

Figure 1. Map of Alaska indicating the 2000 Yukon-Kuskokwim-Norton Sound Disaster Area and Area M.

being measured in how much of the traditional have been maintained while incorporating new socioeconomic systems (e.g. Jacka 1999:214; Wolfe 1984:160).

Few regions of Alaska have incorporated the market economy so thoroughly as have lower Alaska Peninsula and eastern Aleutian villages (see Figure 1). The Eastern Aleut were active participants in commercial development and measure their success in new ways, not in how much of the traditional society there is to be found. In these villages today, there is virtually no separation of commercial fishing from subsistence fishing in the discourse, and most subsistence fish are taken during the period of commercial harvests. One Aleut leader stated, "Commercial fishing has become our subsistence. It's the only thing we have. And it's slowly being taken away from us, all of it is. Not slowly, it's being taken away from us fast." Though it was not his intent to reverse the official meaning of subsistence and subsistence uses (defined in the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act as "the customary and traditional uses by rural Alaska residents of wild, renewable resources for direct personal or family consumption" Sec. 801), nor to downplay the critical importance of subsistence throughout Alaska, he believes that commercial fishing has grown in its importance such that subsistence is not enough to sustain his village economically, socially, or culturally.

The twentieth century eastern Aleutian region saw some of the most productive yet volatile commercial fisheries in the world. Most recently, restrictions on these commercial fisheries have been increasing while productivity has continued to fluctuate for all

species. The most severe restrictions have been on the commercial salmon industry, in which most Aleutian fishermen make the bulk of their income for the entire year. These restrictions are in response to low salmon returns on the rivers of western Alaska where villagers, despite attempts to develop lucrative commercial salmon and herring fisheries, rely heavily on salmon for subsistence purposes. Many Aleutian residents fear that a disruption in their local salmon fishery would be tantamount to the destruction of modern Aleut society and culture on the same scale as the tragic events of Russian and American colonization. Though this may be an overstatement compared to the enslavement, murder, forced relocation, and starvation of the last few centuries, it is clear that the Alaska state government's attempt to solve the social problems that are arising from, or exacerbated by, the failed salmon runs in western Alaska may indeed create similar social problems for Aleut peoples.

What are the consequences to individuals and villages if the commercial fisheries disappear or are no longer legal to be fished? What are the prospects for sociocultural and economic recovery? And what happens when the lifeblood of one Native group is removed in order to save the subsistence way of life of another? This paper considers these questions from the Aleutian perspective through three primary levels of identity, each manifesting themselves differently and offering different levels of empowerment: the community level, the individual level, and the level based upon Aleut ethnicity. These levels are used in order to assess the vulnerability and resilience of Aleut communities and culture in a rapidly shifting environment.

fewer fish returning to the rivers (Malecha, Tingley and Iverson 2000b:20). In 2000, the runs for several key species of salmon, especially chum salmon, were less than fifty percent of their twenty-year historic average (Gov. Knowles, 7/19/00, Declaration of Disaster). Consequently, not only was commercial fishing almost an impossibility in 2000, but subsistence fishing, which constitutes a large portion of the diet for these 80 villages, was also drastically low or non-existent. The Governor named Area M as the main agent threatening these salmon stocks, and recommended to the Board of Fisheries that they "stop the interceptions", which would severely limit the commercial salmon fisheries for the Aleut (Gov. Knowles, 8/8/00, letter to Board of Fisheries Chairman Dan Coffey).

Restrictions on Area M's fishery have been increasing over the last few years because of low chum returns in Area AYK and relatively low sockeye returns in Bristol Bay. Area M fishes for sockeye salmon, for which the cannery pays a much better price than it does for the few cents it pays per pound for chum salmon (in 2000, it was \$0.85 vs. \$0.07). In the course of fishing for sockeye, chum salmon are incidentally harvested in small percentages. There was an abundance-based "chum cap" adopted in 1998, or limit to the number of allowable chum that they can catch in June, and Area M fishermen, through years of experience on the water, take steps to avoid catching them,⁵ lest they reach the quota and have to stop fishing altogether. In the June 2000 fishery, Area M fishermen caught only half their commercial allocation of sockeye salmon and they stayed well below the "chum cap" (the 2000 cap was set at 350,000-400,000 chum and Area M fishermen caught 240,000 chum (Shaul *et al.* 2000:5). Even though they were well below their quotas, at the closing of the Board of Fisheries meetings in January 2001, the 2001 June Area M salmon fishery was restricted to three days a week for the month and could possibly be closed in the future. In addition, Area M fishermen can no longer harvest the previously allowed 8.3 percent of the pre-season forecast sockeye harvests for Bristol Bay, an area which has seen some of the largest salmon runs in Alaska. The June sockeye salmon fishery in Area M is arguably the most important fishery to Aleut villages; it is the month in which Aleuts earn a large percentage of their income for the year, the month where fishermen focus most of their efforts because the runs are the largest, and they harvest much of their subsistence fish⁶ for use throughout the winter (Fall *et al.* 1993:43; Northern Economics 2000:Part I).

Not only might Aleutian fishermen lose a major portion of their salmon fishery, they are in danger of losing the opilio crab fishery because of such low returns in 2000. They might also lose their

king crab fishery, which has been restricted to only a few days of fishing in recent years. They have lost most of the cod, pollock, and Atka mackerel fisheries because the Stellar sea lion has been placed on the endangered species list. This means that trawlers cannot fish within 20 nautical miles of their designated critical habitat, which is where the fish are, and no other fishing gear type can be used within three nautical miles around all sea lion haulouts. Other species, particularly the Stellar's eider and the sea otter, are being considered for protection under this act, which will further restrict fishing.

The study area

This research focuses on an Aleut village that depends almost entirely upon the Area M fisheries. The village of King Cove, located on the Pacific Ocean side of the western Alaska Peninsula, is home to about 700 permanent residents (approximately 65% Native) and contains the primary cannery for all regional commercial fisheries. The population doubles during the peak fishing seasons with an influx of international cannery workers. The village formed around a Pacific American Fisheries cannery beginning in 1911 when people from the former villages of Belkofski, Pauloff Harbor, Sanak, Morzhovoi, Ikatan, Ozernoi, Unga, Thin Point, and other villages out in the chain or up the peninsula moved to King Cove for employment at the cannery, for tending fish traps and supplying the cannery, and so their children could go to the school there and not need to board for the academic year. King Cove continues to be a commercial fishing town with almost all residents tied directly or indirectly to fishing and/or seafood processing. The facilities of Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc., Pacific American Fisheries' successor, burned in 1976, but the adoption of the 200-mile fisheries limit under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, which in 1978 extended the waters around the United States to 200 miles offshore to protect American fishing rights, encouraged its rebuilding. King Cove has experienced record salmon harvests, and emerged as a regional service center. Thus far, despite cycles of productivity and decline, the sea has provided a relatively stable economy for salmon, crab and groundfish.

King Cove is a relatively affluent community when compared with other Aleut and Alaska Native villages. (The 1997 median household income in King Cove was \$53,631, compared to \$42,384 for the Aleutians East Borough, \$43,657 for the State of Alaska, and \$29,628 for the Bethel census area).⁷ It has experienced a demographic shift towards a higher percentage of non-Aleuts in the last few decades but there continues to be a high degree of inter-relatedness. It has a history of ethnic mixture between Aleuts, Russians, Scandinavians, and other northern Europeans. Most of the first families in King Cove consisted of a European father and an Aleut mother (Black and Jacka 1999:103-104; Jones 1973).

