

TAKING BACK THE KNIFE: THE ULU AS AN EXPRESSION  
OF INUIT WOMEN'S STRENGTH

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THESIS

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## **Abstract**

The ulu is an enduring object in the lives of Inuit women which has multiple meanings as both a tool and symbol of traditional subsistence activity. While it continues to be recognized as a symbol of identity for Inuit women across the Arctic, it has received little attention by Western scientists and academics. Following the twists and turns of both de-colonizing and engendering the ulu encourages a comprehension of the profoundly symbolic meaning of the ulu with respect to Inuit women's identity. The **collecting** phase of the Smithsonian in Alaska and the **classifying** impulse of archaeological reports are examined for their underlying rules of practice, conventions of representation and dynamics of scientific authority. Then in reaction to this "objectification" of the ulu, the knife is **taken back** in a multitude of actions and expressions which seek to reclaim the ulu and restore its significance as a cultural item.

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All photos are works of the author unless otherwise noted.

## Acknowledgements

There is a crazy, insane rage that is a reaction to the trauma caused by colonization, sometimes called the “Red Rage.” For some rage results in a descent from which they cannot return or during which they lash out destructively at the ones they love. I am speaking of a different kind of rage. The kind where an ember is breathed into a flame that burns the soul free. I have seen the glint of steel as the fire of this rage catches the crescent of an ulu held firmly in the hand of a woman. I have witnessed how this rage becomes a catalyst for change, a newfound ability to say, we’ve had enough. I have tried to infuse my writing with this clear and strong and good anger. As I have struggled to understand why this object holds such meaning, I have gained greater clarity in my own life. I first dedicate this thesis to the women who are my neighbors, my friends, classmates, colleagues and peers.

JoJo, Rick and Gordon, during these past short years, we have each faced personal challenges either to our own health or that of our loved ones. The rawness of healing and the poignancy of grief are woven into my words as well. Your guidance and good humor have been invaluable in getting me through this, I appreciate your willingness to stick with me. I never doubted you would all come through for me in the end.

I could not have completed this task without the understanding, patience and flexibility of my family. Axel and Eryn I hope by example to teach you the reward of pursuing that which brings you joy. I know my Mom was that example for me and her unwavering faith and continued encouragement keeps me going day by day, step by step. My two darling children, you have been helpful in more ways than you know. And to my husband John, the extent of your love and support will never cease to amaze me. You’re absolutely right, it does keep getting better.

Ruth Behar says in the conclusion to her book, *The Vulnerable Observer*, “that anthropology that doesn’t break your heart just is not worth doing anymore.” And my heart is broken because the one who maybe would have been the most proud, isn’t here. So Dad, this is for you.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

When I went to my first *Nalukataq* (spring whaling festival), I was given an *atigi* (a heavy fur parka which you pull on over your head). Even though it was June, sitting only on a blanket on the cold, damp ground I was grateful for the warmth and heaviness of the parka. When I was handed an *ulu* and taught to slice off a chunk of boiled whale, steaming on the cutting board, and raise it, still on the ulu to my mouth; I marveled at how familiar it felt. I became intrigued as I realized that this was a tool designed to fit a woman's hand. Since then, nearly two decades ago, across Alaska I have witnessed the ulu used in many ways . . . to chop off heads of salmon, split and flip them inside out to dry on racks in the sun; to with keen precision, score a line up the stomach of a seal beginning the process that might lead to a pair of *kamik* (boots), an *amauti* (mother's parkas) and *amiq* (skin covering for an *umiaq* or boat); to untangle the tough stringy tendon from a caribou leg and then split the sinew for *ivalu*; to slice up whale in preparation for pickled *muktuk*, a delicacy treasured by many; to split the thick, tough skins of walrus; to dice up herbs for a poultice; to cut summer grass for basket-making. I have seen *uluit* as elements in contemporary art pieces, as adornment for the body in the form of earring and necklaces, as symbols of achievement as in the medals for the Arctic Winter Games and on letterhead, t-shirts and jackets as the logo for Inuit organizations and corporations.

The ulu is a traditional tool used by Inuit women across the Arctic. Inuit is a term most commonly used in Canada, but which has also been used to refer to the arctic adapted populations who live in the region extending all the way from eastern Siberia to Greenland. They share many biological, linguistic and cultural traditions, including the ulu. However there are identity ties unique to each of the groups. Ulu or plural *uluit* is an Anglicized term from the Inuktitut word (Figure 1) for “woman's knife.” It is also called an *uluqpak* in Inupiaq, or *uluuraq* when referring to a small ulu, and has somewhat different names in the other Eskimo-Aleut languages of Alaska—*ulaaq* in St. Lawrence Island Yupik, *uluq* in Yup'ik, and *ulukaaq* in Sugpiaq (Alutiiq). For the purposes of this



thesis, the terms Inuit and ulu will be used in the general sense, but when speaking of a specific place, group or style of ulu the appropriate, corresponding name will be indicated.



**Figure 1: Ulu (Inuktitut syllabics)**

The ulu, together with the stone lamp, is considered to be one of the most significant tools of the Inuit woman, and a symbol of her role in the culture of the circumpolar world. As a young girl she would be given an ulu, which she would take with her in marriage and would be laid to rest with her in death (Freeman 1978:47). Ulu come many different sizes and shapes, are used for a variety of purposes and reflect the identity of Inuit women from different regions.

The ulu is an unique knife which is made with a handle of bone, wood or antler, and a semi-lunar blade of iron, copper or ground slate. This general purpose cutting tool, “which continues...in daily use, has become the chief symbol associated with Inuit women” (McMillan 1995:265). Well known throughout the Arctic it is been appropriated and highly exploited as a tourist item (Thompson 2008:401), yet it has not been the subject of intensive and comprehensive study. There are no edited volumes of conference papers, no books and very few articles. While some may attribute this void to a general lack of comprehensive studies of material culture in the arctic regions, my argument follows the twists and turns of both de-colonizing and engendering the ulu as it encourages a comprehension of the profoundly symbolic meaning of the ulu with respect to Inuit women’s identity. How and what we value from the past says something about how we see ourselves as a community today and how we project ourselves into the future.

Taking back the knife is to reclaim the ulu by bringing it back into its cultural context as an object of Indigenous women’s power. To call this process, “re-patriating”

would be ironic as it is the culture of patriarchy as expressed in modern society which encourages the domination of man over woman. Indeed in the eyes of the colonizer, sexual violence is seen as necessary to maintain male authority. It has been argued that colonizers realized in order to subjugate Indigenous nations they would have to subjugate women within these nations. There was the belief that Native people needed to learn the value of hierarchy and the role of physical abuse in maintaining the hierarchy. Gender violence is not simply a reflection of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism (Smith 2005; Gunn-Allen 2004; Ned-Sunnyboy 2008).

By bringing Inuit women back to center and privileging their voices, the approach of this thesis is to attempt to challenge the colonialist system that devalues and disavows the contributions of women and suggest its re-construction along more inclusive and meaningful lines. Taking back, then is in the same tradition as “researching back or writing back.” This kind of writing is based on the premise that the center does not necessarily have to be the “imperial” center. The center can be, “shifted ideologically through imagination and this shifting can recreate history” (Smith 1999:36).

Raised voices, speaking out in unison is the main feature of the *Taking Back the Night* movement. Candlelight vigils, speak outs, marches and rallies have been held since the 1970s throughout the world with the intention of symbolically making the streets safe for women at night. The broader aim is to highlight the gender imbalance in power structures and raise awareness about how this contributes to sexual violence. On an individual level it can become a ceremonial release that breaks the silence, eases the shame and restores personal power to a woman who has been abused. Because of the perceived entanglements with colonialism many Inuit women do not identify as feminist. While they may not choose to join in a *Take Back the Night* march, they are speaking out about the injustice to themselves in their own communities. They utilize certain strategies and tactics of feminist activism to actively participate in ending violence against women and children.

