³ In 2003, The Russian Ministry of Trade and Development, with support from the World Bank, announced a project to resettle several thousand residents of the Far Northeast, living in the regions of Sakha, Kamchatka, Magadan, and Chukotka, to parts of central Russia.⁴ This program would eliminate financial obstacles to out-migration, enabling the departure of residents trapped by material circumstances from the most remote and highly subsidized northern regions to southern locations. These plans have met with some controversy among experts with experience and contacts in the North, who worry that indigenous peoples' interests will be neglected as state infrastructure is wound down, falling victim to short-sighted cost cutting measures. Despite the preparatory work conducted by the World Bank, there is concern that predicting the success and consequences of such radical resettlement is impossible without more study and piloting.

This paper attempts to address these anxieties by presenting new ethnographic findings based on a study of a smaller, but thus far unique, resettlement program financed in Russia's most remote northern region, the Chukchi Autonomous Okrug, or Chukotka (Fig. 1) by its governor Roman Abramovich over the years 2001–2003.⁵ This was the first program in post-Soviet Russia to offer a full resettlement package on a voluntary basis to all long-term residents, and therefore offers a preview of the larger programs on the verge of implementation. Elected in late 2000, Governor Abramovich launched a thorough modernization and investment program and invited the author, as a Western researcher, to witness the remarkable transformation of this formerly closed and inaccessible region. Demographers have been predicting a second wave of out-migration from the North, contingent either on a state-coordinated and funded resettlement program or a general improvement in prosperity, both of which would remove the material impediments to departure. This expectation rests on

²The Russian North comprises half the territory of the circumpolar North but contains over 75 percent of the circumpolar population. Russia's North is 2.5 times more densely populated than Alaska and 50 times more than Greenland and northern Canada. The population of the Russian North has declined roughly 8 percent since 1991, but in the Chukchi Autonomous Okrug, the focus of this chapter, the decline has been much greater (Heleniak, 1999; Walsh, 2003; interviews with administration officials, Anadyr', 2002).

³Goskomsever (the Russian State Committee for Northern Development) recommended that of 1400 small settlements in the North, 382 should be liquidated (see Heleniak, 1999).

⁴In the popular press (e.g., Walsh, 2003) as many as 600,000 residents were said to be targeted for relocation, but the actual figure anticipated in the first-stage location appears to be much smaller, on the order of 25,000. The World Bank has provided much of the policy impetus and demographic analysis for this program, and within a \$70 million project called Russia's Northern Resettlement, the Moscow representative office has funded a pilot program of resettlement and administrative restructuring in four northern cities. See Report No. PID8680, Project Name: Russian Federation-Northern Restructuring Pilot Project, www.worldbank.org/infoshop

⁵The author conducted field research in the Chukchi Autonomous Okrug between February and December 2002 and among former residents of Chukotka resettled to central Russia (Voronezh, Tula, Lipetsk, Smolensk, Moscow Oblast, Leningrad Oblast) in January and February 2003.



Fig. 1. General location map of Chukotka.

the assumption of “delayed demand for outmigration” persisting in the North, which is described in both Russian and Western accounts (Serkin, 1997; Sidorkina, 1997; Heleniak, 1999; Kontorovich, 2000). The findings of this study suggest that in Chukotka the moment of greatest demand may indeed have passed, as long-term residents’ attachments to their communities deepen—Abramovich’s resettlement program has in fact been under-subscribed. This study also brings ethnographic depth to demographer Tim Heleniak’s (1999, p. 189) observation that in making the decision to migrate, northerners conduct an “informal cost-benefit analysis” drawing on a range of material, psychological, and emotional factors. Chukotka’s resettlement program has failed to address the complex ways in which northerners are imbedded in family networks, which enable them to phase out-migration in a gradual and careful process, harvest the range of northern benefits to maximum effect, and maintain anchors in the North and central Russia simultaneously. Consequently, planners were surprised to find more program uptake among the younger and economically active age cohort in Chukotka than from the pensioner population, and they suspended the program for review in 2003. This paper also addresses how poor public perceptions of the regional administration’s sincerity have resulted from logistical failures in the management of large-scale resettlement from such a remote region and the tendency of imported planners to perceive locals as allocable “economic factors.”

Russia is experiencing an economic recovery and embarking on a national program of reform and rebuilding under President Putin. The moment has arrived for long-anticipated northern restructuring initiatives, and as the large-scale subsidized resettlement of the northern population commences, the ethnographic findings presented here may provide some tools to anticipate the inevitable messiness of moving from demographic theory to policies in action.

COLONIAL SETTLEMENT AND POST-SOVIET
OUT-MIGRATION IN CHUKOTKA

By historical standards in the Russian North, the settlement of Chukotka by non-indigenous migrants was rapid and concentrated. A census taken in 1897 showed that settlers comprised 0.2 percent of the population, dwarfed by the numbers of indigenous Chukchi and Yup'ik, while 80 years later in 1979 the population of 157,000 was 90 percent non-indigenous (Goskomstat SSSR, 1990; Forsyth, 1992; Znamenski, 1999). The peak period of settler in-migration stretched from 1955 to 1985. The older Slavic-descended population, usually referred to as *chuvantsy* and living on the middle reaches of the Anadyr' River, is very small in comparison with analogous creole populations in other, earlier-settled parts of the North, for example the *sibiryaki* and *silduki* of the Lena and Yenesei basins (Anderson, 2000). A study of settler populations in the Russian North conducted in 1998 found that in Chukotka, less than a quarter of the population had been born in the region, the lowest figure for any part of the North (see Heleniak, 1999). In evaluating the propensity of Chukotka's settler population to participate in resettlement programs, therefore, it should be noted that migration has already been a personal experience for most residents and that most have concrete attachments of some kind to homelands outside the North.