⁵ Experienced fishermen are very skilled at knowing where to set their fishing nets based on sighting the various species jumping out of the water, previous years experience, exposure to weather, and knowledge of the currents. From my conversations with many of these fishermen, the mixed stock is less mixed than is believed by non-fishermen.

⁶ In a 1992 Alaska Department of Fish and Game survey, 37.7 percent of all wild resources harvested (51.5% of salmon) for home use in King Cove were removed from commercial catches, and 37.3 percent of all wild resources (41.3% of salmon) in Sand Point (Fall *et al.* 1993:104; Fall *et al.* 1996:86).

⁷ www.dced.state.ak.us/; www.census.gov



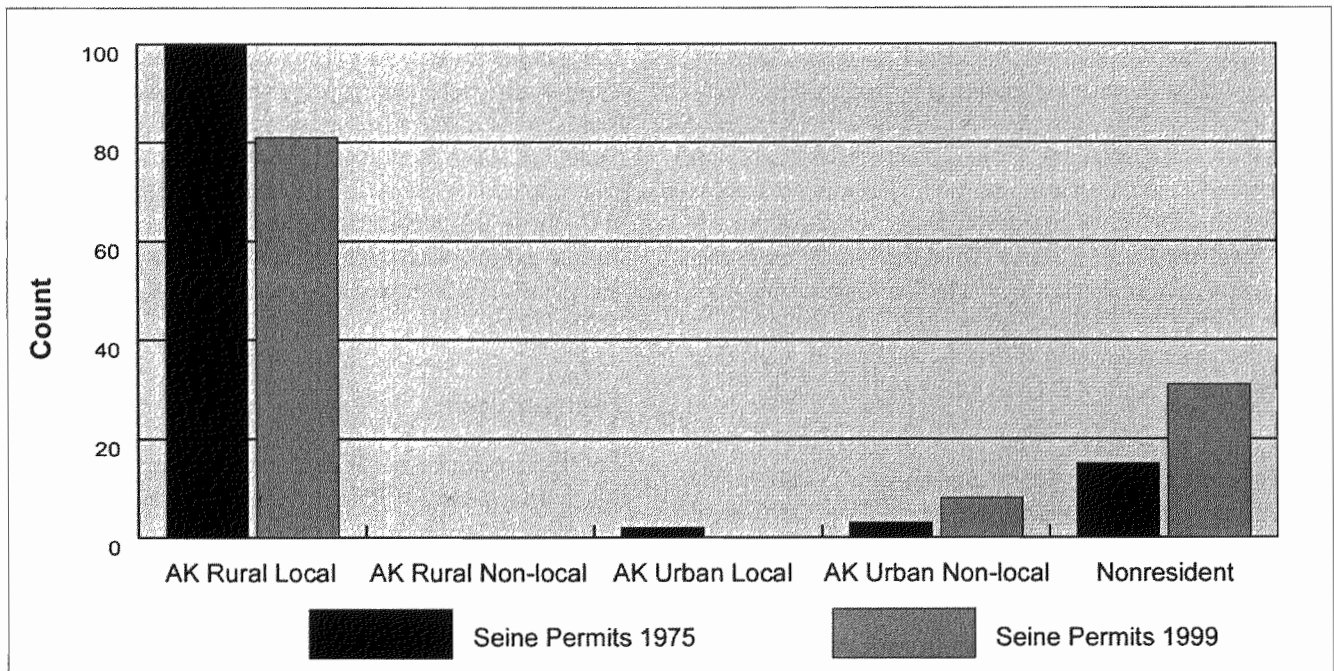


Figure 2. Number and residency of purse seine permit holders in Area M, 1975 and 1999. **Alaska Rural Local** is an Alaska resident of a rural community that is local to the fishery. **Alaska Rural Non-local** is an Alaska resident of a rural community that is non-local to the fishery. **Alaska Urban Local** is an Alaska resident of an urban community that is local to the fishery. **Alaska Urban Non-local** is an Alaska resident of an urban community that is non-local to the fishery. **Non-resident** is a non-resident of Alaska (Malecha, Tingley and Iverson 2000b).

Western influences on cultural, economic and social structures have continuously been felt.

In the summer months during the salmon season, King Cove is as timeless as the arctic sunlight. At midnight, children are still riding their bikes and playing in the streets, the harbor house is still abuzz with caffeine and conversation, boats are moving in and out of their slips, the VHF radio is crackling with chatter, people are driving out as far as the road will go looking for bears, and the bar's jukebox is still fired up. In the winter crabbing season, which claims the lives of local and non-local fishermen and boats almost every year, there is an influx of massive crab boats and non-local fishermen from all over the north Pacific. The whole community braces as local and non-local boats set out for the Bering Sea crabbing grounds with the hope that all will return safely and with their holds teeming with crab. In the cod and pollock seasons, which have increasingly become important to fishermen as the other fisheries have become less lucrative, there continues to be a sense of hope as the community has come to rely on these fisheries.

Global relations

Anthropology's current emphasis on local-global interaction links the peoples of seemingly isolated areas to regional, national, and global concerns (e.g. Ang 1998; Friedman 1994). What appear to be bounded local circumstances have global implications. In the Aleutians, a relatively small population influences access to

valuable natural resources, which has local, national, and global economic consequences. But the reverse is also true, as Aleuts have a long history of global interaction and enduring economic pressures under different political systems (Black *et al.* 1999; Jones 1976; Morgan 1980). The Aleutian Islands have been at the core of a global system for millennia, and a crossroads for people from all directions; Aleut social life and culture has always been dynamic because of this. The Aleutian region has been at the center of a vast interaction sphere that included prehistoric Chinese, Japanese, and northeast Asians to the west, and ancient Koniag and Yup'ik peoples to the north and east. There is direct material evidence that the Aleut were participating in a world economic and social system long before any other Native Alaskan group (Black *et al.* 1999; Hoffman 1999; Lantis 1984; Maschner 2000). Indigenous innovation, foreign intrusions and adaptations, climatic instability, and governmental policies have all played critical roles in the development of Aleut culture.

A wide range of political interests are constantly being asserted in multiple ways; the United States, the State of Alaska, environmental groups, local villages, other Alaskan Natives, non-Natives, and individual Aleuts each heterogeneously have their own interests and agendas. At the heart of this local-global relationship is the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), an act of Congress that launched Aleuts into the modern global system as corporate managers of for-profit regional and national corporations. However, the village impact was less significant because, while individual



shareholders may receive a small return on the economic success of the regional corporation, villages are still dominated by family-based fishing economies.

Changes in marine resource productivity may be natural and/or anthropogenic (e.g. Finney 1998), but no studies have been conclusive. Aleuts are nonetheless carrying the burden for these changes on many fronts, because, as many of them argue, they do not carry the same political weight as other Alaskan Natives, given their comparatively low population (Aleuts comprise 2.2% of the total Alaskan Native population)⁸, fewer political votes (only 0.3% of voting age Alaskans are Aleut)⁹, cultural differences (they are seen as less traditional than Eskimo societies, elaborated below) and geographic isolation (travel is difficult and expensive, hence they cannot always afford to fly to Anchorage to defend their rights and rarely do politicians spare the time and expense of travel to these communities).

