

## TRAGEDY OF COMMODIFICATION: Displacements in Alutiiq Fishing Communities in the Gulf of Alaska

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**ABSTRACT** Processes of marine enclosure are radically shifting ocean governance and marine-based livelihoods across the globe. Drawing on ethnographic research with indigenous Alutiiq fishing villages in the Gulf of Alaska, this paper explores the displacements generated by the privatization of fisheries access. Social and economic relationships between Alutiiq villages and salmon canneries in the twentieth century facilitated flexible commercial-subsistence fishing engagements. More recent property rights forms of fisheries harvest have brought about a dramatic alienation of local fishing rights and place-based livelihoods. The commodification of fishing rights is based on conceptualizations of human-environment relationships fundamentally opposed to the cultural logics of social dependence and informal economy of village communities. Privatization discourses and policies represent fishing participants as efficient, professional, fully engaged in commercial economies, and geographically and occupationally mobile; fishing motivations as profit-driven; and fishing rights as alienable commodities. These conceptualizations have excluded and marginalized certain kinds of fishing operations, lifestyles, communities, and rights.

### Introduction

The potent narrative of the tragedy of the commons is often invoked in academic and popular imaginaries concerning the fate of global fisheries. A current iteration of this tale, 'privatization prevents collapse of fish stocks' (Costello *et al.* 2008), discursively links the so-called property-rights problem of fisheries (Macinko 2009; Mansfield 2004; Macinko and Bromley 2002) with the crisis narrative of global overfishing. The widespread circulation of this discourse has created a fertile context for increased fishery privatization, not under the auspices of maximizing wealth capture as previously articulated, but for the conservation of depleted resources. Despite the 'conceptual confusion' (Bromley 2008, 2009) and a host of studies that draw attention to the complexity of ecological, economic, and social factors of fishery systems that make broad generalizations about privatization and resource health problematic (Copes 1986; McCay and Acheson 1987; Squires *et al.* 1995; NRC 1999, 2002; Brandon 2004; Acheson 2006; Chu 2009), the linking of privatization and conservation has successfully enrolled powerful actors. In the U.S., for example, millions of dollars of investment from the federal government, international environmental non-governmental organizations, and

private foundations are currently guiding the widespread privatization of fisheries access (NOAA Fisheries 2009; Schreiber 2010).

This paper presents a challenge to this 'contagion' (Butler 2008) of resource privatization rapidly unfolding in the U.S. The dominance of privatization framings discursively focused on environmental concerns has backgrounded central equity issues arising from the public-to-private transfer of rights that accompanies resource privatization.<sup>1</sup> The distributional inequities resulting from the privatization of access rights, including the concentration of wealth and power and the loss of livelihood, particularly for low-income, small-scale fishermen and rural communities, has been widely documented around the globe (for example, Langdon 1990; McCay 1995, 2004; Davis 1996; Eythorsson 1996; Copes 1997; Pálsson and Helgason 1995; Helgason and Pálsson 1997; Lowe and Carothers 2008; Pinkerton and Edwards 2009). In Alaska, where fish stocks remain generally healthy, the dominant narrative of the tragedy of the commons is not nearly as appropriate of a metaphor as is the tragedy of commodification (Greenberg 1998; Walley 2004), or the tragedy of the margins (Kleinen 2009). Privatizing the right to fish in Alaska has had fundamental impacts on the fishing lifestyle in remote coastal communities. Enclosure and commodification of resource access rights has deeply constrained the flexible, opportunistic engagements that have formed the backbone of rural economies for generations (Lowe 2008; Lowe and Carothers 2008). Dominant discourses of efficiency and profit maximization have marginalized coastal community cultural logics structured around values of sufficiency (Princen 2005; Ommer 2007; McCay 2008).

In this paper, I explore one case study to make explicit the displacements brought about by the privatization of resource rights. By tracing the recent history of indigenous Alutiiq communities of the Kodiak Archipelago in southwestern Alaska, I consider the undermining of fishing practice, culture, and economy that has resulted from a cascade of resource enclosure and privatization. Beginning in the 1970s, privatization policies created a rupture with the village cultures and economies based on flexible engagements with commercial fishing. Since the early twentieth century, commercial fishing has supplemented coastal subsistence-based livelihoods in the Gulf of Alaska. The nature of adaptive fishing participation, that is, fishing when income is needed, adjusting to seasonal and annual ecological and economic fluctuations, has been impacted by policies that have necessitated large capital expenditures for purchasing harvest rights and a more permanent, continuous engagement with commercial fishing (Carothers 2008a). As explored below, the cascading enclosure and commodification of fishing rights is severing the place, resource, and livelihood attachments of Kodiak communities.

This research draws upon ethnographic research conducted between 2005 and 2010, primarily in the communities of Larsen Bay, Old Harbor, and Ouzinkie, including over 100 semi-structured interviews, seventy-one household surveys, and detailed participant observation (Carothers 2008b). Additionally, eight oral history interviews conducted in 2010 with elder Alutiiq fishermen and their families inform the arguments advanced in this paper.



From the first journey leaving the town of Kodiak, an outsider, sitting in a tiny plane, small against the enormity of the mountainous islands, fjords, and the vast expanse of the sea below, easily perceives the physical remoteness of the outlying villages in the Archipelago. Upon arrival on the small gravel airstrips, planes are instantly greeted by a handful of trucks and all-terrain vehicles waiting to pick up packages from town or returning family members. Here, visitors witness the first of many displays of the cultural and economic distinctiveness of the village communities. A trip to the village store in Larsen Bay, for example, teaches outsiders that formal commerce here is only open for one hour a day, every other day, provided that the storekeeper is in town. Currently, no village has a restaurant. While groceries from the small village stores and the town of Kodiak are regularly utilized, village residents actively engage in a rural subsistence-based lifestyle and depend upon wild resources for a large portion of their diet. In 2003, wild harvests averaged approximately 115 usable kilograms per person per year. About ninety percent of the subsistence diet is marine-derived; salmon make up the majority of harvest, combined with other fish such as halibut and cod, marine mammals such as sea lion and seal, and marine invertebrates, such as chitons, sea urchin, octopus, and clams (Fall 2006).