The Soviet state considered the industrial exploitation of northern resource wealth a key means of maintaining economic autarky. This policy combined with the investment-bias and production-growth orientation of the planned economy (Kornai, 1992) to make possible the massively expensive project of northern industrialization. Economic cost-benefit analyses were difficult to conduct in a planned economy, and the true value of labor, transport, and infrastructure in the Far North was impossible to calculate. High levels of production (rather than profitability), particularly of strategic products like gold and tin, were the measure of Chukotka's economic success, and an industrial labor force was critical for the task. The mostly non-indigenous population of the late Soviet era was an outcome of post-Stalin policies that incentivized life in the North in an effort to attract voluntary labor.⁶ From the late 1950s, an evolving package of special benefits was offered to northern recruits, which included guaranteed accommodation, additional wages and bonuses, longer holidays, and early retirement on a specially supplemented northern pension; it was also widely known that deficits of food and essential household items were much milder in far northern regions than in the country as a whole.⁷ Migrants typically viewed their residency in the North as short-term, and most came on three-year contracts; a northern sojourn was a means of saving money, accessing deficit goods (cars, furniture, and even a

⁶Official population statistics do not include the very large military presence in Soviet-era Chukotka, a key frontline territory in the Cold War. Informal estimates obtained from long-term residents suggest there were likely over 50,000 soldiers stationed in Chukotka, which takes the peak Soviet population to over 200,000.

⁷Western analysts have typically identified the wage increment and cash bonuses as the primary benefit drawing Soviet labor to the North (Armstrong, 1967; Armstrong et al., 1978; Heleniak, 1999). But in a demonetized deficit economy, money (income levels) is less important than access to restricted supply, which was governed by a state-controlled hierarchy of privilege (Kornai, 1992; Ledeneva, 1998; Fitzpatrick, 2000; Osokina, 2001). My ethnographic findings suggest that accommodation and superior northern supply were more important incentives than high pay, which in fact was very difficult to spend in Soviet shortage conditions.

flat), and perhaps experiencing an exotically different lifestyle, but most planned to return to temperate zones within a few years.

While the state itself was unable to track the degree to which investing in the industrialization of remote Chukotka and funding this exceptional package of privileges was beneficial to the larger Soviet economy, settlers themselves performed cost-benefit analyses of northern living on a personal level. Many concluded that, although Chukotka's climate and remoteness exacted a toll, northern benefits and the closeness of community in the North were too valuable to relinquish, and they consequently made their lives there. However, apart from a small minority of settlers who intermarried with indigenous locals or otherwise became deeply involved with the rooted indigenous lifestyle, settlers typically planned to stay in the region no longer than the point of retirement. It was essential that during their period working in the North, they accumulated the resources to ensure a comfortable old age in temperate central Russia. In particular, settlers endeavored to secure flats outside the North, a complex undertaking in the Soviet deficit economy made slightly easier by the administrative privileges of "northern status." Northern residents felt themselves to be participants in a sort of moral economy, in which the sacrifices they made as occupants of the country's extreme northern outpost were linked over time with a set of special entitlements, or by living in worse circumstances than the average Soviet in their working lives, they should live better than the average in retirement (which began for some northern workers as early as the age of 40).

The elaborate system of privileges was maintained by a state-ideological system bankrupt by 1990, and the contract it maintained with the northern settler, implicit in the moral economy, was annulled. The conditions of life for residents of Chukotka have altered beyond recognition over the decade of post-Soviet collapse, and the package of northern benefits, including subsidized transport and supply, have been seriously eroded. The region's extreme remoteness has made it particularly difficult to maintain infrastructure and services, as price liberalization has revealed the true cost of transport. But the crisis was exacerbated by Chukotka's secession in 1992 from its former parent region—Magadan Oblast—followed by the devolution of fiscal responsibilities to the regions, which placed responsibility for funding labor benefits with the local Anadyr' administration. In 1999, Chukotka was rated as the most socio-economically distressed of the Russian Federation's 89 regions after war-torn Chechnya (*RFE News*, January 2001). This partly explains why Chukotka has experienced the highest rate of out-migration in the North. Factoring together the effect of demilitarization and civilian departures, the civilian population dropped from 169,000 in 1989 to 54,000 by 2002, a fall of 68 percent (Goskomstat, 2001). Out-migration peaked between 1992 and 1995, as in the Russian North as a whole.

Settlers leaving the North in these years rarely enjoyed the benefit of state-mandated resettlement programs, whose promises were seldom underwritten by sufficient public financing. In Chukotka, although the okrug administration funded a trickle of resettlement and various large enterprises such as the Iultin tin-mining complex and the regional geological survey managed to move some employees to central Russia as they shut down, the large majority departed using their own resources, a pattern confirmed more generally for the Russian North in recent surveys (Heleniak, 1999). In the late Soviet period, most northern residents held large savings reflecting their high incomes and their future plans for life outside the North, and so hyperinflation first in

1992 (price liberalization) and then in 1998 (national default) particularly devastated northerners. For most, privatized local flats became their sole major asset, but mass out-migration subsequently depressed the market for property. In the late 1990s, two-room flats in Anadyr', the least economically depressed community in Chukotka, were selling for the price of one-way airfare to Moscow. Leaving the North was easiest for recent migrants, with close family and friendship relationships in their destination regions, for highly-trained specialists, whose skills were most transportable, and for the young, who were psychologically and physically better able to adapt to the fickle conditions of the labor market in mainstream post-Soviet life. It was these cohorts that comprised the big out-migration bulge in 1992–1995, a situation often likened in my interviews to the fittest rats abandoning a sinking ship before the escape hatches were flooded.