Like many indigenous societies, Aleuts have multiple identities and political statuses, and they have rights as Native people that non-Native United States citizens do not. From my research in King Cove, overlapping community, individual, and ethnic identities have become increasingly visible in the context of social relations and valuable tools in political and economic strategizing.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Identity is a dynamic construction within specific historical, spatial, experiential and cultural contexts involving the central themes of self, place, difference and tradition (Gellner 1987; Mousalimas 1997). Identity can be defined as a constantly negotiated sense of community belonging. A community or village identity, though not entirely homogenous, has emerged in eastern Aleut villages in light of historical events, their geographic locale, in opposition to economic interests by outsiders, in competition with other Aleut villages, in attempts to secure funding for public projects, and in attempts to preserve or recover their rights to fish from State and federal policymakers.

Aleutian communities are located in remote, sometimes inaccessible, coves and bays of the peninsula and islands. Accessible only by air and sea, getting in or out of a village could take days, and occasionally weeks, due to unpredictable and often violent weather. Living and working in this harsh environment takes great skill, energy, and ingenuity, and surviving the everyday is an empowering validation that Aleuts can continue to live in their

homeland.¹⁰ This strong sense of geographic place has its roots in history. Individual Aleuts and communities moved continually and involuntarily during the Russian and American periods. Aleut men were transported to new hunting grounds that had previously been uninhabited, most notably to hunt the fur seals of the Pribilof Islands and sea otters throughout the chain (Black 1984; Veniaminov 1984). Many from Attu Island were moved east to Unalaska, while others were moved west to the Commander Islands (also previously uninhabited) and subsequently cut off from relatives after the purchase of Alaska.¹¹ Some Aleuts were taken as far away as Fort Ross in northern California. They also made voluntary moves, creating villages around newly established canneries (Black *et al.* 1999). In 1942, the threat of the Japanese landing in the Aleutians prompted evacuation by the U.S. government. All Aleuts west of Unimak Island (save for those on Attu, who were taken to a prison camp in Japan) were taken to abandoned canneries in southeast Alaska where many died from disease and malnutrition (Kohlhoff 1995). After the chaos of World War II, Aleuts who were able to return home, or at least to the Aleutians if not to their own village, found their villages burned (supposedly to prevent Japanese use), vandalized, and homes and churches riddled with bullet holes having been used as target practice (Kohlhoff 1995; Smith and Petrivelli 1994:8). Surviving these traumatic events and concomitant social disorganization, Aleut communities temporarily withdrew from the global stage and concentrated on rebuilding their villages and fishing economies.

Community identity depends on historical circumstances and is often in response to some positive or negative event or action. Though Eastern Aleut villages were never evacuated, they were indirectly affected as many of their relatives in other villages were sent to camps, some never to return. Aleut villages and towns represent one of the most salient aspects of community identity: a strong and profound sense of place, and a sense of knowledge and history that is a product of having an understanding of a natural and social landscape. While the intensity of community identity may ebb and flow with the intensity of external economic and political pressures, the sense of place and landscape remains a powerful organizing force that transcends both internal and global disruptions.

Permit holders and residency

At the 2001 annual meeting of the Alaska Anthropological Association held in Fairbanks, I presented a paper on the Aleut fishermen of Area M, putting a human face on the fisheries. Many

⁸ www.labor.state.ak.us. From Census 2000, there are 2,150 Aleuts and 98,043 total Alaskan Natives.

⁹ www.labor.state.ak.us. There are 1,449 Aleuts of voting age; 60,252 Alaskan Natives of voting age; and 436,215 Alaskans of voting age.

¹¹ Aleuts still live on the Commander Islands today and face severe economic and social problems, but have no representation in the regional legislature (Krivoshapkin 1996).

¹⁰ Since the 1980s, the village of King Cove has lobbied heavily to be able to build a road to connect the main airport in Cold Bay to their village with the hopes of keeping the travel accident rate down. This project is still in negotiation because a section of the proposed road would have to pass through a national wildlife refuge.



who commented to me about my presentation, which included those from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, and other anthropologists, were insistent that Area M is comprised largely of "Seattle boats" and many believed that local Aleut fishermen had long sold their permits to non-resident strangers (or at least one of them, since many were issued two permits after the Limited Entry System was created in 1973). In 1975, 100 seine, 98 drift gillnet, and 99 set gillnet transferable permits were issued to Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian local residents (Malecha, Tingley and Iverson 2000b). A total of 25 transferable permits were issued to other Alaskan non-local residents and a total of 71 transferable permits were issued to non-residents (see Figures 2, 3, and 4). Changes in permit distribution statewide have been tracked by the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) since 1980 (Malecha, Tingley and Iverson 2000a, 2000b). In the Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian region, of the 166 seine permit transfers since 1980, 23 (13.9%) went to a friend/partner, 106 (63.9%) went to an immediate family member, 8 (4.8%) went to another relative, and 29 (17.5%) went to "other". Of the 288 drift permit transfers, 58 (20.1%) went to a friend/partner, 101 (35.1%) went to immediate family, 22 (7.6%) went to another relative, and 107 (37.2%) went to "other". Of the 276 set gillnet permit transfers, 65 (23.6%) went to a friend/partner, 106 (38.4%) went to immediate family, 23 (8.3%) went to another relative, and 82 (29.7%) went to "other" (Figure 5 shows the relationship of transferors to transferees for all seine, drift, and set gillnet permit transfers from 1980-1999). Though many permit holders may list their residency outside of an Aleut village or out of the state of Alaska, their status cannot automatically be considered non-Aleut,

non-family, or stranger. In going through the list of names and addresses of permit holders for the year 2000 of the CFEC website, I was able to identify several from Ferndale and Bellingham, Washington, Anchorage, Kodiak, Palmer, and Kenai as relatives to King Cove residents, not to mention those who I do not know of, or any of the other villages, or other kinds of relationships.

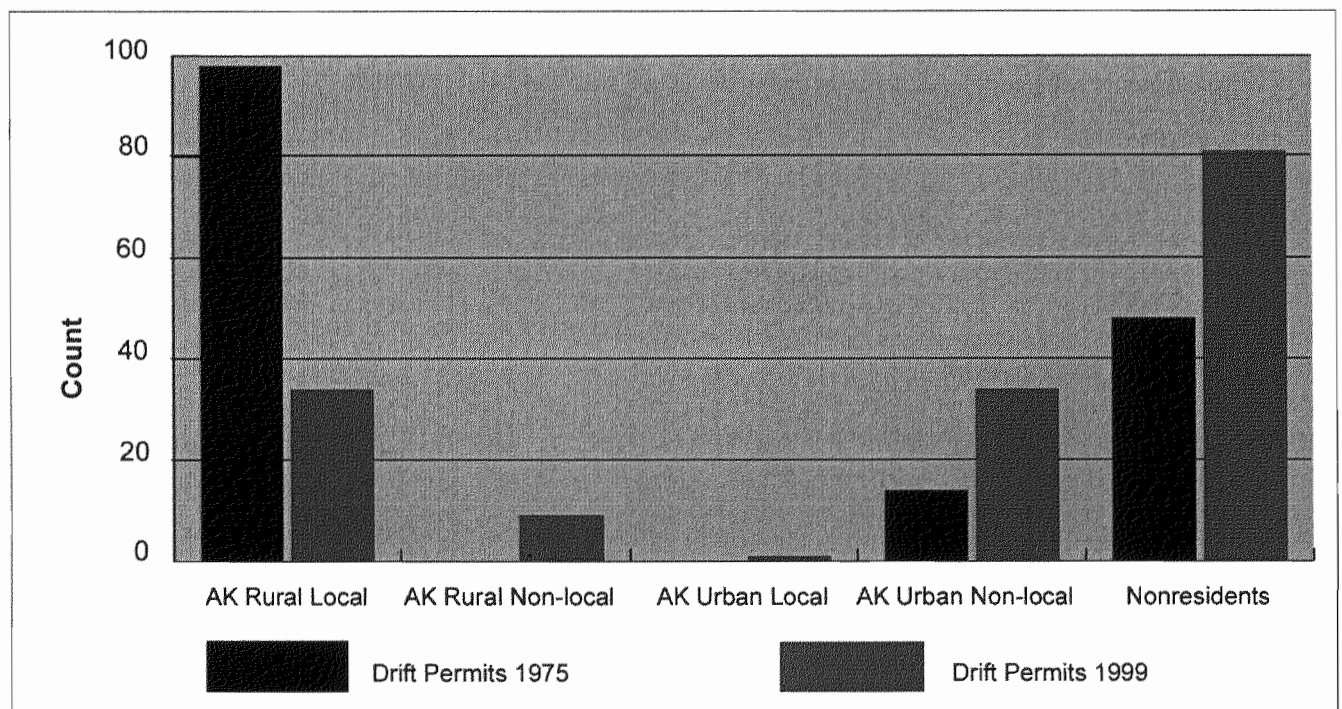
In 2000, there were 85 purse seine, 36 drift gillnet, and 82 set gillnet permit holders who listed King Cove, False Pass, Sand Point or Nelson Lagoon as their primary residence¹² (see Figure 6). These numbers do not take into account that some individuals hold multiple permits. Though these numbers are quite small when compared to the combined approximately 1,568 locally owned Kuskokwim, Lower Yukon, and Arctic salmon permits of Area AYK, it is greater when compared to the percentage of village residents in the region (In 1999 and 2000, 5.2% of the 29,585 AYK residents held salmon permits, whereas 10.7% of the 1,891 residents of Area M communities held salmon permits, or 7.5% of the total 2,697 Aleutians East Borough residents¹³).