Taking back the knife refers to ancient cosmologies which speak to an Inuit woman’s role in her culture. The ulu is an enduring object in the lives of Inuit women.

The ulu is given to a young girl as a rite of passage, restoring this meaning is essential not only to our broad understanding of this object, but to the identity of the Inuit women (Johnson-Korthuis 2007; Patkotak Grinage 2007). The ulu has multiple meanings as both a tool and symbol of traditional subsistence activity. The contemporary significance of this object speaks to the continuity of cultural practices, values and beliefs across the generations. When you hold an ulu in your hand you are connected back across many generations of women for thousands of years (Hopson 1996).

The ulu, or woman's knife, has a symbolic force. Traditionally, Inuit women performed essential roles ... in partnership with the men in their families. ... In the modern society of today's north, women are moving into positions of political and social power on an equal footing with men (Sibbald 2000:679). It is not merely an intellectual exercise but a necessity that colonial, racist and sexist attitudes be addressed. The honoring and celebration of the ulu could act as a symbolic catalyst for the strengthening of the identity and image of Inuit women across the Arctic, which has broader implications for all.

## 1.1 Strong Women

This is the way it goes: These Indian women warriors walk into the tribal library. There are more than three of them. They keep showing up. They are growing in number, and they are gravitating toward the glow of the computer-screen campfire in the farthest recesses of this modern sweat-lodge.

[Lois Beardslee in *The Women's Warrior Society* 2008:54]

The women in my classes are strong. As I work my way through the courses in the Department of Alaska Native and Rural Development of the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), I am privileged to be in their company. Most of them are Alaska Natives, and while some live in the urban hubs of Fairbanks and Anchorage, others are pursuing their degree while remaining in their Native village. Many of them are non-traditional students juggling careers and families with the demands of graduate school. Most of them are active in occupations that support their communities whether as health professionals, wildlife researchers, teachers or even high-level executives in Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) corporations. All of them are undaunted by the challenges they face in the modern arctic world. Yet if you were to speak to them of sexual abuse and violence towards women, too many of them have experienced it first-hand.

For Inuit women, violence often takes place in a context shaped, by the power that the dominant society has wielded "over every aspect of their lives, from the way they are educated and the way they can earn a living to the way they are governed" (Jacobs 2002). The disproportionate amount of victim vulnerability that is recognized today can be traced to the policies and procedures initiated by early explorers and missionaries, and sustained by the federal or provincial governments (Ned-Sunnyboy 2008:72).

Historically, there were distinct gender roles for women and men but relative equality between them. Paula Gunn-Allen suggests that while the definitions of women's roles are "as diverse as there are tribal cultures in the Americas" (2004:55), she also insists "in no tribal definition is she perceived in the same ways as are women in Western

cultures” (2004:56). The tribes may see women variously, but they do not question their power as women and “sometimes they see women as fearful, sometimes peaceful, sometimes omnipotent and omniscient,” but they were never portrayed as “mindless, helpless, simple or oppressed” (2004:56).

Contemporary scholars generally agree that prior to colonization women held esteemed positions in the Indigenous societies of North America. Violence against women was rare. When it occurred, it was often severely punished usually through ostracizing the perpetrator. This all changed following colonization. Early colonial literature pointed out “two of our customs that were particularly unsavory from the European point of view – women’s social equality and common landholding” (Bigfoot 2000). As Indigenous peoples were forced from their lands, Indigenous women were subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence at the hands of settlers and government forces.

Forced assimilation programs such as residential boarding schools and the overthrow of many Indigenous traditions and institutions undermined Indigenous women’s status within their own nations according to Beverly Jacobs, former president of the National Women’s Association of Canada. Through policies imposed without their consent, Inuit women have had to deal with dispossession of their traditional territories, disassociation with their traditional roles and responsibilities, disassociation with participation in political and social decisions in their communities, disassociation of their culture and tradition (Jacobs 2002). Colonialism, which has had a profoundly negative impact on Indigenous communities as a whole, has also affected the relations between Indigenous women and Indigenous men, and pushed many Indigenous women to the margins of their own cultures and to society as a whole (Jacobs 2002). In the Arctic the change has been swift and devastating.

## 1.2 Speaking Out

Things are looking up for Alaska Native women. More Alaska Native women are graduating from high school, completing undergraduate and also graduate level work in academia. They are holding not only professional administrative positions but functioning as the top leaders of Native corporations and serving on prestigious boards. Life is good, or so it seems.

Driving to her job at the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage, Michelle Davis said she laughed as the two male DJs discussed the car accidents around the city, and joked about how you weren't a real Alaskan unless you'd crashed at a busy intersection (DeMarban 2008).

Later, one of the DJs on the classic rock station tried to make a play off an old Alaska saying, and asked, "Have you made love to the Yukon and peed in a Native woman?" Davis said.

"I was horrified," said Davis. "I was completely shocked, it took a long time to sink in, then I got to work and I sat down at my desk and cried. It's such a degrading thing to say. It's incredibly insulting."

"I think the act they described was so degrading in such an intimate way, and it's a very short leap from degrading words to violence. Research shows that sexual assault comes out of a desire for dominance and intimidation, not sexual gratification, and statistics of violence against Native women are really sobering," said Davis (DeMarban 2008), a Tlingit who once worked for Standing Together Against Rape, an Anchorage organization which helps victims of sexual assault and sexual abuse.

The statistics on violence against Indigenous women in the Arctic are staggering. One in five Native women in Alaska, one in three Native women in Canada may become victims of sexual assault, and these are statistics which are believed to be too conservative due to underreporting. Many women have suffered some form of sexual abuse and have been effectively silenced by being disbelieved or ignored or blamed (Amnesty International 2007).

Many Alaska Native women have not spoken out, but Davis did. The reclaimed voice is a strong one and others joined in. At the core of the escalating outrage is the fact that “Alaska Native women are disproportionately targeted in violent crimes, including rape,” said Denise Morris, president of the Alaska Native Justice Center, an Anchorage-based social advocacy (D’Oro 2008). The state has long had the highest sexual assault rate in the nation, but more than nine times as many Alaska Native women were assaulted than other women in Anchorage from 2000 to 2003 (Amnesty International 2007).

State Rep. Mary Nelson, a Democrat who is Yupik, voiced her disgust over the DJs’ comments on the floor of the state House, calling for an apology and punishment by the Federal Communications Commission. Comparing the offensive language to the Imus incident last year she said, “He was name calling, but they were calling for violence against Alaska Native women” (D’Oro 2008).

### 1.3 A Real Alaskan?

Maureen Hogan is a professor that has only recently moved to Alaska to work at UAF. When the DJ story hit the media there were suggestions that the so-called “joke” about what it takes to be a “real Alaskan” was a reference to an attitude long in the past. Yet in a recent article, she acknowledges being introduced to it shortly after her arrival while visiting a bar in downtown Fairbanks. The cultural values behind this “joke,” a distasteful bit of Alaskana, were the real objects of interest to her, since they show a rural hegemonic masculinity, specifically an Alaskan variety, rooted in power and control over landscape and, distressingly, Native peoples — particularly women (Hogan and Pursell 2008:64).

Using a cultural studies approach, she and co-author Timothy Pursell connect recent theories on rural masculinities and nostalgia to show how a particular variety of rural Alaskan masculinity struggles to maintain its dominance even in late capitalist urban spaces. The real Alaskan, a cultural symbol deeply coded as masculine, rural, and white, repudiates—or at least marginalizes—that which is feminine, urban, and Native.

They argue that it is not only part of the nation's imagination but also one in which many Alaskans are invested (Hogan and Pursell 2008:63).