Until very recently, the 'entangled livelihoods' (Reedy-Maschner 2009) of subsistence and commercial fishing defined Alutiiq cultures and economies; nearly ninety percent of all households depended directly on income from commercial fishing. Fishing was the core of community and economic structure. Currently less than thirty percent of village households participate directly in any commercial fishery. This rapid decrease in fishing participation has brought about challenges to the subsistence economy which depends heavily on access to commercial fishing; village depopulation; economic and social displacements; and an 'in-between' or lost generation of young people, the majority of whom are not involved in fishing-based livelihoods (Carothers 2008a). Despite economic diversification opportunities in some communities, primarily in guided fishing and hunting tourism, high rates of unemployment and depopulation threaten village sustainability. While large-scale global political economic factors have exacerbated these trends, particularly the globalization of farmed salmon that has greatly depressed the price of wild salmon and the economic and social disruptions caused by the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, policies that privatized the right to harvest fish have greatly constrained fisheries access and have largely displaced village fishing lifestyles.

#### *Developing Village Fishing Economies*

The village communities of the Kodiak Archipelago are embedded in a postcolonial context. For the 7,500 years of human habitation of the Kodiak area, Kodiak people have made their living from the sea. The archaeological record shows the dominance of a marine mammal diet shifting to a greater reliance on salmon and other fish species approximately 4,000 years ago (Clark 1984). Salmon linked marine and freshwater habitats enabling coastal and interior settlements of the Archipelago (Steffian *et al.* 2006). At the time of the Russian invasion in the 1780s,

over 10,000 Sugpiaq, or indigenous Alutiiq peoples, were living in permanent and season villages. Kodiak Island became a primary hub for the Russian fur trade; Alutiiq peoples were quickly and forcefully conscripted as hunters and producers for the Russian American Company. Violence and disease decreased the indigenous population by two-thirds (Clark 1984). Intermarriage and the adoption of Russian customs, particularly, Russian Orthodoxy, has had a lasting effect on Alutiiq culture and identity (Luehrmann 2008; Black 2004).

The transfer of the Alaska Territory to the United States in 1867 began a new set of assimilative policies and violences (see Luehrmann 2008). The development of marine resource harvesting and processing capacity throughout the region had a profound effect on the development of the six contemporary Alutiiq communities in the Kodiak Archipelago. Salmon canneries were developed with San Francisco and Seattle-based capital, beginning in Karluk in the 1880s and soon spreading through Larsen Bay, Afognak Island, Alitak Bay, Olga Bay, Moser Bay, and Uganik Bay (Roppel 1994). Over the course of the next few decades, each Alutiiq village would become heavily engaged in cannery relationships.

Industrial salmon cannery development in the Kodiak Archipelago was a primary driver of change for Alutiiq villages in the twentieth century. While the large-scale extraction of salmon, a staple resource, by colonial capital prompted early acts of resistance, Alutiiq peoples were quick to engage intimately in catching and processing fish for trade under these emerging economies (Davis 1976; Mishler 2003; Luehrmann 2008). Many local men were employed by the canneries to harvest salmon by beach seine, set gillnet, and later by purse seine vessel. Cannery boats and gear were leased by village fishermen, often informally. These leasing relationships depended on social ties between the cannery superintendents and local fishermen. Relationships were sealed with handshakes, payments flexible based on fishing earnings. Many fishermen recall that in times of need, the 'canneries would carry' them until earnings were generated the next season. Women were also engaged in cannery work, usually processing fish in the plants. In the early years, fishermen and women were paid in goods, or credit at the company stores (Moser 1902), a practice that continued through the second half of the century. These systems of credit, while generating a system of indebtedness from one perspective, were seen locally as an important safety net to fluctuating salmon returns and prices. Many fishermen recollect that these relationships were built on mutual dependability. One fisherman remarked:

In the fifties and sixties, those were some pretty tough years. The cannery stores, they'd give families credit to get groceries to live on for the winter. It was a way of life. Some guys were extremely faithful to the cannery. My uncle that I fished with, the cannery took care of him and he gave 100 percent back to them. It's an ethic a lot of us grew up with.

The development of these close relationships shaped a village economy and culture based on seasonal engagement in commercial fishing and informal systems of credit and exchange (Taylor 1966; Befu 1970; Davis 1971; Roppel 1994; Partnow 2001; Luehrmann 2008). The social and economic ties with the canneries were so

entrenched by the middle of the twentieth century that many current village residents cannot imagine their community's existence without the local canneries. The canneries engendered a seasonal maintenance economy that complemented a subsistence lifestyle based in place. The mixed and informal economies of Alutiitq villages tied to seasonal rounds of resource procurement distributed through trade and sharing networks define life ways distinctive from those more heavily integrated into market economies (Langdon *et al.* 1986; Wolfe and Ellanna 1983). In my interviews, several fishermen noted the complementarities and interdependence of commercial and subsistence fishing:

cc: When you were younger growing up, did people think differently about fishing for commercial income versus fishing for food? Or were those activities linked?

Fisherman 1: Yeah, they were sort of linked. You fished in the summer to make the money to live all winter. The base was that subsistence ... It was part of the same process.