The belief that Area M is composed mostly of wealthy Seattle fishermen with jobs the other nine months of the year has fueled much of the arguments for the closure of that salmon fishery. These data indicate that not only are a significant number of local residents holding permits, but that they did not always sell or transfer their permits to the highest bidder. Often permits were sold, traded, or

¹² www.cfec.state.ak.us

¹³ www.census.gov; Malecha, Tingley and Iverson 2000a, 2000b.

Figure 3: Number and residency of drift gillnet permit holders in Area M, 1975 and 1999 (Malecha, Tingley and Iverson 2000b).



gifted to family and friends no matter their residency, or were inherited (Malecha, Tingley and Iverson 2000a:20-21). Fisheries with lower permit values tended to be gifted more than higher values, such as those found in Area AYK, but an exception to this is the Peninsula/Aleutian salmon seine fishery with a high percentage of gift transactions and high permit values (2000a:21).

In both areas, most residents that hold commercial fishing permits employ non-permit-holding members of their families and the community. In King Cove, boys and girls crew on their fathers' boats starting at a young age and it is common for an entire nuclear family to run a boat.

Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc. and King Cove

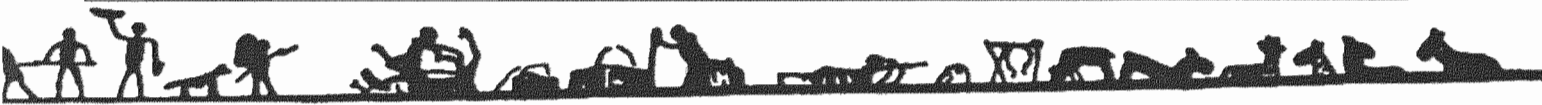
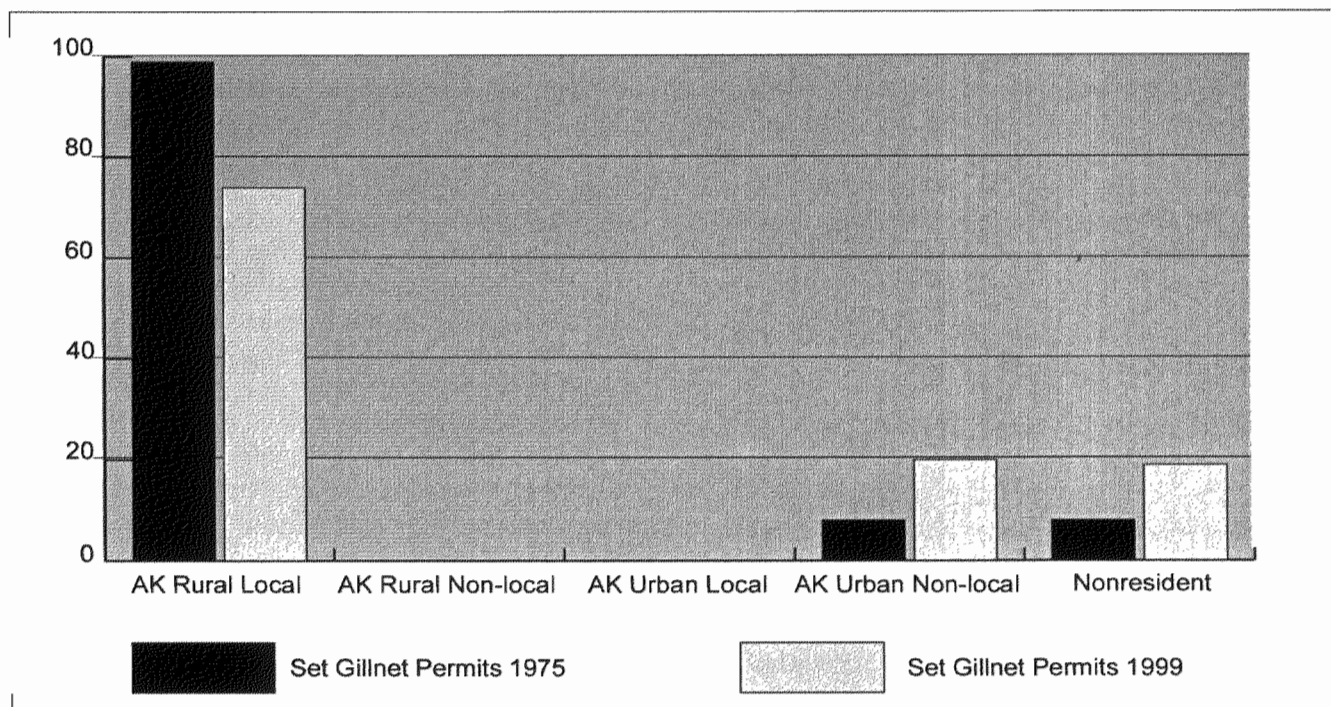
The facility of Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc., currently one of the largest and most diverse canneries in the world, is situated in a fenced compound in the center of downtown King Cove. Though the cannery is on a separate sewer and water system and has its own store, mess hall, Laundromat, and living quarters, the cannery and the community are not rigidly separated. Fishermen and the cannery have a symbiotic relationship; neither one could exist without the other, though dependence of the cannery on the local fleet varies by species. The cannery pays for boat repairs, parts, and other equipment, and determines the price per pound of fish to pay the permit holders. Many cannery workers and managers have been in King Cove for decades, have raised their families in the community, and vote in local elections. Few local Aleuts work in the cannery because so many are fishermen, and their status

and identity in the community depends on access to the fisheries and their ability to fish. Fishermen supply the cannery with seafood, but it is the preparation to fish and the act of harvesting, rather than the processing, that enlivens the community.