PROBLEMS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF ABRAMOVICH'S MODERNIZATION AND RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM

In December 2000, Russia's second-richest "oligarch," Roman Abramovich, became Chukotka's governor and initiated an ambitious program of modernisation. The movement of a young, rich businessman from Moscow into high political office in the Russian periphery follows a remarkable pattern of landslide victories for resource magnates, also witnessed since 2000 in Taimyr and Evenkia. In all three cases, the character of reforms has, as David Anderson has observed in Evenkia, "merged legislative with executive power and blurred the face of public administration with that of corporate governance" (Anderson, 2000, p. 106). Abramovich has spent over \$200 million a year since 2001 paying wages and arrears, building new infrastructure, and funding a raft of social initiatives, including the restoration of the Soviet-era system of reindeer-herding and sea-mammal hunting state farms (*sovkhozy*) in native villages.⁸ Chukotka is almost wholly reliant on state subsidies and is, despite its small population, a serious drain on the federal treasury. The program of economic modernization is therefore oriented toward achieving cost savings, by closing a series of "unpromising settlements," and by resettling thousands of non-indigenous residents to central regions of Russia, or, in the candid words of one administration official, ridding Chukotka of its "human ballast."⁹

According to one senior economic planner in the okrug administration, "a principal task for the Economics Department is to remove inefficiencies in the northern economy, cut costs, and make the money that is available to support life in the Far North go further. Giving people who wish to leave Chukotka the opportunity to do so is the best way to cut costs, because all northern residents here represent a financial loss to the country" (interview, Anadyr', November 2002). Two federal resettlement programs were already in existence before 2001, one providing northerners with lump

⁸Formerly *sovkhov* (state farm), the new local terminology is *gosudarstvennoye unitarnoye predpriyatiye* (state consolidated enterprise).

⁹There are opposing viewpoints on the utility of the Far East's depopulation for Russian state interests. Whereas the World Bank's Moscow representatives and Goskomsever support the idea of a selective depopulation of remote areas, the President's Representative for the Far East Region, Konstantin Pulikovskiy, visited Chukotka in spring 2002 and stated that out-migration did not serve Russia's security needs (press conference, Anadyr', May 28, 2002).

sum compensation according to the length of stay in the northern zone and one that assigns funds for building resettlement accommodation in selected destinations. Neither program was properly funded or efficiently administered. So the Abramovich administration launched a new resettlement program in mid-2001, built upon the pre-existing federal selection criteria but designed to quickly resettle sufficiently large numbers, to noticeably decrease subsidy costs, and create a smaller but more “economically active” population. Resettlement was also explicitly linked to a program of settlement closures and sub-okrug regional amalgamations, intended to create a more compact population, based in fewer locations that are easier to supply, with a more concentrated system of regional infrastructure (hospitals, schools, energy generation, airports).¹⁰

While roughly 75,000 people lived in Chukotka at the point of Abramovich’s election victory, officials in his administration consistently proposed an ideal target population of 30,000–35,000. This figure was based on a comparison of the local cost of living, or the cost to the state of supporting a northern resident, with the present and anticipated levels of federal subsidy and local tax take. The administration also estimated that the cost of resettlement within the program would be recouped by subsidy cost savings within five years. These considerations exclude the possibility of future revenues from local economic activity, for example, from tourism or oil and gas exploration, and it appeared to the author that the economic planning department was somewhat preoccupied with achieving savings at the expense of fostering economic growth. The large team of economists hired by Abramovich in Moscow and Nizhniy Novgorod to tackle Chukotka’s economic crisis viewed the region’s prospects with marked scepticism and maintained (in 2002) that not a single local natural resource (tin, tungsten, gold, silver, uranium, copper, coal, oil, gas and others) could be profitably exploited and exported at current world prices. That the following year a Canadian mining company invested US\$30 million in a silver and gold mine in west-central Chukotka suggests that this judgment, and by extension the aggressive emphasis on cost economies and resettlement, may be premature.

The regional administration formed a private company, Regionstroy, to manage its resettlement program, and in the first year of operation (2001) roughly 1,800 residents were resettled.¹¹ In 2002, another 1,800 departed Chukotka. Most participants were non-indigenous residents living in industrial Soviet-built towns, some of which had effectively been without services such as power and heating since the 1990s and several of which were in the process of official liquidation. Many resettlers, however, also came from towns designated as viable by the administration, as well as from the okrug capital Anadyr’. The program was ostensibly conceived to resettle those no longer contributing to the okrug economy, and so in addition to people trapped in “un-promising” industrial settlements whose enterprises had failed, pensioners and

¹⁰This concentration of services and population echoes the Soviet-era campaign of village amalgamation (*ukrupneniye*) and the “rationalization” of agricultural production, which resulted in a wave of village closures. The Soviet program sought to make the native population less costly to support, while the white settlement and industrialization of Chukotka forged ahead—the Abramovich modernization seeks to achieve the opposite.

¹¹“Regionstroy” could translate as “Regionbuild,” reminiscent of the gulag-era authority with administrative responsibility for the entire Far Northeast, called Dalstroy. But Regionstroy is in fact tasked with dismantling Chukotka’s settlements and removing their population.

invalids were also targeted for resettlement. Recognizing that the lack of assured accommodation in southern Russian destinations has until now been the greatest obstacle to out-migration, Regionstroy has either acquired or built flats in a series of “colonies” in Voronezh, Tula, Lipetsk, Omsk, and other locations. Program participants turn their Chukotkan flats over to municipal administrations and receive equivalent ones in their new communities. Regionstroy pays for transport, in some cases chartering direct flights from Chukotkan settlements to destination cities, supplies containerised transport of personal effects, and operates a support service at either end for processing documentation. This latter assistance is particularly important in Russia, where citizens are “registered” (*propisan*) in their community of residence in order to qualify for pensions, labor rights, and utility and phone service. Moving requires a major effort of paperwork excavation, notarizing records, and motivating local officials to act on one’s behalf.