Fisherman 2: Part of the same process. You know, we didn't give it a whole lot of thought. We'd try to get our subsistence fish before the commercial season started. And, if you couldn't, you'd take a small amount of your catch home. You know, I still do that. You just run out of time and in the spring of the year to put up your winter pack, you do it throughout the season. You bring a few fish home and, in the fall of the year, you go out and get some more, whatever you might need, you know, for the winter. So it was a good relationship – no one got in the other one's way.

cc: How did people think about commercial fishing back then? Was that something really different than fishing for food?

Fisherman 3: You know, it was just something you did. I don't think anybody really thought about it one way or another. It was something you had to do, you know, to earn a living. A lot of the women were employed in the canneries. They worked at the processing plants and the guys went fishing. It was just -- it's just the way things were. You never thought, 'What am I going to do this summer?' You just knew what you were going to do ... in 1965, I ran a boat for the cannery. I leased boats after that. And, then, in 1971, we had our first boat built, my wife and I ... Back then it was family-oriented. Especially growing up in the village, you knew that that's what you were going to do. There was nothing else to do summertime. And I was a pre-teen when I started fishing. For most of the guys of my age set, you know, it's something you did. You didn't think 'if I'm going to go fishing,' it's 'when you're going to go fishing'.

The close integration of salmon canneries and Alutiiq villages solidified the role of commercial fishing engagements as a key source of income, an unquestioned way of life. As this way of life developed, the cannery and commercial fishing participation became integral to living remotely in village communities; the subsistence lifestyle depended on boats, fuel, and gear.

In the 1950s and 1960s, some Alutiiq fishermen began successful independent fishing operations, often with the financial backing of local canneries. As fishermen began to solidify their roles as independent fishermen separate from the canneries, some diversified into other developing fisheries, including herring, halibut, crab, shrimp, and cod (see below). In the early 1970s, dozens of boats were operating out of each village. Many of these boats at that time were still 'company boats', leased from the canneries. Some fishermen had worked their way up from small wooden boats and upgraded to independently-owned fiberglass vessels. Nearly all village households were directly involved in commercial fishing.

Within the span of the next thirty years, engagement in commercial fishing-based livelihoods would drop by nearly seventy percent (Carothers 2008a). Shifts in commercial fisheries participation have always occurred in village communities, as in other communities, based on a complex grid of social, economic, and ecological factors. What is new about recent shifts is that they appear to be more permanent, and their impacts more pronounced. Informants stress that a cascade of resource enclosure beginning in the 1970s with policies that individualized and commodified fishing rights were a primary cause of fisheries shifts in this recent period. These policies ushered in new conceptualizations of resource-people relationships, fundamentally different from the social dependence, mixed-economic relationships that defined the cannery-village period.

### **Conceptual Disconnects**

Resource economists and managers that developed the policies of enclosure in the 1970s employed certain assumptions about the nature of fishing participants, fishing lifestyles, and fishing rights quite in contrast with the realities of participants, lifestyles, and rights in rural indigenous communities. In these new discourses and policies, fishing participants were idealized to be 'highly efficient, technically advanced, professional, with full year-round employment, [having] no ties to any state, regional, or local fishery but instead is spatially mobile' (Langdon 1982:108). Fishing lifestyles were assumed to be profit-oriented. Fishing rights were defined as individual commodities to be bought and sold. These conceptual disconnects have excluded and marginalized certain kinds of fishermen and certain kinds of fishing lifestyles.

#### *Fishing Operations and Motivations*

In the 1972, the State of Alaska amended its constitution to allow for exclusive access to fisheries for the purposes of conservation, economic viability, and the development of aquaculture. The limitation of access was meant 'to prevent economic distress among fishermen and those dependent upon [fishing] for a liveli-

hood' (Alaska Constitution VIII:15) amid concerns of poor salmon returns paired with increasing numbers of non-residents fishery participants. While this measure was taken primary to keep fishing rights in the hands of rural Alaskans, the limited entry policy ironically had the opposite effect, displacing many from fishery resources (Langdon 1980; Petterson 1983; Kamali 1984).

Displacements occurred first in the initial allocation of limited entry permits. Fishermen were asked to apply for a permit based on a point system that attempted to measure involvement and investment in, and dependence on, the salmon fishery. This application process provides evidence of the contrasting models of fishing operations employed by the state and by many rural fishermen. The economic pluralism of rural fishermen and the mixing of commercial and subsistence engagements were detrimental to permit qualification based in part on the duration of commercial engagement within a single season (Koslow 1986). The assumption that fishing operations were individually run was also often an inappropriate classification of rural fishing operations. Many local rural residents ran their fishing operations in partnerships or kin groups, rather than non-locals who tended to run their operation in hierarchical captain-crew relationships; partners often jointly owned vessels and gear (Koslow 1986). In the Kodiak villages, family-run boats were common. The partnership and kin-based model of running a fishing operation did not match the individualization model of the limited entry permit system. Additionally, capital ownership was given greater weight than labor in measuring investment in the fishery. Crew members who did not own vessels or gear permits found it difficult to accrue enough points to qualify for a permit.

Despite attempts by the state to provide for measures of dependence on the fishery, these fundamental mismatches between the conceptualization of a fishing enterprise under the limited entry program and future privatization policies and the reality of fishing enterprises throughout rural Alaska has brought about the alienation of resource rights from rural fishermen. As Koslow (1986:59-60) sums up for the Bristol Bay region:

The application's implicit definition of a legitimate Bristol Bay fisherman was based upon the non-rural fisherman – one who fishes every season, good or bad, and fishes the entire season, both the peak and tails of the run, who maintains written records of income and has sufficient education to comprehend a complex application process. The application failed to recognize the need of local residents to maintain a diversified economy in the face of the drastically fluctuating salmon runs.