The village is centered economically, politically, and socially around the commercial fisheries. The city government operates on a local sales tax (approximately 12% of the total city revenues), a "fish tax" on the fish harvested (30% of the total), federal funding (5%), utilities (28%) and boat harbor revenues (9%) in addition to grants and other revenues (Braund *et al.* 1986:Table 5-3). Local fishermen hold most of the city's offices, having incorporated it as a first class city in 1974. The city has successfully attracted grants and loans for roads, the school, harbor expansion, power, sewer and water. Local fishermen have also taken a measure of control in fishery politics and have been able to influence the price of fish to some extent through striking, lobbying the canneries, and attending meetings during which prices are set. Every political decision made in the community is evaluated in terms of how it will impact the fisheries. For example, the 2000 mayoral election was largely determined by each candidate's position on whether they would allow residents to delay payment of their utility bills during bad fishing years.

A study of identity in an Icelandic fishing town found that social life could not be separated from their economic livelihood (Pálsson 1988; 1993). The same is true in the eastern Aleutian region where the entire social, political, and economic identity of an Aleut community, regardless of gender and age, cannot be separated from the fishing industry. Taylor (1981) found in the coastal settlement

Figure 4. Number and residency of set gillnet permit holders in Area M, 1975 and 1999 (Malecha, Tingley and Iverson 2000b).



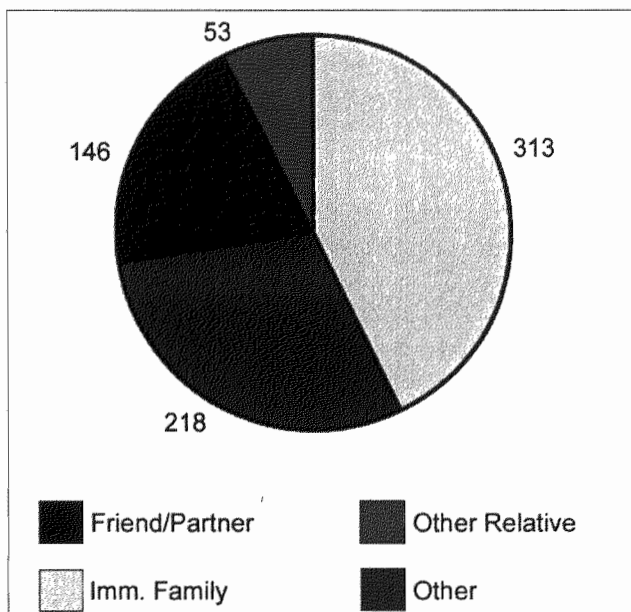


Figure 5. Cumulative number of transfers and relationship of permit transferors to transferees for all seine, drift, and set gillnet permit transfers in the Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian salmon fisheries from 1980-1999 (from Malecha, Tingley and Iverson 2000b).

of Teelin, Ireland, that the pursuit of salmon, even though it is of minor economic importance to the community today, is the source of community and personal identity. The fish are sold commercially, and only a small number of the fishermen earn a worthwhile profit. Though fishing only lasts 8 to 10 weeks of the year and the rest of the year is spent in factories or other jobs, most men describe themselves as fishermen. Taylor argues that, while competition is as frequent as cooperation, the salmon fishery "lends a certain aesthetic coherence to local life, whose effects on the individual psyche should not be undervalued" (1981:787). In the Eastern Aleutians where the fishery's economic importance is much greater, fishing also connects extended families and friends, provides financial stability, and reinforces solidarity and individual identity through cooperative and competitive commercial and subsistence activities. They have privileged access to these natural resources and have developed systems of status and social honor within this fishing complex.

Community disruption

Braund *et al.* (1986) conducted a study evaluating the potential community sociocultural and socioeconomic consequences of harvest disruptions to King Cove due to hypothetical offshore oil development in the eastern Aleutian region. They found that a one-year closure in the Area M fishery (the result of a hypothetical oil spill) would cause fishermen to lose one-third of their gross earnings, city government to lose approximately 15% of its revenue, businesses to suffer from lack of revenue, and there would be a broad disruption in all social and political organizations linked to

the fisheries. Harvest methods and seasons of subsistence activities would change, and reliance on subsistence would increase. Decreased incomes would negatively affect household economies and social health with increased stress linked to financial dependency, alcohol abuse and related crime, negative attitudes towards non-locals, and out-migration. The necessity of women in the workforce (such as cannery labor) would increase. Kinship and extended family relations would increase in importance to harvest activities.

Community disruption in King Cove is not a hypothetical circumstance, and though an oil spill and subsequent closure of one-year is unlikely, many of Braund *et al.*'s predictions are holding true. Stress among borough and city officials has soared, as they are concerned about their budgets, maintaining local infrastructure, and the very survival of the villages. Local businesses are suffering as people are unable to pay for groceries and other needs and cannot pay down a charge account (Gould, personal comm.). Many fishermen find it difficult to pay their city bills and impossible to pay their boat and insurance payments; the cannery will extend credit for these payments, but only temporarily. Seasonal out-migration has increased, as fishermen seek winter employment away from the village to supplement their fishing earnings, and a few have made the decision to move permanently.

The fishing community has experienced past harvest disruptions of all species (Braund *et al.* 1986:Ch. 11:11-18). Despite these declines and rebounds, there has been a continued reliance on these fisheries and an adaptive ability to changing to harvesting other species to compensate for poor seasons. An imposed disruption, as opposed to natural occurrences or one that appears to be temporary, has helped to create a less flexible mindset on behalf of the fishermen, and their adaptive choices are resented.

Northern Economics, Inc. conducted a study for the Aleutians East Borough on the importance of salmon harvests to borough residents (Northern Economics 2000). They looked at a number of future harvest scenarios for Area M, including the closure of all salmon fishing for the month of June. Under this scenario, they found that the average seiner would not be able to cover expenses and will face bankruptcy (2000:Sec.7:1). The average drift and set gillnetter would be able to just cover expenses, but the marginal vessels can expect trouble with creditors. The importance of a cash income must not be downplayed (Langdon 1986:35; Wheeler 1998). Cash is necessary for boat maintenance, insurance payments, house payments, fuel, clothing, and other basic necessities. There are no other viable cash economies in the Aleutians outside of fishing and local infrastructure. Commercial fishing is the primary source of money for the purchase and maintenance of subsistence harvesting equipment (Braund *et al.* 1986), and while it is true that subsistence remains a critical part of the household economy, the burden of supporting these communities in the absence of the fishing industry, even with subsistence practices still intact, would be welfare.