The question of how this hegemonic Alaskan masculinity is negotiated in the twenty-first century becomes a question dangerous to ask, because it threatens the constructed notion of Alaska as wilderness ready for discovery by an adventurer or tourist (Hogan and Pursell 2008:82). But the real danger for Alaska is that “unreflective adherence to notions of rugged individualism—whether in the pioneer or the Thoreau mold—all too often obscure Alaska's serious social and environmental problems” (Hogan and Pursell 2008:84). Alaska is the home to high rates of suicide, sexual assaults and domestic violence. She maintains, therefore, that these nostalgic narratives need to be critically examined to understand “not only how they privilege a hegemonic Alaskan masculinity but also how they may be implicated in the complex social and environmental problems that Alaska faces in an age of the new colonizer: late capitalism” (Hogan and Pursell 2008:85).



## Chapter 2 Approach

“Survivance . . . is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence” (Vizenor 1998:15).

The ulu is an item of “survivance.” In spite of collections made to “salvage the remnants” of a “dying culture,” the ulu is still here, as are its makers. It is a witness to the ways of making a living that have continued with persistence and vitality. It is a symbol of respect honoring the equal contributions of Inuit women that speaks to a sense of positive self-identity.

This thesis unfolds as we see the ulu as an object that has been “collected, classified and represented back to the West and then through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized” (Smith 1999:1). This involves “understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices (Smith 1999:2). It becomes important to ask what are the implications for the study of uluit, given how, our objects of knowledge — what it is we want to know about the past — have been conceptualized, institutionalized and thus, have structured both our research and our received views? Then in reaction to this “objectification” of the ulu, the thesis shows how the ulu is “taken back” in a multitude of actions and expressions which seek to reclaim the ulu and restore its significance as a cultural item.

In order to “decolonize” the ulu, we need to have an understanding of the underlying assumptions of the research practices utilized in the analysis of these objects. Material culture studies, while theoretically diverse and multi-disciplinary in nature, have recently been oriented in an approach that foregrounds the materiality of objects through their biographies (Holtorf 2002), and a concern for how material meanings are constituted depending on social practices (Appadurai 1986). This focus on materiality has led to insights on how objects are used in the transmission of memory (Cruikshank 1995) and the construction of identity (Myers 2001) and the practice of heritage (Meskell 2008).

As Myers states, an emphasis on materiality provides a way to understand how “objects come to convey and condense value and, in doing so, are used to construct social identities and communicate cultural differences between individuals and groups” (2001:3).

Yet, I agree with Olsen in *Material Culture after Text: Re-membering Things*, it is a paradox that the return to material-culture studies did not bring back the material to a greater extent. At the same time as our lives are “increasingly caught up with the material,” studies of material culture are “increasingly focused on the mental and representational — material culture as metaphor, as symbol, icon, message and text — in short, as something other than itself” (Olsen 2003:18-19).

And with Ingold who identifies the emphasis as being almost entirely on meaning and form — that is, on culture as opposed to materiality . . . culture is conceived to hover over the material world — but not to permeate it . . . culture and materials do not mix; rather, culture wraps itself around the universe of material things, shaping and transforming their outward surfaces (Ingold 2000:340–41).

In response, I suggest an approach formulated by Hodder that is threefold:

- Objects have their value through their effect in the world. The object is involved in exchanges of matter, energy and information. This is the significance they hold for a functionalist, materialistic or utilitarian perspective.
- Objects have structural or coded meanings they can communicate. This is symbolic meaning.
- Objects have an interest of meaning concerning the historical content of the changing ideas and associations of the object itself. This is their historical meaning. [Hodder 1994:12]

The analysis of an object twines these three aspects together to arrive at a more complete description.

The ulu is a practical item that continues in daily use. The ulu has meaning as a symbol of Inuit women's economic, social and spiritual contribution to their culture. Looking at the ideas about and the representations of the ulu through time can provide richer understanding of its purpose and meaning in both Western and Inuit contexts.

## 2.1 Foucault Adding to the Archives

While the concept was first introduced in his lecture *Of other spaces* in 1967, Michel Foucault later defined heterotopias as places in which “all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously, represented, contested and inverted” (Foucault 1986:24).

The idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the ideal of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity [Foucault 1986:26].

As such he argues that the museum and the library – both “heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time” – are peculiar to and characteristic of nineteenth century Western culture.

While the cultural archive of the West represents multiple traditions of knowledge, there are Foucault admits “rules of practice” that govern this knowledge. Understanding how these rules operate is important, Smith (1999:44) warns, because to a large extent theories about research are underpinned by a cultural system of classification and representation, by views about human nature, human morality and virtue, by conceptions of space and time, by conceptions of gender and race. Ideas about these

things help determine what counts as real. The only “legitimate knowledge” is the one produced using methods and evidence “made true” within the context of these rules.

Although Foucault suggests the West itself may have difficulty describing the rules, he also posits that the historian must excavate an archive to reveal not merely what is in it, but the very conditions that have made that archive possible, what he calls its “historical a priori.” Coming to know the past, according to Smith is an important part of the process of decolonization. “Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West) requires us to visit, sit by site, our history under Western eyes,” (Smith 1999:34).

This thesis does not focus on attempting to “discover” an authentic, pre-contact description of the ulu, but hopefully contributes to decolonization by providing evidence of the process of colonization, begins to examine the complexities of interactions and exchanges in the Arctic and notes the silences and omissions in recording and conveying knowledge about these artifacts. I also question how the process of en-gendering descriptions of the Other has had “real consequences in that the ways in which Indigenous women were described, objectified and represented by Europeans in the nineteenth century” (Smith 1999:46) and has left a legacy of marginalization for Inuit women.

The museum and the library are heterotopias that are characteristic of Western culture. Re-visiting these spaces as sites of knowledge production frames how the study of uluit takes place. The **collecting** phase of the Smithsonian in Alaska and the **classifying** impulse of archaeological reports are examined for their underlying rules of practice, conventions of representation and dynamics of scientific authority.

## 2.2 (Re) appropriation

Taking Back is to bring into one’s possession or control. Pannell suggests we use the term: Indigenous (re) appropriation. The act she has in mind is most commonly referred to as “repatriation”, “return” or “restitution” of objects or cultural property,

however she argues that the use of these terms functions to present anthropologists, curators and archaeologists as the active agents in the process. They are the ones who send the objects back; while Indigenous people are positioned as the fortunate recipients of this benevolence. She suggests (re) appropriation or “to make something one’s own again,” as a more relevant way to refer to the changing relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Western institutions that hold their cultural objects. Unlike, “repatriation” (re) appropriation carries with it “the memories of previous transactions and prior relationships” (Pannell 1994:18-19).

What are forgotten are the “twisted cool memories of appropriation, the dark histories of colonization, the twisted stories of discovery and the hard facts of appropriation” (Pannell 1994:34). Baudrillard observes, “repatriation is a subterfuge, in order to make out as is nothing ever happened, to indulge in a retrospective hallucination.” (1983:22). Indigenous (re)appropriation “tears away this hallucinatory veil to reveal the politics of possession” (1983:22).

Foucault believes other heterotopias exist besides those of institutions that “accumulate time” and yet through preservation activity “are outside of the ravages of time.” These heterotopias are, “time in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect.” (Foucault 1986:26). He links these heterotopias to festivals and fairs, but I would suggest heterotopias could also be “slices of time,” or “expressions.” They are moments in life where multiple voices come together in a synchronistic fashion to create a new understanding or reveal a forgotten aspect.

Expression literally means, “to press out” and is the

- the power of expressing in words
- indication of feeling, spirit, character as on the face, in the voice or in artistic execution
- the act of representing, as by symbols.

Taking Back contains short vignettes or case studies that feature an ulu as an object, with image and physical description and tied to a particular people and a certain place. All uluit were given to me and act to imbue with meaning relationships I have formed

through the years. Each “place” and the events that happened there are recorded in personal journals I have kept since first coming to Alaska in 1987. As my path to seeking this degree comes after an interlude spent raising children, it was important to bring into this thesis, life experience that could not be captured through “structured field visits.” There is a specific intention to privilege Inuit women’s voices in this section, and to portray the ulu in its cultural context. This context includes not only village households, fish camps and other “field” locations, but also modern art galleries, museums, conference rooms and corporate headquarters.