These disconnects in assumptions about what constitutes a legitimate fishermen excluded many rural residents from the initial allocation of limited entry permits. Koslow's household survey in rural villages in the area suggested that just years after the policy was implemented, significant exclusion of young people to the fishery had occurred. In 1979, seventy two percent of young men aged eighteen to thirty-five had no permit, eighty-five percent of those aged eighteen to twenty-four had no permit.

The conceptual mismatch extends from the idealization of fishing operations to the framing of what social and economic motivations or needs a fishery is meant to achieve. Defined by resource economists, a fishery is made up of individual boats attempting to maximize profit. By contrast, commercial fishing in Alutiiq communities at the time of limited entry implementation was a livelihood practice pursued by many to support a subsistence lifestyle in place not wealth accumulation. Mason (1993) notes the important distinction between 'lifestyle' and 'business' motivations evident in Kodiak fisheries. Similarly, St. Martin (2007) draws on Davis' (1996) conceptualization of the shifts from 'livelihood harvesting' to 'accumulation harvesting' in his examination of the persistence of non-capitalism in New England fisheries.

The role of fishing is embedded in socioeconomic systems and varies based on the diversity of those systems. By the time of limited entry implementation, some Alutiiq fishermen pursuing salmon and other fisheries were seeking profits. Others in the same communities continued to live a subsistence lifestyle, accessing commercial salmon fishing primarily for winter support. One fisherman noted the inherent contradiction – those from the outside 'wanted it to be profitable year after year,' whereas the locals had a long history of adjusting to cyclical variation in resources and earnings wanting merely a sufficient flow of income. The livelihood fishing model has been particularly poorly served by limited entry and other resource privatization policies where permit and quota prices have accrued great monetary value. The shifts in value that accompany commodification lead to a related point of discussion – the conceptualization of resource rights and value.

#### *Resource Rights and Value*

The discussion above reviews how from the conceptualization stage of fishing operations and motivations, rural fishermen were often excluded from formal access rights. Similarly, the conceptualization of the commoditization and alienability of fishing rights has also led to exclusions, as permits have been sold or as individuals have migrated out of the rural communities. This alienation has delocalized knowledge, identity, and for many place. Many interviewees stress the fundamental disconnect between the assumption that the right to fish should be a commodity that can be bought and sold and the assumption that the right to fish should be an inalienable right.

Many people stressed in their interviews that fishing was the lifeblood of their communities, what gave their lives meaning, what connected old and young, what people continue to tell stories about, what people continue to be proud of, and what people continue to form their identities around – in sum, a highly valued life way. But in those same interviews, many note the contradictions of the economic realities and cultural mismatches of the integral value of fishing life ways and the monetary value of permits and quota that often make sales attractive or necessary and purchases prohibitive.

The commodification of fishing rights has led to the alienation of rural fishing livelihoods. In 1986, Koslow found that local residents in Bristol Bay were more dependent on the local fishery than outsiders; however, they also earned significantly less than those from outside the region. In the same year, Langdon

also noted that rural fishermen in Kodiak were earning less than half, on average, than fishermen operating out of the City of Kodiak. Koslow discusses the 'devaluing' of permits by rural or indigenous fishermen. He states that the lower earnings by rural fishermen compared to urban or non-local fishermen combined with economic needs made permit sales more attractive to some rural fishermen. The cyclical nature of the resource dependent rural economy often 'results in more severe short-term cash-flow problems, and, in turn, leads to permits sales' (60); sales of permits were noted most commonly in winter time following a season of poor salmon returns.

My interview data suggest several factors lead to increased rate of permit and quota sale among Alutiiq fishermen. For many families living a subsistence lifestyle in remote coastal communities, cash income is low. In 2000, the median annual household income in Kodiak Alutiiq villages ranged from 19,167 u.s. dollars (Karluk) to 54,375 u.s. dollars (Ouzinkie). Thirty-five percent of the households I surveyed in three villages 2005-2006 earned 15,000 u.s. dollars or less, some as low as 2,000 u.s. dollars per year (Carothers 2008b). This low cash flow can make money more attractive in the short-term, particularly in times of financial hardship or need (Langdon 1980). The holding of a high-value capital asset like a limited entry permit disqualified families from commonly accessed program available for indigenous peoples in the u.s. providing perverse incentives for permits sales. Large economic barriers to permit purchase exist for those without much income, capital assets, or access to loans. The price of permits and quota for the vast majority of rural Kodiak fishermen is prohibitive. Social barriers exist for many Alutiiq fishermen accessing information about fishery management programs. These barriers fundamentally shifted the life path for many people growing up in villages in the 1970s and 1980s. One fisherman recalled the economic stakes of permit ownership in Chignik, an Alutiiq village similar to the Kodiak communities across the Shelikof Strait on the Alaska Peninsula.

cc: You mentioned that it was the dream of most young people to grow up and have a boat...

Fisherman: Uh-huh.

cc: But that's changed quite a bit it seems?

Fisherman: Yeah, I think so. With the advent of limited-entry -- like in Chignik, guys are buying boats and permits for as high as \$750,000 [u.s. dollars]. It was crazy. You know, fishing all my life, I couldn't understand why they were doing that. And I turned down an offer of \$800,000 on my boat in, I think it was 1994.

cc: Oh, my goodness. So that's a pretty big change, then, from pre and post-limited-entry?

Fisherman: Yeah. You know, I fought against it. Even though I qualified for a permit, I fought against limited-entry 'cause I see what it's going to do to young people who wanted to get into the fishery, you know.

A couple of other fishermen articulated a similar concern in the Kodiak area.