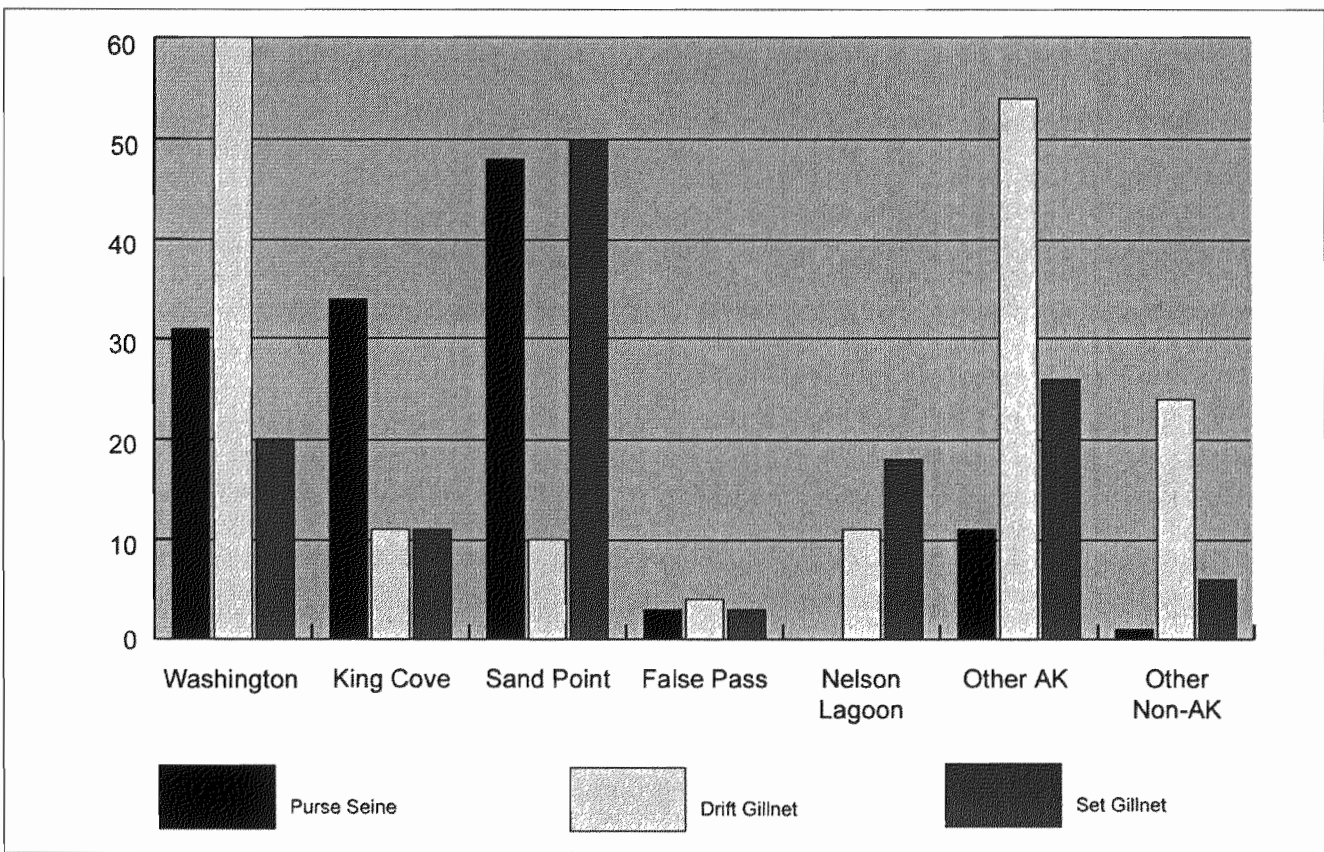


Figure 6. Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian permit holders' residency 2000 (compiled from www.cfec.state.ak.us).

FISHING COMPETITION AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

Anthropologists have long recognized the role of individual success to cultural success (Alexander 1979; Goldschmidt 1991; Leach 1954). Using Malinowski's and Firth's data, Polanyi (1945:53-60) argued that individuals are far more interested in preserving their social status than they are in possessing material wealth. Locally defined identity and social status in the Eastern Aleutian region hinges on all aspects of the commercial fishing industry, especially for males, and multiple forms of male behavior with regards to fishing are culturally exalted.

Historically, Aleut society was highly stratified with hereditary classes of nobles, commoners, and slaves (Townsend 1983). In the past, individual male identity was based on their success as sea mammal hunters, fisherman, and warriors (Maschner and Reedy-Maschner 1998; Townsend 1983). Status-seeking activities follow similar criteria today. Aleut subsistence identity has been transposed into an identity based on access to the commercial fishing industry, success in the industry, and the ability to cope with the environment. As fishing boats replaced labrets as social status markers among the Alutiiq (Mishler and Mason 1996:268), fishing boats have likewise emerged as status indicators among the Aleut. In addition, community leaders tend to be from the largest families, considering

the support base that accompanies them, and they are usually members of the founding families of King Cove who have been fishing the longest.

Fishing and status

Fishing provides more than just food and cash in Aleut villages. The act of fishing in turbulent waters and unpredictable weather is extremely difficult, and fishermen derive a great deal of status from overcoming these obstacles. There is a profound sense of pride and accomplishment in filling the fish holds of their boats, giving fishermen a sense of individual self-worth. Most fishermen boast of their innate ability to fish. They frequently talk of the history of fishing in their families and insist that fishing is "in my blood". In the current era of economic uncertainty, they also frequently talk of their lack of ability to fulfill any other type of job, their lack of interest in any other occupation, and how devastating it would be to have to leave their villages.

Competition between fishermen from other communities has led to an intensification of most fisheries and the purchase of larger, more efficient vessels (e.g. Shirley 1996). Reduced fishing seasons and regulations have exacerbated this trend. Similar to that found in the Norwegian cod fishery (Maurstad 2000), increasing regulations on the industry inspired expansion. Dreaming of a



commercial empire, one Aleut family began to expand their fishing fleet after the founding patriarch passed away, but they are paying the price just two years later because of bad salmon seasons and are trying to sell one of their boats.

Individual fishermen strive for an impressive catch record, and while they might joke about their failures, they refrain from expounding on their own successes. The most successful are called "highliners", who often, but not always, have the largest boats, better equipment, a seasoned crew, and more money. Highliners with their "Midas Touch" are most distinguished in the largely non-resident crab fleets, where ten percent of the fleets catch 90 percent of the crab.

Self-sufficiency and independence of fishermen has been found cross-culturally (Acheson 1981). It is a dangerous, uncertain occupation where so much depends on the skill of the captain, but Aleut fishermen often understate the difficulties and the dangers of their work. Palinkas (1987:301) argued that the sense of self-reliance decreases with participation in the commercial economy due to dependence on a cash income and the market economy, and that self-reliance is easier realized through subsistence activities. The community is cash dependent: fishermen schedule payments on their boats, insurance, maintenance, and family expenses around the different fisheries. If one collapses, they try to make up for it in the next venture. However, independent behavior is still idealized among fishermen and is measured in individual skill and innovation, knowledge of the ocean and fishing grounds, crew management, and commitment to the occupation of fishing, and less so in actual monetary income.

During periods when there is no fishing, fishermen still "go to work." They congregate at the harbor house, which has a small room lined with chairs, walls covered in nautical charts, coffee for all, and the harbormaster's office and VHF radio. This is where most fisheries meetings are held and where the city mayor spends much of his time. Even retired fishermen can be found there giving advice, interpreting the weather report, discussing past seasons, and catching up on the local chatter at all times of the year. Braund *et al.* (1986:Ch. 9, p. 58) noted that this is because they are in their "preferred domain as fishermen."

That male identity is intimately tied to the fishing industry is reiterated in the behaviors and goals of village children. Most young boys aspire to be fishermen, and their future occupational aspirations rarely extend beyond some relationship to the fishing industry. There is no other activity that grabs the attentions of boys more than fishing, and it is not uncommon for teenage boys to be running the family boat on their own. While playing badminton with a six-year-old Aleut boy, he asked, "Can we catch fish with this net?" Likewise, young girls will crew on boats, mend nets, and can or jar fish as soon as they are able, and many aspire to marry fishermen and stay in their community. Some young women become boat captains through inheriting permits from their fathers as well.

Accordingly, their entire childhood identity, male and female, revolves around the harvest, the processing, and the consumption of fish.