### Chapter 3 Collecting

I pulled open the wide, shallow drawer, which glided easily despite the weight of its contents. Inside were all manner of uluit. Even with the climate-controlled environment, I could detect a faint smell of slate. The earthy smell was a bit of a surprise in the sanitary environment of the Smithsonian collections facility. The Museum Support Center of the National Museum of Natural History in Suitland, Maryland is a modern, state of the art facility far removed from the image of the Smithsonian as the nation's attic. Neither dirty nor dusty, perhaps a bit alien to the romantic notions gathered as a child reading about Margaret Mead.

Having so many uluit before me, I had a hint of what the early curators felt as they were overwhelmed by the amount of ethnographic specimens that poured in from the efforts of explorers, missionaries, traders and government agents. The uluit in this drawer came from different villages in western Alaska and were part the Nelson collection, considered one of the largest and most important collections of Arctic ethnographic materials ever assembled.

Edward W. Nelson, a Chicago naturalist who served the Army Signal Corps as a weather observer at St. Michael, Alaska from 1877 to 1881 was perhaps the most prolific, but only one of a team of collectors referred to as Baird's naturalists (Fitzhugh in Nelson 1983:40). Spencer F. Baird became assistant secretary of the Smithsonian in 1850, only four years after its official creation. At a time when the nation was expanding westward, Baird saw the young Smithsonian serving a dual role: documenting and understanding this new natural world and preserving its past for future study and edification. From his perspective it was in keeping with the mission of the Smithsonian to encourage field collecting, analysis and dissemination of results through lectures, publications and exhibitions (Fitzhugh 1988:89).

With the promise of a transfer of Alaska, from Russia to the United States, a unique opportunity presented itself to Baird. As he began to articulate this vision, he devised an ingenious strategy to both attract young, talented naturalists and gain logistical

support. He attached the Smithsonian to the “forces of change themselves” by enlisting the assistance of government boundary survey parties and commercial enterprises (Fitzhugh 1988:90). W.H. Dall, Robert Kennecott and Lucien Turner made collections from Norton Sound and the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta. Armed with collection manuals and notebooks these early ethnographers were especially excited about what they saw as an inanimate nature subject to empirical investigation and measurement. They were “heartened by the possibility that their Enlightenment categories and scientific instruments might help them pry nature from culture” (Cruikshank 2005:10). Baird appealed to individuals who saw their mission as salvaging a disappearing past; pioneers in new realms of modern science and adventurers in the dangerous and physically challenging arctic wilderness.

There was an urgency to Baird’s activity as the late nineteenth century was an era of highly competitive “collecting” which aimed to secure territories, exotic flora and fauna, mineral resources and even cultures. Alaska was not the only region to see such attention, and the Smithsonian wasn’t the only institution involved in such efforts. Europeans were also seeking new territories and the museum being the new “badge of civilization,” they sought to assemble large collections of “specimens” from the New World themselves. Indigenous peoples were classified alongside plants and animals and were considered as much the “commodities” of colonization as any natural resource. As Indigenous knowledge in the form of “myths,” artifacts, technologies, and social codes came to be recorded, they were considered “discoveries,” and as such property of the great cultural archive of the West.

Following the purchase of Alaska, Baird’s plan came to life as he was able to place naturalists on many expeditions as the United States government expanded its activities in the area. During the years from 1877 until 1884 Smithsonian collaborators working with the U.S. Army Signal Corps in various regions of Alaska amassed a significant research collection. These included in addition to the extensive work of Lieutenant P.H. Ray and John Murdoch at Barrow, smaller collections from the Aleutians



by Lucian M. Turner, from Kodiak and Bristol Bay by William J. Fisher, and from Nushagak by C.L. McKay (Fitzhugh in Murdoch 1987:xv).

The race to the Arctic was seen as an important vehicle for nation building and the advance of scientific knowledge. As Lisa Bloom writes in *Gender on Ice*, polar exploration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was integral to “the social construction of a distinctive nexus of white manhood and nationalism” and was crucial to “reifying a particular form of white masculinity”. Both the North and South Poles represented one of the few remaining masculine testing grounds where “adventure and hardship could still be faced” (Bloom 1993:32).

### 3.1 Thoughts in Things

Otis Mason was Curator of the Department of Ethnology at the United States National Museum (Smithsonian) from approximately 1884 to 1908. Mason is not a character in the heroic tales of explorers or an agent of the colonial mission which inspired government supported collectors. He worked in the “comfortable serendipity that left curators to deal with the miscellany of materials that came their way from army and navy officers, missionaries, traders and sea captains, uneducated but well-meaning donors, or colleagues with unusual interests” (Kohlstadt 2005:592).

It would have been difficult for him not to notice the ulu, if only due to their sheer numbers.

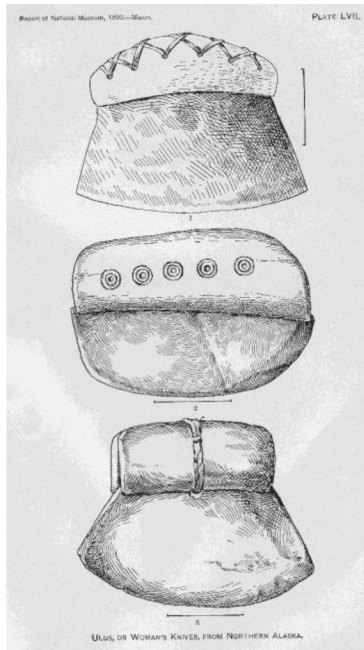
There are a great many examples of the Ulu in the National Museum. and there are thousands of pieces of slate, shale, quartzite and other stone which correspond exactly with the blades of the Eskimo woman’s knife. These have been gathered from village sites, shell heaps, the surface of the soil, from graves, mounds and Indian camps in countless numbers. This need surprise no one who reflects that every woman and every girl among

the American aborigines had one or more of these indispensable implements [Mason 1890:412].

Ethnographers like Otis Mason were wrestling with theoretical questions of cultural evolution, parallel development and culture transfer in the 1880s. Smithsonian curators organized their materials in mobile cases so that they could be presented by geographical region or, alternatively, by type (i.e., spears, headdresses, cooking utensils, and so forth). Mason, trying to find a way to capture the complexity, suggested that cabinets (i.e., collections) were essentially “thoughts in things.” Whatever the configuration, of course, the presentation formulated a position about human development and imposed an order on the artifacts that was not implicit in them (Kohlstadt 2005:588). Mason seemed acutely aware that context mattered. He understood that an object could be layered with many meanings, yet the predominate message communicated depended on the intentions and therefore presentation of the researcher.

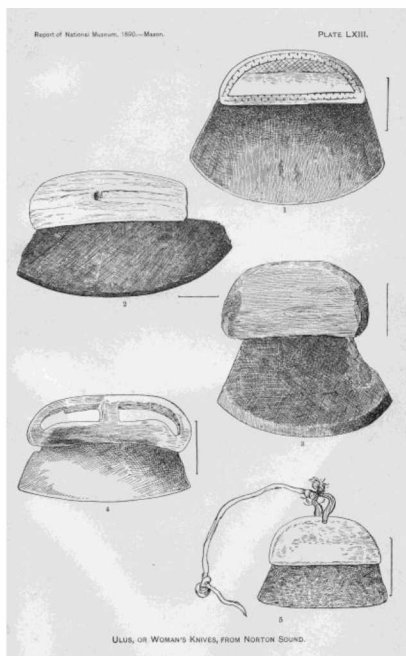
Surprisingly the only comprehensive monograph available on the ulu is *The Ulu, or Woman's Knife of the Eskimo* prepared by Otis Mason in 1890. Mason selects the uluit for inclusion in this monograph from a variety of collectors, which he lists in table form – Dall, McKay, Nelson, Turner, Murdoch and Fisher as well as others.