Regionstroy also launched an aggressive promotion campaign to fulfil administration targets quickly by encouraging locals to accept resettlement, and beginning in 2001, advertisements saturated regional TV and radio programming and filled the local newspaper. Once the campaign was under way, any local could recite the publicity mantra (translated from the Russian below) from memory:

They leave because they’ve given Chukotka all they could!

They leave for the sake of their children!

They leave because a new life begins there!

Others await them there!

The Resettlement Program—choose your region!

Life begins there!

No budget figures are available for Chukotka’s resettlement program, which has been financed with “extra-budgetary funds” and implemented by a private company, but the annual figure is certainly in the tens of millions of dollars.¹² In relative terms, Abramovich’s initiative is ambitious: in 2001, federal funding in Chukotka was sufficient to resettle only 75 individuals, compared with the 1,800 individuals resettled by Regionstroy.

It was inevitable that putting Abramovich’s resettlement plans into action within a year of his election as governor would lead to some unexpected difficulties and disappointments, particularly given the fact that a company with no track record in managing this kind of task was contracted and full-scale resettlement commenced without the benefit of exploratory pilot work. Governor Abramovich has publicly stated that he will serve only a single four-year term, and so the modernization program he has launched in Chukotka is colored with a sense of urgency. Although most program participants expressed gratitude to Abramovich personally for his generosity, those now scattered across temperate zones of Russia blamed Regionstroy for a series of inadequacies.

¹²In attempting to unravel okrug budget figures, one encounters unspecified “extra-budgetary funds” beside many line items. This refers to funds originating from Roman Abramovich’s corporate structures, which in 2002 accounted for as much as three quarters of total government spending. Regionstroy refused repeated requests for information on the costs of resettlement services and size of its budget.

The most serious problems participants faced in their new homes arose from incomplete paperwork. Regionstroy undertook to process personal documents for those it resettled, after reaching agreements in destination regions with local authorities that participants would be granted full pension and labor rights. But all resettled Chukotkans whom I contacted reported long delays before they received their registration papers (*propiska*), some waiting as long as six months, a period over which they were not able to collect pensions, establish ownership of their new flats, arrange phone lines and post boxes, apply for local jobs, and in several cases seek medical care. Partly these delays were due to the sclerosis afflicting local Russian bureaucracies—for example, in order to confirm pension rights, notarized labor records must be passed from a previous employer in Chukotka to the municipal pension authority—but Regionstroy was ultimately responsible for shepherding the process expeditiously and putting in place bridging arrangements in the interim. Another set of complaints related to the quality of flats into which participants were resettled, most of which were newly constructed. A flood of letters and telegrams came into Regionstroy offices throughout 2001 and 2002, complaining that new flats were in fact unfinished flats. More serious than this, however, was the collapse of the construction contract to build a colony for hundreds of resettlers in Aleksin, near Tula, by the end of 2002. This left a large group of resettlers, all of whom had already vacated their old homes in Chukotka and sent their belongings ahead in containers, stranded indefinitely in hostels and billets in Anadyr' and across central Russia. There were other complaints about the quality of the Regionstroy services, including the loss of containers with personal belongings en route from Chukotka and, more often, delays of many months in their delivery. Regionstroy maintains representative offices in some of the larger resettlement destinations, such as Voronezh and Omsk, and the professionalism of some employees was an issue: for example, the Voronezh representative in 2001 had a serious drinking problem.

But when set against the logistical difficulties of resettling thousands of residents from Chukotka across Russia's temperate regions, the accomplishment of moving such large numbers of people into new homes over such a short period somewhat attenuates these complaints. Regionstroy had less than six months from the date the resettlement plans were inked to the first flight of program participants to central Russia. In that time, representatives based in Moscow fanned out across Russia's temperate regions, acquired flats and persuaded local authorities to accept large numbers of migrants and the responsibility for paying their pensions. Meanwhile, in Chukotka, representatives had to reach remote settlements in all corners of the region, screen applicants, gather personal documents, and arrange for the transport of containers by ship via Vladivostok and of resettlers themselves by air via Anadyr'. The difficulty of operating in Chukotka's severe and unpredictable climate was reflected in, at the very least, the delays in getting containers out of the region during the short ice-free shipping season.

The greatest obstacle for the administration and Regionstroy ultimately proved to be the negative publicity and resentment that the resettlement program generated in Chukotka, in the new resettlement colonies, and even in the national press. Telegrams from disgruntled participants in their new homes went not only to Governor Abramovich, but also to President Putin and several national newspapers (*Vek*, December 7–13, 2001; *Argumenty i fakty*, May 23, 2002). Resettlers complained that Regionstroy

was indifferent to their needs, abandoning them in unfinished homes without the documentation necessary to begin new lives. Locals in Chukotka speculated that the large sums spent on resettlement and the bare minimum in services that resettlers got in return pointed to corruption, and accusations circulated that Regionstroy was embezzling the governor's money.¹³ Authorities in the regional administration, which is mostly staffed with young specialists imported from Abramovich's corporate networks in Moscow, Nizhniy Novgorod, and Omsk, met these complaints with indignation. In interviews, senior figures pointed to the "dependency mindset" of the average long-term resident of the North, while several also acknowledged the old moral economy of the Soviet era, but declared it was irrelevant in the new post-Soviet reality, which they believe has only finally arrived in Chukotka with Abramovich's appearance. An official in the okrug administration, originally from a city in central Russia, explained:

When we all came here, we were really taken aback. There is this attitude that "we've been in the North for 30 years!" People here believe that they have given everything to their country, and therefore their country is obliged to care for them from cradle to grave. On the *materik* [southern Russia] people now understand that their fate is in their own hands—they have adjusted to the new post-Soviet reality. Here, people are still stuck with a Soviet mentality.