Thus, all that it means to be male, and all that many women look for in a male, is tied in some way to being successful in the fishing industry. If there is a major disruption in the Area M fishery, what will be the effects on individual identity and social relations? How will self-worth and status be redefined? At this time in Eastern Aleut culture, there is no viable alternative for status, prestige, and identity in any part of the social, political, or economic system.

ALEUT IDENTITY

Ethnic identity has often been used to avoid demographic collapse or catastrophe (e.g. Nuttall 1998; Stevens 1997). The historic Aleut population and the number of villages have diminished due to the activities of Russian reorganization, disease, and the evacuation of Aleuts during World War II. Today there are approximately 2,850 Aleuts living in the Aleutian region, all of a mixed ethnic heritage (Petrivelli 1991:15). Though Russian, Scandinavian, other European, and Aleut heritage can often be found in the same individual, the majority call themselves Aleut before any other affiliation. The emergence and maintenance of an ethnic identity is often expressed in opposition to dominant forces. In the eastern Aleutians, an Aleut ethnic identity and a heightened sense of cultural distinctiveness is emerging in the face of negative change, and in response to other cultural groups doing the same.

An Aleut identity that crossed village or island boundaries emerged in relation to larger socio-economic and political processes during the Russian and American periods while still being regionally specific, given the vast expanses of ocean between villages (Townsend 1983). As the Russians and Americans strove to enforce and legitimize their dominance through religion, political and social reorganization, education, economic control, and material culture, they inadvertently promoted the unity of Aleuts. Throughout this process, Aleuts revitalized aspects of traditional culture while adopting new religious beliefs, housing styles, and politics and appropriating new symbols of European and Russian power.

Identity and heritage pride has been argued to be the sole means of ensuring cultural survival among Alutiit of the Gulf of Alaska to the east (Pullar 1992). Studies of youth aspirations and identity in rural Alaska found that Native ethnic identity and gender, that is, local images of where they belong in the world, largely determines each village's future in the face of social and economic change (Seyfrit *et al.* 1998). A growing uncertainty as to what to aspire to can be found among Aleut youth, since many of their fishing parents, fearing the future and knowing the uncertainties of the industry, are reluctant to encourage them to follow in their footsteps. Aleut youth are firmly rooted in their environment, in the harvest and consumption of local foods, and are feeling the same strain as their parents.



Area AYK	Area M
No subsistence permit required for any species, except in a few small sections of inland rivers.	Subsistence permit required for salmon, rainbow and steelhead; No permit for other fish species.
No harvest limits set on any species.	Salmon limit of 250.
Few time limits (only in specific districts and for one day before a commercial fishing opener).	No salmon taken within 24-hours before or 12-hours following and within a 50-mile radius of a commercial fishing opener.
Gear limits: for salmon only gillnet, beach seine, fishwheel, and rod and reel are allowed; by spear in a few areas. No gear restrictions on other fish species.	Gear limits: for salmon and other fish species only seine, gillnet, rod and reel, or gear specified on the permit allowed.
No recordkeeping required.	Recordkeeping required on the reverse side of the permit, returned October 31 to the Federal Subsistence Board.

Table 1: Summarized from *Subsistence Management Regulations for the Harvest of Fish and Shellfish on Federal Public Lands and Waters in Alaska*. 1999-2001. Federal Subsistence Board, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Many adult fishermen also believe that they will have to leave their homes and the villages will disappear if they do not encourage their children to try to make the same living. The potential closure of the salmon fishery is viewed as a direct threat to the existence of Aleuts. Steps taken by the State government and environmentalists to close Area M's fisheries have been viewed locally as "genocide." Nowhere in the State's numerous press releases; letters to the president, his cabinet, Alaska's Board of Fisheries, the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council; and speeches and declarations culled from the Governor's Operation Renew Hope website¹⁴ is there any concern for residents in the Aleutians. For example, on August 8, 2000, to Board of Fisheries Chairman Coffey, the Governor wrote, "I request the Board to take action to stop the interceptions of the salmon stocks in the Area M fishery and any other fishery that threaten the subsistence and escapement needs of Western Alaska." Aleuts have largely been dehumanized, referred to solely as "Area M", and their economic lifeblood described as bycatch, interception, or incidental harvest, without any mention of people. Despite their lobbying efforts, there are not enough Aleut votes to affect these political decisions (again, from Census 2000, Aleuts over 18 years of age comprise only 0.3% of voting age Alaskans and 2.4% of voting age Alaskan Natives). The State has concluded that all salmon user groups share the burden in protecting subsistence rights, but by cutting Aleuts off from their livelihood, they will create the same social problems in Aleut villages that have plagued western Alaskan villages for decades.

Aleuts have an historical claim to fish just as much as any other Alaska Native group, and perhaps they have a greater claim to fish commercially given their historical role in global economic activities discussed above, but that might mean very little in today's political climate. The Native American Rights Fund seemed to neglect Aleut Native-ness when defending Yup'ik and Iñupiaq villages' attempts to block the June salmon fishery in Area M.¹⁵ The Governor's failure to consider the impact of his recommendations on the people of Area M is equally indicative of the disregard for Native Aleut claims.

Without debating which fish belong to which Native group, Aleuts see residents along the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers receiving special considerations. Politicians make trips out to their villages to hear their grievances, but trips to Aleut communities are often at the expense of the Aleutians East Borough or the villages themselves. In addition, the rules regarding subsistence activities set by the Federal Subsistence Board are quite different for the commercially defined Areas M and AYK, and are more restrictive for Area M (see Table 1). Subsistence users in Area AYK are allowed to self-regulate their harvests, which the State and federal boards consider to be relatively low and stable, and impose no limitations, whereas the Aleutians are closely monitored and limited (Federal Subsistence Board 1999-2001; Wolfe 1984:174). Rules regarding commercial fisheries in each area are likewise inconsistent, but to elucidate these fisheries management issues is to track a perpetually

¹⁴ www.gov.state.ak.us/Rural/RenewHope/index.html

¹⁵ <http://www.narf.org>. In *Native Village of Elim vs. State of Alaska*, the Native American Rights Fund filed a motion in State court siding with the Iñupiaq community against Aleut fishermen to compel the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to take steps to minimize the harvest of chum salmon.



moving target, though it is generally written that overharvest is a concern at the start of salmon migration and not at the end where they spawn. There are stark differences between harvesting salmon in the open ocean, where a higher grade of fish is to be found, and harvesting salmon where they spawn since their flesh starts to decay as soon as they reach fresh water.

Few Aleuts dispute the fact that the situation is a dire one in the 80 villages of the disaster area, but the proposed solutions to the social and economic problems found along the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers (e.g. Fienup-Riordan 1994; Lee 1995; Palinkas 1987; Shinkwin and Pete 1983; Wood 1999) are considered to be more than an economic threat to Aleuts. As one local man put it, "We'll become Anchorage's next street people." If Aleuts can no longer fish commercially, social problems will escalate, people will be forced to relocate in order to survive, the villages will gradually disappear, and eastern Aleut culture will cease to exist.

