

FAITH, FOOD & FAMILY IN A YUPIK WHALING COMMUNITY.

BY CAROL ZANE JOLLES WITH ELINOR MIKAGHAQ OOZEVA. (UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PRESS, SEATTLE, 2002). A McLELLAN BOOK. 364 pp. \$50 (HARDCOVER), \$24.95 (PAPERBACK). BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS, FIGURES, FOOTNOTES, APPENDIX, GLOSSARY, BIBLIOGRAPHY, INDEX.

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St. Lawrence Island was a fistful of deep-sea earth squeezed dry in the hand of the Creator and placed in the Bering Sea, according to local belief. Jolles traces the spiritual world of the contemporary marine mammal hunters who inhabit the island, particularly in the village of Gambell, one of only two inhabited villages on the island. Yupik people are considered in relation to clan organization, names and souls, marital unions, birth and death, hunting and religious ceremonies, and the commitment to wild subsistence foods. *Faith, Food and Family* is an engaging read, from Jolles' Easter arrival in 1987 through more than a decade of mutual respect in sharing life's moments, good food and stories. Jolles' commitment and concern for the people of St. Lawrence Island is unquestionable. The trials of everyday living—such as getting water (before indoor plumbing became the norm in 1997) and following ever-changing 'roads' through mud, ice and snowdrifts—are vividly described for the Yupiit, but also for Jolles herself, who sometimes fumbles but learns with patience and diligence.

The 1878 epidemic and famine resulting from introduced diseases from foreign whalers was a defining crisis in their history that ultimately characterizes today's island life, religious dedication, and family structure. Jolles reprints Nelson's description of his 1881 encounter on the island with his chilling Pompeii-esque scenes of bodies frozen in death. The proselytizing that followed this time, which was clearly opportunistic, disregarded the social system, and missionaries successfully convinced the Yupiit of a superior Christian god. Jolles outlines the conversion processes to Christianity and aspects of the traditional religious system as they have shaped one another. She highlights the practicalities of conversion, for example, in how people accepted Christianity because their prayers for food during a famine were answered (p. 177), as well as the spiritual transformations of shamans and others. The introduction of Christianity—Presbyterian and later Seventh Day Adventist—brought both confusion and resolve in matters of life and death.

Jolles explains the *ramke* (clan) system not found in other Eskimo/Inuit societies and how courtship and marriage have changed within this system due to population loss, religion, television and other outside influences. She also takes us through the naming process, describing how names are alive and carried through new generations.

Strong gender roles limited Jolles access to men's activities, so the focus is on the lives of women; however, the whale hunt, polar bear hunts, and the walrus hunt clearly carry great social and nutritional importance to the *ramket* (pl.), the individual hunters and the community as a whole. She writes, "...although whaling is superimposed on all things, sacred and secular, walrus and seals feed people everyday" (p. 279), indicating the power behind whaling. Taking a polar bear or a whale accords great status to the hunter and the heights of the graveyard are reserved only for these hunters (p. 116, 221). It is also significant that boat captains were early converts to Christianity, seeking power and prestige (p. 85, 218).

Faith, Food and Family is part of a long tradition of modern Alaskan ethnographies following such figures as Chance and Fienup-Riordan, however it falls short in placing St. Lawrence Islanders within problems faced by many people of the arctic. Some of these limitations are due to agreed-upon topics as being out of bounds. Social problems are alluded to, but not fully considered within the religious framework that she has laid out. Though Jolles is clear about the goals of the book, I still expected environmental concerns surrounding pollution and climate change as well as oil and gas exploration and how Gambell and Savoonga villagers engage with corporations and governments to play a larger role than in the story Jolles tells. Though Jolles has written about the market economy in a 1997 *Arctic Anthropology* article, the uninitiated reader of her book is left wondering just how they earn a living on the island, given the undeniable need for cash. There is a nod to a transition from autonomy to dependency on a market economy (p. 11), but there is no dis-

cussion of wage work. She mentions baleen as a local currency (p.73), but does not fully explain its worth. The communities pay close attention to boys as “our food for tomorrow, you know, our hunters for tomorrow” (p. 163), so I would think that activities of the Eskimo Walrus Commission and the Eskimo Whaling Commission would be forefront in people’s minds.

Archaeologists might cringe at a favorite pastime of islanders’ digging for “ancestral treasure” described in Chapter 3. Jolles even lists the prices some pieces fetch in distant galleries. That description could have been situated in context a bit better. I would hope that some members of the Sivuvaq community see these activities as destroying their heritage, since the work of early archaeologists in which skeletal remains were removed from the island was described as “disrespect for their ancestors” (p. 58 n.9).

I would have liked to see some comparative reference to other ethnographies of whaling communities, as well as some seminal studies on religious conversion as some statements and conclusions leave the reader hanging. I also wonder what the Elder Advisor’s role was in preparing the manuscript because other than her direct quotes, the Elder’s contributions are unclear. Despite these criticisms, I enjoyed this book and found it to be an important contribution to arctic social sciences. Ultimately, it is wonderful to read about the lives of people in such a marginal place in an accessible, eloquent way.