Indeed, in interviews with locals, the idea of a moral economy of sacrifice and entitlement still strongly structured northern residents' expectations of the state. Although settlers in Chukotka enjoyed a range of privileges truly exceptional in the Soviet era, and which effectively made of the northern population an elite social class, the discourses of sacrifice and the role of the Chukotkan population as defenders of the state's exposed Arctic flank (40 km across the Bering Strait from America) created a moral case in local minds for great future rewards. Living in Chukotka, if one conveniently passed over the considerable material benefits, was construed as a service to the motherland. If the moral contract was compromised by the collapse of the Soviet state, the arrival of wealth and administrative energy in the form of Abramovich's imported administration has signaled to local people the return of the state, and thus the reactivation of the state's obligations before its northern population. This is the psychological underpinning to the sense of entitlement with which resettlers in Chukotka have met Abramovich's resettlement program—locals commonly fail to grasp that he funded this program privately, with his own companies. Another young official in the okrug administration described this mentality:

Having survived these last ten years, locals are even more full of a sense of their own entitlements. "We've waited all these years, and now the hard times are over—so let's have the goods!" For them, the government and the Governor are the same thing. They understand in principle that the Governor is

¹³Because Regionstroy refused to divulge budget information and all publicity for the resettlement program was diverted through the Anadyr' administration's public relations department, it seemed more likely, in popular perceptions, that the organization was operating dishonestly. Due to the lack of transparency, it was impossible to test the rumors, although in my investigations I did not encounter any evidence to suggest embezzlement.

paying for all of this out of his own pocket, but they assume he is getting something back for his trouble, that at heart he has his own interests, not theirs. This is how you get this blatant lack of gratitude for the resettlement program.

Planners in Regionstroy and the okrug administration expressed their frustration that, having fully funded and arranged the removal of voluntary resettlers to new homes in central Russia, they were inundated with demands and complaints. But the infantilism they identified in resettlers is surely an outcome of a paternalist style of managing resettlement. By undertaking to provide a complete package of resettlement services, the administration signaled that it acknowledged the terms of the old moral economy, thus inheriting the debts of the Soviet state before the northern resident.

RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES: THE ADAPTATION PROCESS

In past studies of migration in post-Soviet Russia, the relatively low mobility of the population relative to Canada and the United States was attributed to the inflexibility of the property market. In the process of departure from the North, securing a flat in central Russia was the necessary prerequisite for migrants, and this was never easy. Securing jobs in advance was viewed as less important (Heleniak, 1999). This problem in fact stretches back into the Soviet period, and the difficulties in arranging flats in southern Russia were so serious that in many cases this factor alone frustrated return migration. As a means of easing this problem, the Soviet State after 1970 sanctioned the formation of “co-operatives,” in which northern residents could pool their savings and privately contract construction trusts to build apartment buildings. But this process was plagued with problems. In interviews with present and former northerners, it emerged that a typical waiting period for obtaining a “co-operative flat” was 10–15 years, and that from about 1987, most co-operatives dissolved, taking members’ savings with them. For resettlers, the obstacles of securing accommodation in advance still persist: housing loan provision is still in its infancy while property values in the North remain far too low to enable northerners to trade into the market in southern destinations. The resettlement program in Chukotka effectively grants resettlers properties, which become their principal asset in their new communities, and this is extremely important in convincing people to participate and enabling the process of adaptation.

In the first year of resettlement, migrants typically expressed dissatisfaction with their new circumstances and nostalgically pined for their former Chukotkan landscapes and communities, in which most had lived, if not a lifetime, then two or three decades. Until a *propiska* is secured and pensions and other entitlements appear, new arrivals live in a state of high anxiety and, in most cases, serious poverty. Compounding these difficulties, they must live in bare, unfurnished flats until containers with belongings arrive overland from Vladivostok. Regionstroy has endeavoured to resettle its participants in mid-sized provincial towns or in dormitory communities of larger cities such as Voronezh, mostly to economize on property costs, and the lack of facilities such as post offices, transport links and food markets in these locations has made adaptation more difficult. But locals in these towns also tend to be curious and open to the arrivals from the North, and many resettlers report that locals proved

helpful guides to their communities. The welcome resettlers encounter is not always positive, however: former northerners are appalled at the level of violence and mistrust that pervades urban areas in central Russia, in direct contrast to the safe and insular communities they left behind. Many are surprised to learn that walking after dark on the streets of their new communities is unsafe, and complain of the threat of burglary. One middle-aged resettler in a town in Leningrad Oblast lost her husband within months of arriving, when drunk local teenagers murdered him at the post office in a random act of violence.