COPING WITH RAPID CHANGE

The local behavioral health coordinator in King Cove found fishing to correlate inversely with emotional health, though he believes that successful fishing seasons do not always lead to healthy individuals and families (Gallagher, personal comm.). He found that during successful fishing seasons, there is an increase in alcohol problems, drug use, adultery, and divorce. During bad years, there is an increase in depression and anxiety, family violence, sexual abuse, and relational problems. Some spouses fear bad years because of the potential for abuse. When there is a surplus of money, he noted that there is some hedonistic behavior. Men who feel a sense of prosperity might be compelled to travel to Anchorage to spend money, cheat on their wives, or perhaps leave their families. When there is a deficit, there is a lot of anxiety, tension, irritability, and people looking for someone to blame. Data on substance abuse, especially alcohol abuse, family violence, separations and divorce, and emigration has been anecdotally collected by myself, but it is difficult to quantify these kinds of problems and their relationship to the fisheries at this point. In King Cove, previous restrictions in the fisheries have already created disenfranchised individuals and social problems that the community must cope with. Social problems among youth are far less prevalent in the salmon season and teens do not get in as much trouble when they are fishing. "This is our slow time," said one mental health counselor during the June salmon fishery. But what will occur when every season is a "slow time," as should be expected if there is a closure of the Area M fishery?

Strategies for survival

In this time of rapid change and political conflict, different strategies for survival have emerged in both the Aleut and Yup'ik

regions of Alaska. The Yupiit tend to have more visible cultural symbols and traditions than do Aleuts, and Aleuts are now having to adopt similar practices and rhetoric as the Yupiit in order to survive. The result of Yupiit appeals for help was a State coordinated response to the disaster in western Alaska, dubbed "Operation Renew Hope," which includes work programs for youth and job training, food aid, and energy assistance.

There is a growing sense among Aleuts that they need to recapture their historical identity in order to combat contemporary political trends. This historical identity is becoming an important position for debate in disputes over fisheries, and undoubtedly history will be shaped by the present circumstances. Aleuts are devising new ways to combat potentially damaging political decisions and are assessing how harmful the fisheries closure would be to their culture and their entire way of life. Part of their strategy is to make concessions and agree to some restrictions. They may have to agree to put observers on their boats to prove that they are avoiding harvesting chum salmon. It was even suggested that they donate the chums that do get harvested to Yupiit (which they freely agreed to) and hire them on their boats as crew (which was not taken as a real suggestion given the amount of bad feelings in both regions).

Given what is at stake, many Aleuts have begun to describe themselves as better custodians of marine resources than the people of Area AYK and as able to sustain their livelihood without government intervention. Without direct knowledge of Yup'ik practices, they talk of poor sewage draining into the rivers and of the Yupiit hanging fish on the banks to rot after stripping the roe. Aleut fishermen argue that one cannot harvest fish where they spawn and expect them to return to the streams, and that the State has mismanaged all fisheries in western Alaska.

In addition, though there are several Aleuts who have been actively involved in fisheries politics for decades, the majority of Aleutian fishermen are having to recast themselves as politicians and become their own advocates in order to keep fishing. They have been engaging directly with the State and federal governments: they write letters to the Congressional Delegation, community leaders have been known to dine at the homes of State Senators, and several have testified in front of Congress on all matters from reparations for damages during World War II to the building of a road to protecting their right to fish. But these activities are taking a toll as well. The expectation and pressure on individual fishermen and their families to pay their way to meetings (many of which are held during fishing openers), testify, write letters, and act as politicians in order to fish is creating social and political stress between individuals and between communities. This is creating destabilizing competition between individuals, families, and villages where cooperation has been the historical norm.



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Most arctic societies depend upon local marine resources. Anthropological studies of this dependence focus on the traditional importance of subsistence and coping with economic loss (e.g. Anderson 1998; Condon, Collings and Wenzel 1995; Langdon 1991; McNabb 1988). Hensel (1996) argued that Yup'ik peoples constantly construct ethnicity and identity through subsistence practices and discourse, and that changes in these traditional avenues for success affect cultural identity. I argue that this can be extended to the traditional commercial fishing activities in Aleut villages.

The image of Eastern Aleutian villages has been distorted across Alaska to suggest a wealthy, non-resident, non-Native fishing fleet with little or no vested interest in sustaining the fisheries. However, the majority of the fishermen are local Native residents that are entirely dependent upon the salmon fisheries for their livelihood and are deeply intertwined in a sociocultural system of status and identity that cannot be separated from the fishing industry. Local fishermen catch most of the fish, own their boats and permits, and manage their own crews. Many non-resident fishermen are relatives or friends who obtained their permits from local fishermen through gift, trade or sale, and are not seen as outside competition siphoning away money and resources. The cannery depends on the local fleet for the harvest of salmon, and they cater to the standard small-boat fisherman. The cannery formerly employed a large number of local residents (primarily women) in processing and cannery maintenance, but much of the local population gradually removed itself from those jobs as fishing became more lucrative. They participate in other fisheries in smaller percentages because to enter into these fisheries requires new permits, new gear, and often, new boats, and the social significance of these fisheries is not as strong as it is for salmon.

Eastern Aleutian fishermen took an active role in commercial development from its inception: they relocated their villages voluntarily, hired on at the canneries as seasonal processors, and purchased vessels and gear to fit the fishery, from dories tending fish traps to diesel-powered boats with hydraulic net lifts and reels. Commercial fisheries have increasingly gained in their importance economically, socially and culturally. Permits, boats, and required insurance are expensive to maintain and if fishermen are not allowed to catch enough fish to meet expenses and feed their families, they will have to sell out and be disenfranchised from their society. Aleutian social and cultural identity pivots on the reliance on the local environment, and it is through the fishermen's relationship with the natural resources that Aleuts express and transmit the core of their identity, social organization, discourse, and culture to their children.

Wiener and Mesquida (1997) demonstrate that levels of cultural violence and crime are intimately related to the number of

disenfranchised males in that society – a serious problem among the Aleut when identity is directly tied to their role as fishermen. It has been well documented that a disruption in traditional status outlets for males, without a culturally defined alternative, results in increased levels of crime, violence, and social unrest (Daly and Wilson 1988; Maschner and Reedy-Maschner n.d.; Reedy-Maschner and Maschner 1999; Wilson and Daly 1985). Social problems have been linked to the systematic erosion of individual autonomy in the high arctic (Bodenhorn 1988), a concern in the Aleutians where individual and community independence in fishing is so highly valued. Palinkas (1987) examined problems related to integrating commercial industries with traditional subsistence in Bristol Bay and found that stress-related morbidity and mortality occur among disenfranchised residents who have been lost in the attempt to merge these two systems. However, Aleuts successfully merged the subsistence with the commercial and have maintained low rates of crime, violence, substance abuse, and mental health problems that disproportionately plague so many arctic rural communities. The cause of Aleut disenfranchisement is externally imposed, and we can expect these rates to increase.

It has been argued that identity is often most visible during times of social and economic upheaval when individuals may lose social or economic privileges. Differences in how Aleutian fishermen and western Alaska fishermen are regulated and treated by bureaucracy have exacerbated an ethnic conflict over Native rights and the cultural importance of subsistence and commercial fishing. On the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers, subsistence fishing is regulated by local custom whereas subsistence fishing on the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutians is externally limited. The social and cultural role of commercial fishing has been given less weight relative to subsistence throughout the State. Aleuts believe that their traditional commercial livelihood is equally worthy of preservation and that their existence as a culture depends on their access to the fisheries.

After surviving earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, climatic change, the trauma of Russian reorganization, American hegemony, and forced relocation in World War II, the final blow to Aleut culture and society would be the closure of the traditional commercial fisheries. Considering changes in the fishing industry, the globalization of the arctic, and the structure of Aleut communities, it is a critical time for the investigation of the place of individuals, families, and villages in these larger constructs.

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