...limited-entry, it pretty much took everybody's dreams away of being fishermen and running your own boat. You know, 'I can't afford to buy a permit. I can't afford to buy gear and a boat'. And along come IFQ's (individual fishing quotas), you know, and it just added to it. It just took the dream away. Or the goal away, whatever you want to call it. (Ouzinkie Fisherman)

You look at it now, if you aren't in the fishery *and you aren't made*, it's going to be pretty tough to get in there. I don't see how, you know, unless you got a rich dad or a rich uncle... (Old Harbor Fisherman)

The incredible sums of money necessary to access fishing livelihoods also bind fishermen into new relationships of indebtedness. Whereas in previous decades social cannery relationships based on flexible engagements and seasonal rounds enabled fishermen to weather fluctuation in resource abundance or price, new debt relationships based on bank loans require consistent payment. Provided that one has access to financial institutions and can purchase a permit, boat, and gear, this hefty debt load requires fishing for money income, even if fish stocks or prices are low.

One elder fisherman noted: 'My eldest son and I bought one of my uncle's permits in 1995. I think we paid \$230,000, something like that for it. Things were pretty good and, all of a sudden, our fish had collapsed for a few years and things got pretty tough'. As Robinson (1996:88) notes: 'competition, pressure to make payments, and the need to travel long distances [to catch more fish] have transformed an occupation that formerly reinforced a sense of community, mutual aid, and economic cooperation'. Expensive fishing rights have impeded the adaptability of small-scale coastal fleets to respond to social, economic, and environmental changes (Lowe 2008). The decisions about whether or not to fish, for example because of low salmon prices, or due to a disruption in a fishing season (for example, the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill of 1989) became more permanent as expensive rights needed to be bought and sold.

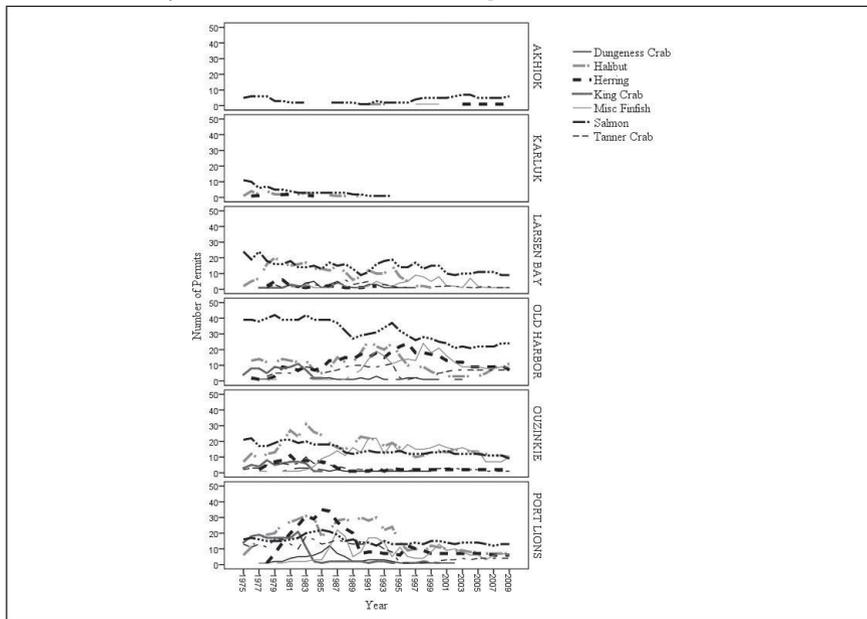
The market mechanisms in favor in contemporary discourse monetarize rights and allocate those to those with the ability to pay. In the case of many in the Alutiiq region, this marketization has alienated resource rights from those whose culture and economy depends greatly on the resources of the sea.

### Recent Movements in Alutiiq Fishing Villages

Many residents view the loss of fishing rights as the biggest threat to community sustainability. Figures 3 and 4 explores the documentation of formal commercial

fisheries participation in each of the six Kodiak villages as recorded by the state of Alaska.<sup>4</sup> As introduced above, the limited entry act for the salmon purse seine, set gillnet and beach seine fisheries in the Kodiak region was implemented in 1974. Langdon (1986) notes that within the first four years of the program the price of Kodiak salmon purse seine permit had increased from 4,571 to 75,000 U.S. dollars. By 1990, permit prices had climbed to 156,000 U.S. dollars. Prices began to fall after this, reflecting the fall in the price of wild caught salmon due to increasing global production of farmed salmon (Knapp *et al.* 2007). Permit prices bottomed out in 2003 at 7,100 U.S. dollars. They have climbed again to about 26,600 U.S. dollars in 2010 (CFEC 2010).

Figure 3: Permit holdings for the primary fisheries accessed by Alutiiq communities. Data source: State of Alaska, Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission.



Akhiok and Karluk fishermen primarily fished only for salmon, not diversifying into other fisheries. These communities have been least able to weather the storm of fisheries alienation. As Langdon (1986:121) notes of Akhiok, the ‘sale of limited entry permits and their accompanying rights to the productive red salmon sites has nearly eliminated this important source of commercial fishing income from the local economy’. In Karluk, the site of the first and largest cannery complex in Alaska, participation of locals in salmon fishing dropped from eleven individuals in 1976 to only two in 1980. For over a decade, no local resident of Karluk has held a fishing permit. Of all of the Kodiak communities, the viability of this community, currently at thirty-eight people, is the most threatened.

For the other communities, diversification into other fisheries created an important economic base. However, following salmon limited entry, access rights

to several other important fisheries in the Kodiak region were also individualized and commodified, including: herring roe purse seine and gillnet (1981); federal halibut and sablefish fisheries (1995); herring food/bait, purse seine and otter trawl (2002); tanner bairdi crab (2003). Notable in Figure 3 is the collapse of the king crab fishery in 1983. Engagement in the king crab fishery was especially pronounced in Port Lions where a crab processing plant was located until it burned down in 1976 (Langdon 1986). Prior to the population crash, peak participation in the king crab fishery topped out at twenty-one fishermen in Port Lions, eleven in Old Harbor, eight in Ouzinkie, and three in Larsen Bay.