Mason bases his report on painstakingly drawn representations of the uluit, presented by region (see Figures 2-5). With the advent of photography, one might wonder why Mason would spend hours producing detailed drawings. The illustrations used in scientific description appear to be neutral representations. However, in their “appearance of being exactly what they represent, claiming truth to nature and so to science, they persuade the viewer with a naturalism no less saturated with meaning than other forms of art” (Molyneaux 1997:3). By asserting the power to name, describe and represent Mason is constituting what serves for the “truth” of this object. Much in the same way that land can be colonized, through specific processes of positivism; artifacts (and by extension the people who have made them) can be colonized as well.



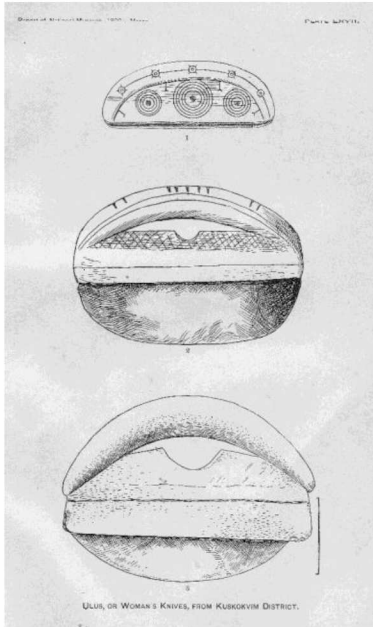
**Figure 2: Uluit - Northern Alaska**

Collected by Captain P.H.Ray (Mason 1890:Plate LVII)



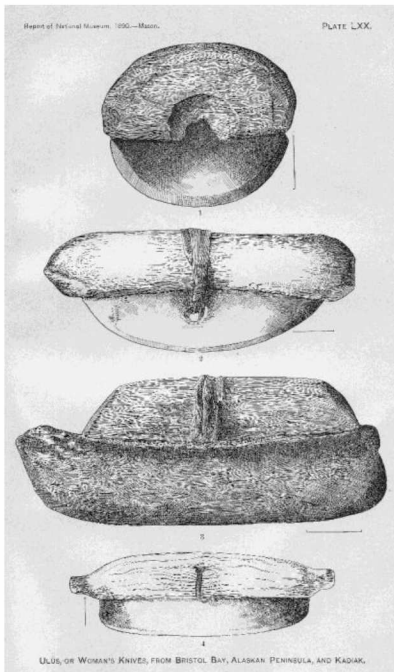
**Figure 3: Uluit - Norton Sound**

Collected by E.W. Nelson (Mason 1890:Plate LXIII)



**Figure 4: Uluit - Kuskokwim District**

Collected by E.W. Nelson (Mason 1890:Plate LXVII)



**Figure 5: Uluit - Kodiak and Vicinity**

Collected by W.J. Fisher (Mason 1890:Plate LXX)

Mason's action serves to "capture" the ulu and frame it in "antiquity" as an item to be left in the past. Images help to "reinforce and promulgate attitudes in the scientific community," and each scientific representation of knowledge is "shaped in specific circumstances of production within a specific time, space and sociocultural milieu." (Molyneaux 1997:3). Drawings and other visual representation have "tremendous inertia, or staying power that may persist long after the ideas behind the images have gone out of fashion" (Molyneaux 1997:6). Similar to the prestige collectors and donors could earn through adding uluit to museum repositories, the drawings were a way that Mason could immortalize not only the ulu, but himself.

With respect to the accompanying text, Mason drew heavily on field notes and correspondence of the different collectors. Only two large-scale publications were completed as a result of these early massive ethnographic collecting efforts: Nelson's *The Eskimo About Bering Strait* (1899) and Murdoch's *Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expeditions* (1892). As both are still routinely used by contemporary scholars, it is worthwhile to examine the historical bias prevalent in the writing. It is important to remember, however, that colonialism was not just about collection. It was also about "re-arrangement, re-presentation and re-distribution" (Smith 1999:62).

### 3.2 Early Arctic Ethnography

The role of the ethnographer in early documentation has been influential not only in the construction of a discourse concerning Inuit culture but also about Inuit women, their roles in their own culture as well as that of the colonizer. Identifying the construction of race, gender and class ideologies is a means of understanding underpinning ideologies that exist in the maintenance of unequal power relationships. In order to effectively talk or write back to such ideologies we need to interrogate the origins of those constructions. Through the examination of historical citations the complexities of dominant discourses and how they originated can be revealed.

It was nearly impossible even for male ethnographers describing life in the Arctic to ignore the contributions of women. There are many accounts of time spent traveling between settlements and time spent in households where the women are active and engaged in all activities necessary for survival. There are descriptions of women who butcher animals with great skill and dexterity to provide for nourishment and to prepare skins for clothing, boots and other essentials. These same women often trapped, hunted or fished for those animals. Indeed, Murdoch notes of the Inupiaq women he observes in Barrow, “Women appear to stand on a footing of perfect equality with men in both family and community” (1892:113).

This acknowledgment of shared power between sexes posed a challenge for Mason as he saw his role as being influential in the championing of the progress of American civilization. To this end it could be reframed by social evolutionist theories whereby sexual differences were linked with racial progress. “Civilized” races were differentiated from “primitive” races according to the specific sexual traits and gender roles that characterized the white middle classes. As historian Gail Bederman (1996) argues in *Manliness and Civilization*, biologists of the late nineteenth century believed that as human races slowly ascended the evolutionary ladder, men and women evolved increasingly differentiated lives and natures. Indeed, civilization itself was understood in the 1880s as a biologically transmissible racial trait—so far exhibited only by the more advanced white races. In 1897, William I. Thomas, a social scientist at the University of Chicago, specified with utmost clarity the concept of the evolutionary connection between sexual difference and racial progress: “The less civilized the race the less is the physical difference of the sexes” (41).

Mason could marvel at the ulu as a technological innovation within a primitive culture if he applied Klemm’s step-wise evolution of cultures which stipulated technology was a marker of a culture's stage of development and distinguished three stages of cultural evolution: savagery, domestication and freedom (Hinsley 1981:88). He could applaud the ulu for the role it played within primitive culture and then transform the ulu (and by extension the woman who used them) into a mere kitchen utility knife.

The kitchen chopper represents:

no less than the continuation of a structure with great modification of function. It is still the woman's knife deprived of nearly all its ancient and primitive offices, consigned to a single one which it scarcely had at the beginning. From this we are led to the reflection that it is easier to change the culture of women than the culture of men. Civilization lifts up savagery almost exclusively through the women. [Mason 1890:415]

Mason's decision to study the uluit in the collections at the National Museum, allows him this interpretive authority over an innovation he saw as "ever attending the march of civilization" (Mason 1890:412). As Mason "domesticates" the ulu he diminishes the immanent power this tool represents in Inuit culture and places it into the "kitchen of the white middle-class."

The following excerpt from Porsild in Greenland demonstrates how this transformation plays out:

We will now try to get to the bottom of the purpose of the Ulo, especially in its ideal form, and request, for example, a skilled West Greenland housewife to cut up and quarter a seal in our presence, asking that it be done "in the proper manner." This little addition will cause her to place the seal on her newly-scoured wooden floor, and to put on her Sunday clothes. The sleeves of her newly-washed, gaily-coloured jacket of European stuff are rolled up above the elbow, her longboots of coloured skin have on the front fine embroidered ornaments of bits of coloured skin, and if she be young and unmarried she has round her knee a broad piece of fine white linen embroidered with coloured silk. It is now her aim to demonstrate that the whole of the cutting up and the quartering of the big animal can be accomplished without staining her garments with blood. We shall witness

a work of dissection where each separate incision gives proof of the experience of generations, handed down from mother to daughter.

[Porsild 1915:205]

Porsild applauds the skill of the Inuit women but re-frames her as a “housewife” who is unwilling to soil her fancy European-style clothing. In reality, from the Inuit perspective much attention is paid to the care with which animals are butchered as a matter of respect to the animal and the necessity of safeguarding the curing and storage process.

