

SECTION II: INTRODUCTION

MOVED BY THE STATE: PERSPECTIVES ON RELOCATION AND RESETTLEMENT IN THE CIRCUMPOLAR NORTH

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The two papers in the following section are the result of the collaborative research project “Moved by the State: Perspectives on Relocation and Resettlement in the Circumpolar North” (MOVE). As the project leader of MOVE, it may be appropriate to introduce this section with a few words about the project and its approach to population movements in the circumpolar North.

MOVE is one of seven projects with the EURO-CORES scheme Histories From the North—Environments, Movements, Narratives (BOREAS) of the European Science Foundation (ESF). BOREAS has been an innovative program, the first European funding scheme entirely focused on arctic humanities and social science research. Likewise, this was one of the first ESF attempts to include U.S. and Canadian funding into its portfolio (the research by Mikow was funded through NSF, and Rockhill’s work was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada).

MOVE was first conceptualized in discussions between Yvon Csonka (University of Greenland at the time), Tim Heleniak (University of Maryland), Florian Stammler (University of Lapland), Niobe Thompson (University of Alberta; he was later replaced by Elena Khlinovskaya Rockhill), and myself in 2005. After the collaborative project passed ESF reviews in 2006, five individual MOVE projects were started in College Park, Edmonton, Fairbanks, Nuuk, and Rovaniemi in late 2006 and 2007. The five research teams focused on different spatial, temporal, and topical aspects of the overall themes and questions. Given the tremendous impact of Soviet and Russian interventions, three projects had their primary focus in Russia. Other circumpolar regions covered include Alaska, north-eastern Canada, and Greenland. Each project dealt with

indigenous and nonindigenous northern residents, thereby overcoming a common dichotomy in arctic social sciences (see also Khlinovskaya-Rockhill, this issue). As of 2011, almost all of the individual projects have been completed.

The starting point for the project was the recognition that the twentieth century in the circumpolar North had been characterized by state projects that regulated and engineered the movements of human groups. On the one hand, indigenous communities were enticed or forced to settle around newly developed infrastructural nodes, such as churches, schools, and stores. On the other hand, the planned movement of a nonindigenous work force to the North was a necessary requirement for the realization of “high-modernism” state projects (Scott 1998) north of the temperate zones. At the turn of the twenty-first century, several new developments emerged: indigenous communities started to question the authority of state projects, the Russian state initiated a massive resettlement project aimed at moving workers south again, and climate change began to threaten the existence of many coastal communities.

Previous research on various forms of state-sponsored migration and resettlement had focused almost exclusively on the political motivations and repercussions, as well as demographic consequences, of such movements. While these lines of inquiry are important, they provide no clues about local perceptions and impacts. This, in turn, leads to poor predictions about the possible consequences of voluntary and involuntary future movements on northern populations. We saw the need for ethnographic attention to local ways of perceiving, experiencing, and reacting to state interventions, coupled with comparative perspectives focusing on the political, economic, and demographic trends in which local developments are embedded. We

were also interested in “place-making”—that is, the strategies individuals and communities use to appropriate new social and geographic space, to remember places of past habitation, and to imagine future spatial circumstances.

While the two papers to follow showcase some of the breadth of the MOVE project, they cannot cover all of it. By focusing on Alaska and the Russian Far East, we had to eliminate regional examples from Greenland, the European Russian North, and western Siberia. Likewise, important work resulting from MOVE on post-Soviet demographic trends (e.g., Heleniak 2009) and on labor recruitment in western Siberia’s oil and gas industry (Dzida et al. 2009) cannot be covered here. Even MOVE Alaska cannot be fully represented in this issue. Elizabeth Marino’s important work in Shishmaref can only be mentioned here, as well as its important connections to the historical King Island case (see Kingston and Marino 2010).

Now, let me finally say a few words about the two papers represented here. Elizabeth Mikow’s paper, “Three Times and Counting: Remembering Past Relocations and Discussing the Future in Kaktovik, Alaska,” is based on her master’s thesis, which she completed in summer of 2010 at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. In a way, Mikow’s topic is at the heart of MOVE: a small indigenous community “moved by the state,” in this case by the U.S. military. The example of Kaktovik is interesting because the community endured multiple relocation events, which were conducted differently and led to different community responses. At the same time, Kaktovik is one of many Alaska coastal communities threatened by erosion and facing the prospect of another relocation.

The Russian Far East certainly experienced more than its share of state-induced population movements. While the relocation of small indigenous communities in Chukotka has been investigated within MOVE (e.g., Holzlehner 2011) and before (Krupnik and Chlenov 2007), the role of the state in nonindigenous population movements has rarely been studied in the same context. Elena Khlinovskaya Rockhill’s article, “Living in Two Places: Permanent Transiency in the Magadan Region,” focuses on a region traumatized by Stalin’s labor camps and deals with the quest for belonging that characterizes many northern settler communities (e.g., Thompson 2008). In Magadan—in Kaktovik and many other places in the North—past patterns of place-making cannot be ignored when thinking about present and future configurations.

In the end, “Moved by the State” demonstrates that community relocations are never entirely voluntary and rarely completely involuntary. Instead, the story of state-induced population movements is about how local individuals and communities navigate and negotiate external pressures, power hierarchies, and cultural discriminations. Anthropology is in a privileged position to provide a perspective that highlights local agency, a perspective that is all the more important given the pending relocations of the twenty-first century.

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