Of the rural Kodiak communities, Ouzinkie and Port Lions have been the most involved in halibut fishing. In the early 1980s, as many as twenty-one Ouzinkie and seventeen Port Lions fishermen were landing halibut. About twelve fishermen in Old Harbor were consistently fishing halibut in these years. By this time, the halibut fishery was one of the few fisheries available to beginning fishermen. As Landgon and Miller (1984:27) notes:

For the residents of the smaller communities of Kodiak virtually the only fishery open to first time fishermen is the halibut fishery. Shrimp and crab (except on a very small scale basis) are too expensive to enter. Herring and salmon are under limited entry leaving halibut as the only cheap starter fishery.

In 1995, individual fishing quotas (IFQS) were implemented in the federally managed halibut and sablefish fisheries. Since then, nearly all of the individual halibut fishing quota has left Larsen Bay and only twenty percent remains in Old Harbor. By contrast, Ouzinkie retains over eighty percent of their original quota holdings. This is explained in large part by the presence of a single large quota holder (Carothers 2008b).<sup>5</sup>

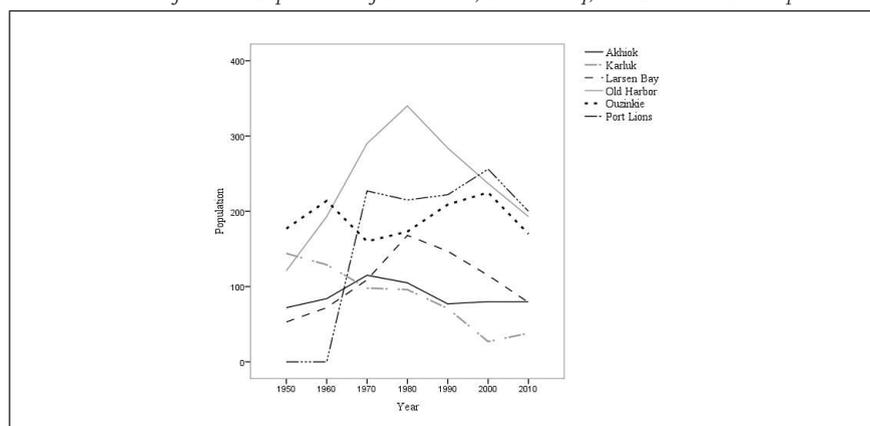
The alienation of fishing rights and fishing livelihoods in Alutiiq communities has had profound implications for the future of the communities. Within one generation the effects of the cascade of resource enclosure and commodification has fundamentally changed village communities. Discussed above is the lack of access. Many interviewees stress the 'aging out of the young' from pursuing fishing livelihoods has been especially detrimental to maintaining remote village communities. While knowledge of the marine environment is still taught to the young through subsistence and recreational practices in many villages, the skills of commercial fishing – growing up on a boat and gaining competency before the teenage years is for most people no longer occurring.<sup>6</sup> Many people stressed that the regulatory changes have also affected the practice of fishing. One fisherman noted: 'Before permits and quotas, fishing used to be a ton of fun, used to not have to worry about prices. But now guys are really stressed out, worried about prices and making it'.

Another shift that is still difficult for many Alutiiq residents to reflect on is the fundamental change in social relationship catalyzed by the limitation and commodification of fishing rights. When I presented my research to a group of Alutiiq community leaders in Kodiak in 2007, one fisherman shared his insights and tears with the group. This man quietly spoke about his experience with the

implementation of limited entry. He said that his siblings, cousins, and friends in the village of Ouzinkie all grew up as brothers, ‘everyone was equal’. Of his close peer group he was the only one to get a limited entry permit. He shared with us the guilt he has carried over the years, guilt for becoming part of a new ownership class that changed the basic social structure of community. This man, barely fifty, is one of the only ones among his group of ‘brothers’ that are still alive, ‘so many were lost’. This fisherman situates current challenges in the long colonial legacy of assimilation and loss that the Alutiiq peoples have faced. The creation of new hierarchies, loss of pride, loss of livelihood, the conceptual inconsistencies described above, are a continued source of alienation.

Figure 4 displays the population trends of the six Alutiiq communities of Kodiak. Karluk is nearly a ghost town. Of the communities where I conducted ethnographic research, Larsen Bay is furthest along in its transition away from a marine-based livelihood supported by commercial fishing. Several local and non-local hunting and sport fishing lodges have diversified Larsen Bay’s economy. A couple of lodge owners are local residents, several are not. The wealth generated by the lodges primarily accrues to the lodge owners, although employment in guiding, cooking, and cleaning provide a few jobs to the community. The lodges’ use of goods and services benefits the commerce and tax base of the community. Larsen Bay’s current population of sixty to seventy people shrinks to an even smaller core in the wintertime. One resident predicted that within the decade the village would be made up entirely of seasonal lodges. Based on my household survey in 2006, about sixty percent of heads of household are employed in non-fishing related work; another twenty percent are unemployed, leaving only twenty percent employed in fishing-related work (Carothers 2008b).

Figure 4: Population figures for the six Alutiiq communities of the Kodiak Archipelago. Port Lions was established after the 1964 earthquake destroyed the village of Afognak. Data Source: State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development.