In another example, derived from his field visit in 1913, Jenness provides many accounts of the prowess of individual Inuit women, but when speaking in general terms his tone becomes quite derogatory:

An Eskimo woman demands very little: her world is small and her mental horizon limited. Life seems full and satisfactory to her if she has someone who will supply her basic needs of food and shelter, someone for whom she must cook and sew and by whom, in due course, she can bear two or three children . . . Her proper mission, she believes, is to establish and maintain a smoothly running household [Jenness 1957:30].

As Mason so neatly ties the ulu into categories of sexual difference being promoted within his own culture, he also ties the apron strings around the waist of Inuit women.



### 3.3 Woman, the Civilizer

Louise Newman asserts in *White Women's Rights* that Mason quickly grasps the implications of social evolutionist theory as the basis for the United States policy in assimilating Indians. As a theory that linked biology and culture, social evolutionary theories connected societal change with individual change, equated advanced civilizations with white racial superiority and anchored both of these in sexual difference. Social evolutionary theories also introduced the theoretical possibility that sexual and racial differences could change over time—and change as a result of individual and social actions. In the United States, these theories offered support to those who were arguing that racial inferiors could be quickly civilized through assimilationist programs (Newman 1999:29). For the ruling elite of the United States in the late nineteenth century, “sexual difference, race, and national power were all causally connected” (Newman 1999:42).

It should not be surprising that when the Women's Anthropological Society of America (WASA) was founded in 1885, Mason offered to provide the group with an outline of study and secured the opportunity to address them in a series of talks. The culmination of this effort resulted in his book, *Women's Share in Primitive Culture*. The book appears at first glance to be a radical statement on the role of women in the formation of culture and civilization. Mason attributed the development of many, if not all, the major innovations in art, language, religion and industry to women. He could acknowledge the contributions and accomplishments of women in a “primitive” society as they were, as he saw it, only so far along on the evolutionary scale.

Assimilationist policies, entrenchment of patriarchal gender roles, and an absolute belief in American superiority guided Mason's work.

Division of labor began with the invention of fire-making, and it was a division of labor based upon sex. The woman stayed by the fire to keep it alive while the man went to the field or the forest for game. The world's industrialism and militancy began then and there. Man has been cunning

in devising means of killing beast and his fellowman - he has been the inventor in every murderous art. The woman at the fireside became the burden bearer, the basket-maker, the weaver, potter, agriculturist, domesticator of animals - in a word, the inventor of all the peaceful arts of life. [Mason 1895:viii]

This sentiment is echoed in his monograph on the ulu when he states, “it is well to recall in this connection that in savagery the peaceful arts such as housemaking, furnishing, tailoring, butchering, gleaning, milling, cooking, spinning, netting, weaving and the like, belong to the women” (Mason 1890:411).

In his evocative renderings of the common domestic lives of primitive and civilized women, Mason downplayed the ongoing political conflicts between whites and Indians. Mason’s work offered a “soothing balm” for white Americans’ longings for racial harmony, as he insisted on the potential for similarity among races and the possibility for the universal acceptance of patriarchal domesticity (Newman 1999:52). According to Mason “it matters not whether we regard the history of the remotest past or the diverse civilizations of the present, the emancipation and exaltation of women are the synonym of progress” (Mason 1890:412).

The founders of the WASA followed the suggestions Mason made clear that far from being “innovators” they were a group of “special contributors” to the discipline who were to not question its fundamental paradigm (Lurie 1966:37). It was made explicit that women anthropologists would play a special role as women because not only could women obtain detailed information on other women's private lives, but because women were the “conservators of race traits” and as white women they were the “civilizers” of racial and class inferiors (Newman 1999:23).

The demand for women’s rights had arisen at the same time as evolutionist theories were being applied to racial development, sexual difference and social progress. Women’s progress was applauded by evidence of her increased presence in the public sphere and her attendance at universities, but mostly importantly through her role as

social reformer. Changes in women's status were linked to the ideas of evolutionary progress and her success marked the advance of a "higher" and more "civilized" United States. Accomplishing what white men accomplished was a coveted goal for white feminists of the time. Thus white women embraced the evangelical mission to convert the heathen. At home, the "Indian problem" was reconceived, according to Trask, as a "Woman Question." Indian women were cast as saviors of their race and thus agents of the civilizing mission. By deciding what Indian women should be and how they should proceed, white women merely reinforced the superiority of white civilization (2002:235-236).

Although in the initial stages of arctic exploration few colonial women traveled with expeditions, their influence was strongly felt and even from a distance influenced the behavior of white men. Despite their Othering of the people of the Arctic, Western male explorers and travelers often formed intimate relations with Inuit. Indeed many arctic explorers had children with Inuit women and usually the existence of their Inuit families was carefully guarded outside the Arctic, in the world of whites. The shame and guilt this engendered often "weighed like nightmares on the brain of their descendants and their families outside the Arctic" (Palsson 2004). These passions were seen to be unavoidable, in the colonies as elsewhere, but they had to be channeled into a proper direction, in accordance with the moral obligations posed by the empire and the church. In the late nineteenth century, Stoler (1989) suggests that the very categories of "colonizer" and "colonized" were secured through forms of sexual control which defined the domestic arrangements of Europeans and the cultural investments by which they identified themselves. Gender specific sexual sanctions demarcated positions of power by refashioning middle-class conventions of respectability, which, in turn, prescribed the personal and public boundaries of race.

But Inuit women were not only excellent seamstresses, their ability to act as guides and interpreters were essential to the success of the ethnographer's mission. Dispelling the myth of lack of male access to females of the culture, Inuit women often were very involved collaborators—often "key informants." However, because

ethnographers were unable to acknowledge the intellectual role of Indigenous collaborators, in particular women, their contributions were “significantly elided at this historical moment” and white Western men remained as “the sole aesthetic interpreters or scientific authorities” (Bloom 1993:32).

Interpretation of the ulu remains tied to the social evolutionary discourse that Mason utilized in the justification of nineteenth century American imperialism and racial and sexual hierarchy. Providing a more accurate culturally contextual description of this “women’s tool” is more complex than simply decrying a “white male bias” in arctic ethnography. It is also more difficult than acknowledging colonial distortions and moving to the “post-colonial.” An appropriate analysis of the ulu means going beyond historical “amnesia” and accepting responsibility for complicity with the imperialist project.

## Chapter 4    Classifying

The first time I took my children to the newly renovated consortium library at the University of Alaska in Anchorage, they looked toward the ceiling in awe when we entered the soaring space of the entry as if in a cathedral. Then they were astounded with the number of books piled on shelves. The shelves were made to move back and forth with a touch of a button, so that more books could be stored in a space. There were endless drawers containing maps that could be brought out to view on large tables.

Fortey recounts a similar impression in *Dry Storage No. 1, The Secret History of a Natural History Museum*. He finds it difficult to believe there could be “so many books pertaining to natural history.” With a main reading room so “vast, with tomes on shelves all around the perimeter as high as one could reach” that there were “little ladders to help the reader retrieve some of the higher volumes.” He goes on to remark that there are some visitors who find such libraries intimidating, but he is not one of them, “I like to see the books in their old, leather bindings, the shelves stretching away, deeply filled; it gives me a sense of continuity with past scholars.” Viewing all of these volumes, part of the great “archive” of Western knowledge he wonders how it will even be possible for him make a contribution. “Think of all the thousands of workers putting pen to paper to add to the knowledge of the natural worlds, or to communicate scientific ideas to their colleagues. If all this is known already, how can a new intruder into the world of learning make any mark at all?” (Fortey 2008:27).

Making a mark, building a reputation and becoming an expert are all impulses within the scientific community and academia that speak to the Western ideal of intellectual transcendence and personal actualization. To find one’s niche and acquire specialized knowledge has its rewards in the acclaim of one’s peers and the possibility of immortality through the written word.

