

OIL AGE ESKIMOS. By JOSEPH G. JORGENSEN. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. xix + 401 p., maps, figs., tables, bib., index. Hardbound. US\$40.00.

This book is the product of contract research on social impact assessment. It is a welcome addition to the literature on contemporary Eskimo subsistence and socioeconomic change, for as the author notes, the bulk of the work in this area has been consigned to the "gray literature" of technical documents and EIS/SEIS reports. The field data on which it is based come from the northwest Alaskan villages of Gambell, Unalakleet, and Wainwright and were collected over several years in the 1980s by Jorgensen and his collaborators. The central goal of the work is to document and analyze the effects of oil extraction and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA) on indigenous social and economic relations. The primary conclusion is that "Eskimo villages haven't created successful, for-profit corporations, nor have Eskimos gained more than token employment.... Rather, the villages have become deeply dependent on federal and state income transfers" (xii-xiv). Furthermore, unlike some areas where oil production occurs, Jorgensen finds that in northwest Alaska it not only fails to provide local long-term benefits, but threatens the local subsistence base as well. A sub-theme of the book is how cultural and structural features of Eskimo society provide a radically different context for economic change.

The book consists of a short preface, ten chapters, a lengthy Epilogue, and three appendices, as well as the usual scholarly apparatus of tables, figures, and references. Chapter 1 is primarily a survey of ANCSA and its impact on Native societies. Chapter 2 provides a summary of the three study sites: their population, natural resources, recent history, and infrastructure. Jorgensen notes that they form a continuum in wealth, economic development, reliance on imported foods, wage labor, and diminution of sharing, Wainwright being the wealthiest and least dependent on subsistence foraging, Unalakleet intermediate, and Gambell at the other extreme. In Chapter 3 we are given a summary of the recorded history of the three villages, focusing on demographic and economic change over the last century and a half.

The next four chapters provide the bulk of the original data. Chapter 4 argues that the study villages retain "quintessentially subsistence economies" (p. 79). Jorgensen defines subsistence economy (p. 80 ff.) by a number of criteria, most of them "absences" (e.g., lack of well-developed markets, rarity of exchange, lack of capital accumulation or productive specialization) and some of them vague (e.g., what is "well developed"?) or questionable to this reader (e.g., the elaborate pre-contact trading networks, though mentioned, are not shown to lack capital accumulation, economic prominence, or production for exchange). Despite (or perhaps because of) Jorgensen's obvious sympathy for native Alaskans, I wonder if he doesn't simplify the indigenous political economy in order to provide a more dramatic contrast with mercantilism and capitalism.

Chapter 5 presents maps of land use and quantitative data on monetary subsistence expenses. In comparison with similar Canadian studies with which I am familiar, this part of the study is adequate but not impressive. Little sustained attempt is made to formulate explicit versions of Eskimo economic decision making or to test them empirically. In seeking ethnographic generalizations, Jorgensen claims that the Eskimo helping/sharing ethic "is so deeply held that there are no second thoughts about economic choices" (p. 123) when someone is in need, nor is any reciprocity expected. But this lumps regular sharing of food with physical assistance in an emergency (e.g., engine failure) and ignores contrary evidence for highly selective sharing and helping documented by Burch and others. Indeed, Jorgensen himself notes that kinship ties strongly bias sharing and cooperation (p. 125) and that laziness in subsistence effort leads to "grousing" by others (p. 126).

Chapter 6 is concerned to show how contemporary modes of production "subsume subsistence economies into dependency relations" (p. 133). Jorgensen briefly traces the history of trade relations (with

native Siberians, Russians, and Americans) from the 17th century to the present and distinguishes subsistence, "semimercantile" (fur trade), and capitalist (commercial whaling) modes that eventually came to coexist in Alaska. He also discusses the increasingly dominant role of the public sector. In explaining dependency and lack of native capitalist development, Jorgensen points to both lack of control over means of production and indigenous valuation of sharing over profit seeking. He illustrates the dominance of sharing/cooperation over competition with a discussion of the failure of Unalakleet fishermen to maintain loyalty to any one fish buyer (p. 150-153), but he also notes (Chapter 7) that buyer competition was beneficial to villagers and that they did withhold fish locations from each other. I myself wondered how much of their behavior reflects uniquely "Eskimo values" and how much of it is typical of social ties in any small village, coupled with risk reduction through sharing networks.

Chapter 7 discusses how the economies of the three villages "are fueled by funds from the public sector" (p. 161) — even private businesses depend primarily on sales and contracts with government agencies. Public sector employment is highest in Wainwright, lowest in Gambell (where ivory carving and transfer payments provide the bulk of monetary income), while Unalakleet relies heavily on commercial fishing. Jorgensen presents figures showing that Unalakleet natives actually lose money in commercial fishing, but argues that they persist because of non-monetary gains via subsistence use of the same equipment (though no data in support of this last assertion are presented).

The last three chapters focus on kinship, social organization, and ideology. Jorgensen reviews "traditional" kinship forms and their modern persistence and discusses the contrast between the patrilineal clans of St. Lawrence Island and the endogamous bilateral demes of northwest Alaska. He identifies "nuclearization" of households (people dispersing into minimal household sizes) as a major contemporary trend, yet points out the persistence of kinship ties and social networks for cooperation and resource sharing. He argues that nuclearization is driven by a desire for privacy and permitted by income increases, while coalescence is driven by risk sharing and pooling of income in hard times. In Chapter 10 ("Ideology"), Jorgensen discusses the differences and similarities between the shamanism/animism of a century ago and the Christianity of today, particularly with respect to views about nature; he suggests that the conversion/religious change process is less advanced than it first appears, especially with respect to beliefs and values concerning "space and place" (p. 269 ff.). He also discusses views about wildlife management and regulation of subsistence harvests, including Eskimo views that outsiders are ill informed about both wildlife populations and native conservation. Unfortunately, although raising some interesting topics, this chapter, even more than others, lacks clear organization or sustained argument, often wandering from one topic to another.

The Epilogue assesses economic events since 1982, especially the decline in oil revenues, Reagan administration cuts in social services funding, and recent amendments to ANCSA. Jorgensen notes that the economic situation of most villagers has deteriorated; cash incomes have decreased, welfare reliance is up, household size has grown but total population has stopped growing, the commercial fish catch has declined, etc. The book concludes with appendices on methodology, research barriers, and natural environment.

In summing up, this book is clearly a major contribution to the published literature on Eskimo economics and social change. It is written in a clear and fairly nontechnical language. I find it somewhat thin in both theoretical and empirical substance, but recommend it as essential for specialists on arctic peoples and/or northern economic development.

Eric Alden Smith
Department of Anthropology
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington 98195
U.S.A.