A major difficulty for migrants is adjusting to the much lower average pay in central Russia compared with the North, despite a lower cost of living, and the greater competition for jobs. In one colony of resettlers near Voronezh, among the eighteen 20–30 year-olds recently arrived with their families, only two had jobs after six months, both as boiler stokers in the local heating plant earning roughly US\$50 a month. The majority of resettlers are on pensions, but many of these are still in their 40s and 50s and have valuable skills and good health. Migrants of this cohort consistently report that it is impossible to find work in their fields, and it repels them that so many highly skilled and educated locals take work as cleaners and cashiers or sell vegetables in the market. The northern pension is typically twice that of the average Russian pension and so many middle-aged resettlers seem content to rely on this income without seeking work, while tending vegetable patches to supplement their larder.¹⁴ My pension-age informants, once they were receiving their northern pensions, seemed materially content, but they suffered psychologically knowing that, at the age of 50, their professional skills were no longer valued in the economy.¹⁵

Adaptation comes with time, and migrants in their new homes for over a year reported much less anxiety and more involvement and interest in their local communities than new migrants. Securing a plot of land, or better yet a summerhouse, usually marks a major threshold, providing resettlers with a means of putting down literal and figurative roots. After a life in the high tundra, the opportunity to grow fruit and vegetables in a warm climate is a dream fulfilled for many former northerners. In some cases, resettlers who received flats in the new apartment buildings of the Regionstroy colonies sold them within months of arriving in order to buy traditional houses and land in Russian villages, reportedly to fully devote themselves to cultivation (*khozaystvo*).

There was a clear attitudinal difference between resettlers from Chukotka's liquidated "unpromising" settlements and those from Anadyr'. Living standards in the former settlements have been extremely difficult. The port and coal-mining town of Beringovskiy, for example, had a population of roughly 3,000 in the late 1990s when heating, water and electricity all failed, an extremely serious situation in a remote Arctic setting. Compounding the problem, then-Governor Nazarov prevented outsiders (reporters from Moscow, foreign researchers) from visiting Beringovskiy and censored mail and telegrams from the community. Almost the entire population of Beringovskiy has now been resettled, and these migrants are very positive about their new,

¹⁴A typical "northern pension" (for those with a full work record in the North, regardless of where they later reside) is 3000–3500 rubles, or roughly \$100–\$120, a month. The average Russian pension in 2002 was roughly 1500 rubles a month.

¹⁵In the North, a frequently expressed discourse on the psychological dangers of resettlement is, "If I leave for the South, I go there not to live, but to die."

warm flats with running water and light. On the other hand, some resettlers from Anadyr', which never suffered service problems in the 1990s, relinquished large, comfortable flats for smaller ones in central Russia; they naturally tend to be less enthusiastic about their new homes.

A final factor bearing heavily on the success of adaptation is the model Chukotka's resettlement program has adopted of moving resettlers in large groups to colony-like communities. The North was known in the Soviet era and after as a place of strong community spirit, and according to northerners themselves, an unofficial "code of northern life" enforced traditions of mutual reliance, trust, and unconditional generosity. Many of the resettlement program's critics in Chukotka maintained that those who left would dissolve into the lumpenized greater Russian population and lose precious connections to their former northern communities. Visits to resettler colonies, however, revealed that in many cases, the fabric of communities—the social capital—proved quite transportable. Former neighbors from Chukotka now live on the same stairwells in their new buildings and old friends still socialize on a daily basis as they did in the North. Perhaps the best indication of the intactness of social networks was my own success in reaching resettlers. In each of the resettlement colonies visited, two or three initial contacts opened up tens of secondary ones living in close proximity, and the author was able to contact and speak with a great number of resettlers over the span of short five-day visits.

LOCAL RESISTANCE TO RESETTLEMENT AND THE EMERGING LOCALISM

While many have accepted resettlement, the population in Chukotka is proving in practice less amenable to restructuring than the administration's economic planners had anticipated. Contrary to predictions of a large "delayed demand" for out-migration, the resettlement program was in fact undersubscribed in the first two years of operation. Moreover, it emerged that too many middle-aged and younger residents, and too few older-aged pensioners, were taking advantage of the resettlement offer. Any resident of Chukotka with a work-record of 15 years or more is eligible, under federal rules, for resettlement, and Regionstroy was also obliged to resettle any applicant, regardless of age, from a settlement in the process of liquidation. Governor Abramovich's large investment, intended to increase the proportion of young, healthy and working-age residents to the retired or invalid, and thus to lower social-care costs to the state, appeared to be producing an opposite effect. As a consequence, the program was suspended and reviewed in autumn 2003.

There is a range of explanations for the program's poor uptake, particularly among pensioners. Non-indigenous northerners often remark that the North is a rewarding place to work but a terrible place to retire, and indeed the low state pension compared with Chukotka's basic cost of living (the highest of any region of Russia) compels many pensioners to continue working to survive. Health care, particularly outside Anadyr', is relatively poor, and the climate is severe. But after a decade of high out-migration, among the pensioner population there are many people prepared to cope with the challenges of northern life because they feel at home there. After many decades working and living in their communities, they have strong friendships, they know the landscape intimately, they are accustomed to the weather and the seasons,

and their memories are imbedded in the North. In many cases, they have children and grandchildren in Chukotka. Older people often report that they would be condemned to obscurity living in a new community in central Russia, whereas in their northern homes they are known and their accomplishments are remembered. Among resettlers in central Russia, those who most regretted leaving the North tend to be migrants in old age, who lived for three or four decades in Chukotka and who had left children there. In targeting pensioners for resettlement, and then meeting with unanticipated resistance, the program's planners failed to understand older residents as people imbedded within family and community networks, and therefore with considerable local resources on which to draw.¹⁶

Long-term northerners in their 40s and early 50s have usually worked for over 15 years in the North and are consequently eligible for resettlement. But for those eventually intending to leave the North, the offer of resettlement is only one of a set of material benefits available to them as northern residents, which they deploy strategically in pursuit of a secure future life outside the North. A prime consideration for this age group is the bias in the Russian labor market, and particularly in the private sector, toward the young, who have moved through higher or middle education in a post-Soviet environment and do not bear the stigma of embodied Soviet work habits. Added to this, many Russians stress the importance of connections, rather than formal skills and good references, in obtaining a job. For these reasons, northerners over 40 commonly believe that if they resettled to central Russia, their prospects of finding rewarding work and adjusting to a new professional milieu are poor. Consequently, many interviewed in the 40–50 age bracket prefer to reach retirement in their northern jobs before resettling.