The community of Old Harbor has several residents that work as full-time commercial fishermen. A few individuals that have moved out of the community to reside in Alaska’s hub city, Anchorage, continue to maintain residences and re-

turn to fish seasonally. About sixty percent of the households in Old Harbor report current or former vessel ownership (Carothers 2008b). Noting the decreases in commercial fishing participation, many informants note with sadness that there used to be thirty active boats in the community; now there are about six or seven. The community of Old Harbor currently has the unique distinction of being the only community to have purchased community shares of halibut quota shares through the Community Quota Entity Program (see Langdon 2008). The community holds 151,234 quota share units, equivalent to just over 30,000 pounds of halibut based on 2009 total allowable catch limits. The program is an attempt to alter the federal fisheries privatization model to include collective, small-community ownership; however, in contrast to the direct allocation model of other community-based ownership programs (for example, the Community Development Quota program in western Alaska), communities must purchase quota on the open market. Primarily because of the high cost of halibut quota, no other community has been able to purchase quota at the time of this writing.

Like all Alutiiq villages, Ouzinkie is experiencing 'transitional dissonance'.<sup>7</sup> Based on my household survey, only seventeen percent of Ouzinkie heads of household currently are employed in fishing related work, and yet fifty-six percent consider their vocation – what they are most skilled at – to be commercial fishing (Carothers 2008b). Several individuals remarked on the paradox that Ouzinkie still maintains a strong fishing identity, yet so few people are involved in fishing. While the economic shifts from fishing to no fishing have been relatively rapid, the cultural shift from fishing-based identities appears to be a much slower transition. The lodge and tourism industry is still nascent in the community, although a couple of entrepreneurs are growing local businesses. Ouzinkie was fortunate to receive funding from the Administration for Native Americans to initiate a series of community training and planning sessions, two of which focused on commercial fishing and local business development. Community members have been active in visioning and collective organizing, for example to take advantage of the community quota program that Old Harbor has been able to access.

The crux of these transitions is that the village communities are fundamentally changing. The local ties to place and resources are profoundly being severed. While subsistence fishing and hunting is still vital to the life ways of current Alutiiq village residents, decreased access to income also endangers the resilience of this system. The familial and sharing networks of the villages continue to help families without much income to even out needs. The economic model of maintaining remote village communities with large state expenditures appears less and less sustainable without viable locally based economies.

### **Challenging the Inevitability Framing: Summary and Conclusions**

The main opposition, over the years, to controlled access systems has been a desire on the part of many fishermen to preserve the particular 'lifestyle' they had come to enjoy. In Alaska the maintenance of the 'last frontier' lifestyle was intensely protected. However, all things change and Alaska is

no exception. All fish species of commercial importance off Alaska are essentially fully exploited (several overexploited). Hopefully fishing will shift its focus from lifestyle to the business of efficiently harvesting the nation's fishery resources...I predict as time goes by and fishermen adapt to the new system it will be impossible to ever go back to open access because of fishermen opposition.

Donald A. McCaughran, Director,  
International Pacific Halibut Commission  
Annual Report 1991:10-11

During a reflective silence in an interview with an elder Larsen Bay fisherman, I puzzled at an alarming paradox: there we sat by the edge of the water, in a tiny village surrounded by ocean, waters full of fish, and yet the boat harbor was nearly empty. Pages of detailed notes from this interview and many others trace the changes in Kodiak fishing village over the past few decades. The empty boat harbor in Larsen Bay in 2006 is the result of a complex set of global and local realities, including global seafood markets (for example, fish farming in Chile and Norway depressing the price of wild Alaska salmon), industrial disasters (for example, the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989 shutting down fishing for a season causing dramatic environmental and social disruptions), and local village depopulation. As this fisherman sees it, however, the privatization – the individualization, commodification, and marketization – of the right to fish marks a fundamental break in how fishing livelihoods were able to be pursued in this remote village. The flexible nature of commercial fishing engagements supplementing a subsistence-based economy became severely restricted as the right to fish became commodified. As a result, those at the margins of the commercial economy, in this case, indigenous communities, have greatly reduced access to income from fishing. The lack of alternative options for village-based income generation drives emigration and dependence on governmental support. In Alutiiq communities, these displacements have greatly affected community well-being.

The declines of rural coastal economies like Larsen Bay have been underway for decades worldwide, in large part due to resource declines (McGoodwin 1990; Jentoft 1993; Hamilton 2004; Ommer 2007). The displacements in rural Alaska are particularly disturbing as they have occurred despite relative resource abundance. This is particularly important to note as the discourse of fisheries privatization shifts from one of maximizing aggregate wealth to conserving fishery resources. The resurfacing of the tragedy of the commons narrative, despite its problematic assumptions, is aiding in the current widespread restructuring of human-environment relationships (McEvoy 1986; McCay and Acheson 1987; McGoodwin 1990; NRC 2002).

The privatization of resource access, however, is first and foremost a process of economic restructuring. Many resource economists and managers, like the former director of the International Pacific Halibut Commission quoted above, view this economic restructuring and the displacements that result as part of a natural, inevitable process consistent with global neoliberal trends that 'privilege

markets as the major source of governance in human affairs' (McCay 2008:1). I would like to stress that the displacements discussed in this article are not natural, inevitable outcomes. These transitions need to be understood as the direct result of a certain ways of viewing and managing social-ecological systems. It is the economic restructuring meant to generate increased profitability by commodifying access that has brought about these displacements.

In previous interviews with fishery managers, the inevitability of access privatization was a commonly voiced one. I have been told that the only alternatives to fisheries privatization are the total collapse of fisheries, bankruptcy, and death at sea (Carothers 2008a). Hilborn (2009), in a recent review of the book *Enclosing the Fisheries: People, Places, and Power* (Lowe and Carothers 2008) also remarks on the perceived economic inevitability of access privatization in fisheries: 'If the fleet size had not been frozen by limited entry in the 1970s, these small coastal communities would have been overwhelmed by tens of thousands of additional boats from all over the u.s.'. Responding to a growing fleet size, the first intention of the limited entry act – limiting entry – was expressed as an attempt to keep the rights to fish in the hands of Alaskans that depended on fisheries for their livelihoods (Homan 2007). Perhaps in this case limiting access was a perceived inevitability to address the problem of too many boats.