Archaeologists use access to heritages places and items to reaffirm identity – in this case the disciplinary identity of a specialized expert within a mature science. In *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage*, Laurajane Smith suggests

this process is continually reaffirmed by the ways in which the processual discourse, particularly that of “stewardship,” “professionalism” and “scientific objectivity” is continually rehearsed and ultimately regulated by its inclusion in theory, policy and legislation (Smith 2004:195). The idea that archaeologists are specially appointed stewards of the “archaeological record” for the benefit of all people comes with an implicit presumption of privilege justified by appeals to intellectual and scientific authority (Wylie 2005). In actuality, public access to the material and intellectual results of archaeological research remains limited, and in most contexts “held in the public trust” means “owned and managed by the state” for particular state interests and purposes. Historically, archaeology has served the needs of the nation-state and those in a position of power and privilege (Smith 2004:68-74). Nationalist, imperialist and colonialist traditions have figured prominently in archaeology’s development (Trigger 1984:356–357).

Scientific colonialism describes a situation in which knowledge is extracted and produced elsewhere, without benefits returning to those at the source. Hymes (1974:48) proposed that anthropologists have been guilty of scientific colonialism and exploitation of those they study by “mining Indigenous communities for knowledge, bringing it back to our own societies as raw material and then producing finished products by which anthropologists profit.” More recently, Zimmerman (2001:169) has applied it to relations between archaeologists and Indigenous peoples. A major feature of scientific colonialism is claiming the unlimited right of access to data from a “colony.” Another is exporting “data” (or people) to one’s own territory for processing into profitable goods such as articles, books, or PhDs. The result is an asymmetrical production and distribution of knowledge about the colony that excludes people at the source from participating in the most creative or rewarding aspects of research (Hymes 1974:50). Ames (1999) notes that researchers typically not only claim property rights over the knowledge they produce, but also proprietary rights over the subject matter—the field of raw data—from which they gained their knowledge. This conceptual paradigm continues to be imposed upon the world as a type of “vestigial colonialism—long after the decline of those imperial

regimes that gave rise to it in the first place” (Ames 1999:41). Descendant populations are well aware of the scientific colonialism that persists in archaeology (Watkins 2000).

The carving up of Inuit territory into separate nation-states has created a flow of information from north to south. Claiming territory (archaeological sites) and extracting resources (artifacts, burials and other cultural materials) remain an active dynamic in arctic archaeology. Field seasons are conducted in the summer months and the excavation “data” are shipped back to the respective universities where they are utilized by the archaeologists to “build” a reputation. Indigenous moves to assume control over cultural resources have increased and in some cases a mutual collaboration is the result. Unfortunately, many resources (sites and artifacts) remain under the “ownership” of state and federal agencies where although consultation is required, the quality and duration is not stipulated. “If one is quite convinced that one knows best – because one is the government, or a scientist, or a professional – one is likely to have a hard time consulting with people” (King 2003:235).

What is key to acknowledge is that within the United States, the decision regarding who gets to make the determination regarding access, control and interpretation of cultural resources most often still lies outside of the particular tribe or Indigenous group. Archaeologists presume they have a right to knowledge — they base career and identity on it —taking for granted they have jurisdiction and control.

It has been rightly noted that archaeology itself “will not move beyond being a colonialist enterprise unless it actively seeks to understand the underlying issues of ownership and control of material and intellectual property as related to cultural knowledge and heritage” (Nicholas and Bannister 2004:329). Most archaeologists are nominally in favor of a more equitable archaeology, but in reality they still hold the real power in terms of the actual production and interpretation of archaeological knowledge, access to or use of data, and the capital derived from these processes. The very idea of sharing power appears threatening to many archaeologists because it means a radical re-

visioning of ethical responsibilities and research paradigms and altering deep-seated notions about scholarly privilege, ownership of intellectual property, and the production of knowledge (Nicholas and Bannister 2004).

In addition to the uluit “deposited” into museums and other Western institutions by late nineteenth century ethnographic collectors, many have been acquired through recent archaeological excavation. In the laboratories, storage facilities and even basements of academic institutions throughout the world are uluit in labeled plastic bags amongst other artifacts, faunal material and even human remains. Not only rules by which things are studied but whether they are deemed worthy of researching, what questions are asked how they are asked and how the “data” are analyzed are the purview of the archaeologist when it comes to things of the ancient past.

#### 4.1 Man, the Hunter

Archeologists have, “contributed to and perpetuated certain limited and ethnocentric views on women and gender relations. Archaeology and prehistory, in a sense, have always been gendered – gendered “androcentric.” There has been great commendation for “Man – the Hunter” (Conkey 1991:103). Until fairly recently, the production and distribution of Western, academic knowledge has been dominated exclusively by white, Western men socialized in cultures that systematically discriminate on the basis of gender, race and class.

Feminist critiques have demonstrated that researchers focus disproportionate attention on the experiences, accomplishments and social lives of men (Minnich 1982). Additionally archaeologists all too often project culturally specific, contemporary notions about the roles, positions, activities and capabilities of the men and women onto the groups they study. These projections suggest gender definitions as static and unvarying without regard to temporal or cultural context (Spector 1991:388). We must also be aware that “the knowledge about our reconstructions or interpretations involving gender in the past is, of course, also linked to and derived from the sociopolitics of



archaeological practice” (Conkey 1991:102). Not only what is studied, but also how it is studied is determined by power relations within academia.

The dispatching of large game, especially by men, appears to hold a hallowed status in the archaeological literature. Exclusion or marginalization of women in the subsistence realm is less a reality, Jarvenpa and Brumbach submit, than a product of observer bias and blindness. As products of Western society, they suggest most anthropologists have internalized a recreational model of hunting ultimately derived from “aristocratic class notions of sport, trophy collecting, and Victorian masculinity.” Consciously applied or otherwise, “the Western sporthunting model is highly inappropriate as a lens for viewing hunter-foragers or hunter-herders” (Jarvenpa and Brumbach 2006:100)

The distorted lens of the sport hunt may also account for the inordinate attention given by many archaeologists to the technology of killing. As an example of this myopia, the literature on prehistoric North America abounds with studies of Paleoindian fluted points and their effectiveness for felling mammoths, mastodons, and other megafauna. Fluted points and other large chipped stone bifaces have become the presumed indicators of “male” hunting activity. However, there is remarkably little interest in the tools, facilities, and technology that converted these massive kills into usable supplies of food, clothing, and other products (Jarvenpa and Brumbach 2006:101). Modern flintknapping, a means of simulating ancient lithic production techniques, is an area dominated by males (Gero 1991). The tools replicated by modern male flintknappers concentrate on a limited range of forms, mostly projectile points, of which the fluted type is the “single most frequently replicated point in North American research” (Gero 1991:165). The Western sport-hunting model fails to consider the total economic and social needs of peoples who rely on hunting and foraging as a way of life (Jarvenpa and Brumbach 2006:101).

In the Arctic this translates to an obsession with toggling harpoons, spears and other projectile points. Workman and McCartney (1998) consider, “one somewhat romantic school of thought seems to hold that prowess in sea mammal hunting is the hallmark of a ‘real’ maritime orientation. The larger or more dangerous the animals

pursued, the better.” They acknowledge in many areas of the Arctic, fish and littoral resources are the foundation of subsistence strategies with sea mammal hunting being perhaps “overrated.” Yet, while they credit ground slate uluit as being “a key innovation in the mass processing of fish,” they also cite, “Ground slate knives, like uluit in particular, have been suggested to be an important *adjunct* of maritime life” (Fitzhugh 1975:358ff, 376, emphasis added).