The notional northern benefits package has not been significantly altered since the Soviet period, although the devolution of fiscal responsibilities from Moscow to the regions in 1995–1996 meant that in many parts of the North, meager local budgets left wages and northern increments unpaid. In Chukotka, Abramovich has since 2000 injected sufficient funds into the budget to fully discharge his administration's northern-benefits responsibilities. Pay in the okrug for government workers is two to three times the Russian average, residents are entitled to a return flight to Moscow every two years, the minimum annual paid leave is 43 working days, and retirement ages are still 50 for women and 55 for men. Furthermore, the okrug administration funds the higher education of hundreds of local school graduates in universities throughout Russia, providing tuition, maintenance, and transport. Working-age Chukotkans consequently benefit from a set of concrete privileges, which they would lose through resettlement. Rather than accept resettlement now, many residents prefer to remain in the relatively highly paid positions they have in Chukotka, using their disposable income and long, subsidized holidays to support children in higher education outside the North and prepare for eventual migration. Several interviewed informants residing in Chukotka were in the process of building houses in central Russia over the course of four or five long summer breaks. Still more were supporting adult children in central Russian universities and planned to leave Chukotka only when they had achieved

¹⁶In an investigation of resettlement in neighbouring Sakha, anthropologist Piers Vitebsky found that those without local kinship resources were the most likely to leave for southern Russia, whereas those with local networks of family and community would often remain, even if they had reached pension age (Vitebsky, 2000, pp. 37–38).

full rights to the supplemental northern pension and their children were established in their professions. A popular alternative to immediate resettlement, therefore, seems to be phased migration, calibrated to extract the maximum material benefit from the range of northern benefits available.

The modernization program in Chukotka, which is not only resettling locals out of the okrug and closing a series of settlements, but also investing in infrastructure and resurrecting the traditional native economy, in some senses works at cross purposes to the aims of the resettlement campaign. The influx of specialists working in the various initiatives Abramovich has launched—for example, reporters, petroleum engineers, builders, lawyers, and translators—has led to a spike in the value of flats in the capital Anadyr', where two-room flats in 2002 were selling for \$3000, up from \$300 two years before. This might have been expected to trigger a flood of out-migration among flat-owners previously trapped by a lack of resources. But the booming economy has generated jobs, many offering good pay. Anadyr' itself is undergoing a thorough physical transformation after 15 years of stagnation, with new entertainment facilities, a modern shopping center, office and residential buildings, and new utilities under construction. There is a sense that anyone who leaves Chukotka now may miss its renaissance, and several informants explained that whereas two years ago all their plans were oriented toward departure, they now believe they can enjoy a better quality of life by staying.

Finally, many locals are responding to the pervasive pressure to accept resettlement with some resentment, asserting their attachments to Chukotka and indeed their right to remain. The modernization program is outsider-led, managed by young imported specialists averse to local input and opinions, who are in fact employees of Abramovich's oil company Sibneft and who shuttle between Moscow and Anadyr' on chartered planes. Much of the administration's business, which directly affects local people, is conducted from a suite of offices in central Moscow. The culture of the administration is insular and nepotistic, and locals find it very difficult to penetrate the decision-making process or to obtain jobs within administration structures. High officials in the Abramovich administration recruit their staff from within their own personal networks in Omsk, Nizhniy Novgorod, Moscow, and Syktyvkar. One of the most significant findings of a year of ethnographic research revealed that a common local response to the processes of modernization, despite the fact that wages are now paid on time, is a sense of exclusion from the "new Chukotka." These sentiments have galvanized in the white, non-indigenous population a strong sense of *local identity*, with which people stake claims to authority and entitlement based on long tenure in the North and a familiarity with the local landscape, local history, and indigenous culture. On many occasions, locals expressed indignation that inexperienced youths holding degrees from Moscow universities should replace experienced old-timers in their jobs, while pushing the established local population into "troglydytic lifestyles" in central Russian cities.

The resettlement program, particularly as reports have emerged of careless and indifferent management by Regionstroy, was indeed a principal driver of local resentment. Many perceived resettlement and the liquidation of settlements as proof that the new regional administration is a corporate division of Governor Abramovich's oil company Sibneft, staffed by managers who view local people as economic factors rather than human beings. There are other reasons for resisting resettlement.

Chukotka, particularly as the economic crisis recedes from memory, remains a haven set apart from the social malaise besetting mainstream Russian life. A strong community spirit persists in Chukotka's towns, despite the dislocations and deprivations of the past decade, and this remains a prime attraction for northern residents. Indeed, a durable, permanent, and multi-generational population of whites appears to be forming, the descendants of Soviet-era settlers with kinship networks in Chukotka and deceased loved ones buried in local cemeteries.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS: TRANSIENT AND FIXED MODELS OF NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

The cost of maintaining in the Far North large populations of former settlers, scattered extensively in remote industrial settlements whose former economic-extractive rationale has disappeared, is too high for regional administrations to support. The desire of many non-indigenous northerners to return to the temperate zones of Russia—their transient mentality in the North—adds a moral justification to the economic imperative for a renewed state-funded resettlement program. In the future, only a small number of exceptionally rich natural resource deposits in the Russian Far North will be able to support large urban concentrations of industrial workers—for example, the nonferrous metals complex in Noril'sk and the gas fields in Yamal.