The fallacy, in my view, is in extending this perceived inevitability to the next three steps of the process: 1) turning the right to harvest fish into a valuable commodity; 2) creating a market for that commodity so that it can be freely bought and sold; and 3) permanently transferring the public right to access a fishery to individuals or businesses, such that the generated wealth from enclosure accumulates only to these permit holders. These steps are not inevitable solutions to the problem of too many boats. There are many options for addressing problems of fisheries – whether that problem is too many boats, or too few fish; however, the growing hegemony of privatization discourse has left little room for the imagination of these alternatives. In the case of limited entry, if the goal was to keep the rights to a fishery in the hands of locals who depend most upon that income, why make those rights market-based? In the case of indigenous fishing communities in the Gulf of Alaska (threatened, as Hilborn notes, by an influx of outside vessels), limiting access and creating inalienable resource rights based in place may have prevented many of the displacements discussed in this article.

Rather than an inevitable solution to the problems of fisheries, the commodification and marketization of resource rights is the outcome of a particular way of viewing social fishery systems – that of maximizing the generation of aggregate profit. This paper has attempted to document a host of undesirable social impacts that accompany this economic restructuring that displace those who depend heavily on the resources of the sea and have long histories of close connections to those resources. While some fishermen discuss the remaking of relationships in Alutiiq communities that have institutionalized competition, hierarchy, year-round commercial engagements, and profit-seeking behavior, the majority of people have simply been displaced. As described above, unique subsistence-commercial economies with millennia of place and resource attachments, become increasingly more marginal, increasingly alienated from the resources of the sea, increasingly separate

from the concentration of wealth and power generated by privatization policies. The value of the right to fish becomes defined strictly in monetary terms, the market becomes the method of determining who has the right to fish, and rights to fish shift into the hands of those that have the ability to pay.

Jentoft (2007) identifies power as a particularly underexplored aspect of fishery systems. Power – in this case, the power of certain dominant conceptualizations to reframe and remake social fishery systems – is at the heart of understanding how communities like Akhiok, Karluk, Larsen Bay, Old Harbor, Ouzinkie, and Port Lions are becoming dispossessed of the resources of the sea. The symbolic and material domination of cultural logics based on the conceptualization of a fisherman as an autonomous individual, employed full-time, heavily entrenched in the market economy; a fishing business as a profit-seeking enterprise; and a fishing right as commodifiable and alienable from person and place have largely constrained the mixed, informal sufficiency economies of remote coastal Alutiiq communities. These conceptualizations, these particular ways of framing human-environment relationships, have excluded and marginalized certain kinds of fishing operations, lifestyles, communities, and rights.

In the case reviewed here, the commodification of fishing rights is based on conceptualizations of human-environment relationships fundamentally opposed to the cultural logics of social dependence and informal economy of village communities. In the Kodiak village communities the tragedy of commodification has displaced those operating at the margins of the commercial economy, those perhaps most dependent on fishing livelihoods. The monetarization and marketization of fishing rights poorly serves to capture the value of these kinds of livelihood and place attachments. While Hilborn (2009:1907) has recently noted that ethnographic descriptions like the one presented here do not ‘get us very far in understanding how to allocate fish’, perhaps they do present a cautionary tale about how not to allocate fish. Identifying and describing the context-specific problems of fisheries beyond the simple ‘too few fish, too many boats, privatization as the inevitable solution’ tale is necessary step toward understanding how to more equitably allocate the rights to fish. The multiplicity of fishing operations (individual, collective, kin-based), fishing motivations (profit-seeking, livelihood-based, mixed subsistence-commercial), and fishing values (monetary, cultural, social, familial, spiritual) need to be more fully accounted for in resource policy.

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## Notes

1. This is not to deny the environmental tragedies in fisheries. Many of the world's wild-capture fisheries are indeed collapsed, depleted, or threatened. The health of these resources is clearly an important concern. Linking these realities to global political economic systems that have created vast inequities of wealth and the incentives for overharvesting and depletion is an important part of the story, often absent from tragedy of the commons discourses. Global political economic systems have also created economic disasters that threaten fishing livelihoods (see Robards and Greenberg 2007). The point here is that in the current popularization of the privatization-for-conservation discourse, the centrality of the economic restructuring of privatization and the social distributive inequities that result have been largely silenced.
2. If the relatively isolated U.S. Coast Guard base is included in the statistic, the Kodiak population is approximately 13,000.
3. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 created a corporate structure for the management of Alaska Native lands and asset holdings. Regional and village corporations were granted legal title to forty-four million acres of land and received nearly a billion dollars (O'Brien 1989). This legislation eliminated aboriginal claims to hunting and fishing rights (with the exception of subsistence rights, which the state later declared as rights shared with all rural Alaskan residents as defined in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980).
4. State of Alaska data is available from 1975 when permanent limited entry permits were issued for the salmon fisheries.
5. Many small coastal communities in the Gulf of Alaska lost access to halibut fishing because of the IFQ program. A community quota purchase program was implemented in 2005 that enables communities to purchase and retain halibut and sablefish fishing rights. These collectives bound to place have been used in recent policy decisions to link fishing rights to place (Langdon 2008; NOAA Fisheries 2007).
6. Residents of depopulated villages like Karluk express concern that youth are not learning the skills of subsistence because there are no elders left in the community to teach them (Fall 2006).
7. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this helpful framing.

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