The case of Chukotka illustrates the logistical difficulties and moral ambiguities involved in any effort to rapidly restructure the northern population. Elevating the importance of achieving cost economies in northern administration through depopulation and amalgamation policies may satisfy short-term fiscal objectives at the expense of long-term community and economic sustainability. In announcing the resettlement of up to 600,000 residents of the far Northeast, including Chukotka, the Russian deputy minister of trade and development Mukhamed Tsikanov declared that he wanted companies in remote regions to use “shift labor whenever necessary” and for “people to be resettled whenever possible” (Walsh, 2003). This follows a pattern long established in the Canadian North and the western Russian Arctic, where petroleum and mining labor is usually imported from southern regions on a shift basis. In Chukotka, the Abramovich administration, which issued construction contracts in 2002 worth as much as US\$100 million, is also devoted to the transient shift-labor model. Companies there employ large numbers of Turks, Ukrainians, Russians, Central Asians, and Canadians on construction projects, while the administration itself is staffed largely by shift-labor specialists from Moscow. There is, however, widespread apprehension among local people, both non-indigenous and indigenous, that the move to transient labor in the region will seriously damage local interests.

While transient labor is well-suited to industrial projects (gold mines, oil fields, and large-scale construction) in remote regions with shallow local labor pools, without agreements in place on local hiring and community investment, this economic activity tends to benefit distant interests without leaving sustainable local improvements behind. There are a range of administrative and service roles in local communities, moreover, that are best performed by local people, whether settlers or indigenous in origin. The Western experience with “welfare colonialism” in the Far North, a system in which transient whites shuttle to the North in a service-provision capacity, has shown the futility of building various kinds of capacity in northern communities when

the people with authority and resources are not those with local commitments and connections. Native leaders in Chukotka are expressing their deep anxiety that as the new resettlement programs accelerate the depopulation of Chukotka's settlements, they will be left without qualified teachers, doctors, engineers, veterinarians, and other specialists. The removal of local whites does not automatically elevate natives in local hierarchies. Rather, in the aftermath of a colonial division of labor in which whites occupied specialist positions uniformly, natives can only acquire the skills and experience to replace them in a collaborative process that relies on the presence of *permanently* settled whites in northern communities. This is a gradual process; the resettlement certainly is not.

Governor Abramovich embarked on his modernization program at a moment when Chukotka had reached an extreme socio-economic nadir. The industries of the Soviet era had failed, state investment and social support had dried up, and no new fields of economic activity had yet emerged. The urgency of the cost-economy drive within his modernization strategy reflects Abramovich's belief that the Soviet model of permanent settlement of the Far North is not sustainable, and that indigenous populations alone have the "right" to a subsidized northern existence. Abramovich's political constituencies are not only within the local okrug electorate, but also in Alaska and the international indigenous rights movement, and out of necessity he has embraced the principle of indigeneity and its associated entitlements. For this reason, his investments in Chukotka are securing the native economy and subsidizing remote native settlements while relentlessly pushing forward an efficiency drive within the white, non-indigenous domain.¹⁷

But community closures and rapid depopulation, if not conducted with extreme care, may endanger Chukotka's long-term economic development. The example of other far northern regions—in the Canadian Arctic and northern Alaska, where the climate is similarly harsh—shows that small-scale sustainable economies rooted in permanent non-industrial communities can in fact develop. Tourism is perhaps the precedent most relevant to Chukotka, which is a vast and ecologically rich territory with indigenous communities that maintain traditional reindeer-herding and marine mammal-hunting traditions. The market for eco-tourism, extreme wilderness expeditions, and ethnographic tourism is growing, and when managed carefully, a tourism industry can be lucrative, sustainable, and less damaging than many types of extractive industry, as the success of Iceland and Alaska has shown. Yet while Chukotka's administration has embarked on resettlement and settlement closures with remarkable energy and generous financing, it has done little to address tourism development. Chukotka remains a closed military border zone, an outdated holdover from the Cold War period, when it faced the American threat across the narrow Bering Strait. To visit the territory, foreigners and Russians alike must still be vetted by the Federal Security Service, the successor to the KGB, and receive special security clearance. This creates a huge bureaucratic impediment to visitors. Transport infrastructure is also extremely poor, and while the administration is investing in new airports, a bureaucratic and legislative wall still exists, making it impossible for locals to license

¹⁷The tendency among the new "oligarchic" administrations of Russia's resource periphery is to recognize, within a management framework intended to secure business profits, the nationality-linked entitlements of indigenous peoples. For remarks on the situation in Taymyr and Evenkia, for example, see Anderson (2000, p. 108).

small aircraft—a mainstay of northern life on the American side of the Bering Strait—and extremely difficult to arrange flights directly between Alaska and Chukotka.

CONCLUSION

Russian federal authorities and their partners in the World Bank are launching a major new resettlement initiative in the Far North, which will transform northern communities, moving them away from the Soviet model of permanent and extensive development toward a more Western model of compact settlement and high labor transience. The case of Chukotka under its new administration, undertaking its own resettlement, has serendipitously provided a preview of how this type of new initiative may actually work in practice. In Chukotka, in relative terms an extremely isolated region, with a harsh Arctic climate and a very high cost of living, the “delayed demand for out-migration” predicted by World Bank and independent academic analysts should have guaranteed the program’s success. In fact, the program has been undersubscribed and the mostly non-indigenous population has resisted the administration’s cost-economy projects in a number of ways. While many northerners still plan to leave the North, the existing northern benefits package provides a number of very meaningful incentives to northern residency, which mitigate the attraction of immediate resettlement. Among long-term residents, there is also a durable strain of local belonging and attachment to northern communities, which the imposed modernization has only brought to the surface. There are many in Chukotka who embrace resettlement, but a permanent population, which transcends ethnic boundaries, is also emerging, a development that confounds the impulse to view non-indigenous residents in purely economic terms, as allocable and moveable resources.

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