One of the few research projects focused exclusively on the ulu is study by Lisa Frink working with Cup’ik consultants in Chevak. She compares the performance of slate and metal uluit when processing salmon in an effort to model technological change associated with the replacement of ground slate uluit with metal ones (Frink et.al. 2003:116). She asserts the importance of ethnoarchaeological studies as a valuable tool for interpreting past human behavior, but most of the research has focused on “males and their material-culture correlates.” She gives the reason for the neglect of women’s productive activities as, “the tendency to focus on the primary kill” rather than on the “whole meat-acquisition process, which includes, procurement, processing, production and storage as well as skilled management and an appreciation of technological requirements and constraints” (Frink 2003:116). She echoes Jarvenpa and Brumbach when they declare, “our research focused on the *total enterprise* of hunting, including the pursuit, dispatch, butchering, preservation of meat and other products, storage, distribution, and the manufacture of clothing and implements” (Frink 2003:112).

While early attempts at “engendering” the archaeological record insisted that “women can hunt, too,” (Gero 1991), this “re-positioning of the Division of Labor,” is merely an additive device that does nothing to disrupt the existing exploratory structure. Man is still the “Hunter” and women’s activities are an “adjunct” to his hunting. This theoretical move is reminiscent of Mason’s approval of the admittance of women into the profession of anthropology as long as they did not question its fundamental paradigm. Female archaeologists seem to be reminded that far from being “innovators” they are a group of “special contributors” to the discipline who by virtue of their sex can best document female activities.

This stance is problematic in that it reinforces the dualistic notion of separate spheres where the male (public) is valued over the female (domestic). In a recent article looking for “intersectionalities” or common points of reference and resistance between Feminist archaeology and Indigenous archaeology, Conkey (2005) still places herself as “dwelling in the margins.” Feminism far from being credited in postprocessual archaeology as the driving force behind the questioning of power structures, increased self-reflexivity and the embracing of multivocality, has been given little credence in mainstream archaeology. There is no political advantage to be gained, and only male privilege — and with it professional and scientific authority and control — to be lost.

There is also danger in the continued presence of the male hunter as a hegemonic masculinity within the domain of archaeology and how it acts to condone and perpetuate the idea of privileged male authority. If all that is female and Native is diminished in the analysis of material culture, and then reflected to society at large through publications and exhibits; the result is a double-knife for Inuit women. On the one side it shreds their sense of self-worth and positive identity and then on the other it creates the condition for victimization by others.

When I first proposed the topic of uluit to my research methods class, a strictly quantitative approach was suggested. Why didn't I just count the number of papers, articles, books and other publications on the ulu and compare it to the number on projectile points? While the information about uluit is sparsely scattered throughout archaeological reports and in brief mentions in academic journals and difficult to locate, the amount of information on male hunting implements is much too numerous to easily tabulate. This can also be due to the ulu being a “ground stone” artifact.

Compared to the volume of material associated with elaborately retouched implements (associated with hunting), such as the projectile point, ground stone tools (associated with domestic activities) have received much less attention. There is currently only one major publication that focuses solely on ground stone analysis (Adams 2002). Lithic analysis is synonymous with flaked stone technology. In a preponderance of lithic analysis manuals, there is only a token inclusion of ground stone artifacts. They are often

regarded as unglamorous, awkward, static through millennia of use, and functionally self-evident. Ground stone tools nevertheless constitute a substantial part of archaeological finds (Ebeling and Rowan 2004:8). They can offer insights into such diverse phenomena as changes in diet and food processing techniques, mobility and residence patterns, division of labor, and specialized activities (Ebeling and Rowan 2004:112).

Even though the study of lithic materials in the archaeological record focuses almost exclusively on flaked stone technology, the different strands of analysis including origins and distribution, typological analysis, functional analysis and replicative systems analysis can be applied to the ulu. The ulu has been recognized as an artifact type, but the manner in which it has been analyzed (or not) may say more about the archaeologists than the ulu itself.

#### 4.2 Origins and Distribution

According to some archeologists, the ulu or the women's semi-lunar knife is believed to have appeared in the Arctic with the arrival of the Thule "pioneers," but Dumond (1987) and others have proposed much earlier dates. Additionally, very early occurrences of uluit have been mentioned for three sites in the eastern Aleutians: Anangula 8700-7800 BP, Sandy Beach Bay, 5600-4300 BP and Chaluka 4000-3500 BP (Laughlin and Aigner 1975:193-194). Uluit have been recorded in archaeological assemblages from Chukotka across Alaska and northern Canada to Greenland. Surprisingly, uluit have been found in sites in Northeastern America dating back 6000 years (Snow 1980).

While it is generally agreed that geographic distribution of the ulu corresponds to the modern Inuit cultural areas, very little actually has been done to demonstrate geographic delineation. What is clear is that currently there is not a sufficiently articulated chronology of the emergence and changes through time of the ulu. Rankin and Labreche in addressing the difficult problem of cultural origins for the ulu, state that, "it appears that ulu(it) or ulu-like tools are part of a complex of traits shared by a number of

Northern Maritime cultures through millennia, with origins that reach back 4500 years ago” (1991:105).

Part of the difficulty in relating the ulu to the more general development of indigenous grinding and polishing techniques in the Arctic is because it is a complex and widespread process, which needs further investigation. Previous explanations for the origins and spread of slate knife-making practices were diffusionist suggesting an initial dispersal of production knowledge and tools to North America from Asian or Eurasian localities (Gjessing 1948), subsequent north-to-south or south-to-north diffusion (Dumond 1968), and cross-continental ties between groups in the Northeast and the Pacific Northwest (Osborne et al. 1956). Underlying these explanations was, in part, the assumption that gross similarities in production methods (grinding) and tool morphology (thin blades, beveled edges) signify shared cultural traits (Graesch 2007). More recent examinations of slate artifact distributions and radiocarbon dates, however, strongly suggest the independent development of ground slate technology as a maritime adaptation in these culturally distinct North American regions (Clark 1980; Fitzhugh 1975; Ritchie 1969).

#### 4.3 Typology

Artifact classification is based on morphological similarities. In the case of the ulu, the strongest identifying element for this type of artifact would be its distinctive semi-lunar shape with a handle attached to the flat edge or otherwise utilized in a transverse manner. Some earlier discussion exists in comparing other transverse knives from across the world to uluit, (Lowenstein 1958; Arkeell 1958; Steiner 1941; Mason 1890) as a means of differentiating from other knife forms. There have been some attempts at typologies (Mathiassen 1927; Leroi-Gourhan 1946) which incorporate handle type, evidence of hafting and existence of stems. However, efforts to apply systematic classification to the ulu have been isolated and sporadic. Much more information could

be recorded such as angle of curve, shape of blade and type of hole used for attachment of handle (Knecht 1995).

There is more to typological analysis than the assigning of artifacts to different classes. These classifications become part of a hierarchical system where items of high interest to the archaeologist occur at an elevated ranking in that system. Accordingly, projectile points and other hunting implements are placed high in this ranking whereas uluit tend to fall low. Much as women's activities areas are referred to as taking place in site areas designated as "household," "domestic space" or even "kitchen," the corresponding artifact classification for uluit is "kitchen" or "domestic utility." This classification re-positions the ulu by reducing its importance and thus rendering its significance moot.

#### 4.4 Function

The ulu is often referred to as a multi-purpose tool suited for cultural adaptation to an arctic coastal environment. Uluit have been used for many purposes: cleaning, preparation and cutting of skins, butchering meat, cleaning and slicing fish for drying (Rankin and LaBreche 1991:110). However on the original purpose of this invention there are different suggestions. A notable technological change is the invention of the semi-lunar knife, or ulu in the early Kachemak phase. This tool, compared to stemmed knives of the preceding Ocean Bay II phase, would have decreased wrist strain and increased processing efficiency and would have provided a distinct advantage in the processing of mass-captured resources with short pre-processing shelf-life (Fitzhugh 2003; Knecht 1995). In the Central Arctic however the ulu is attributed to the rise of tailored skin clothing where it allowed both the ease in flensing the animals and precision in cutting the skins in preparation for sewing (Oakes 1996; Issenman 1997).

Although the semi-lunar shape is ideal for a wide variety of uses, differences in blade style and size may indicate the intentional design of tools for different cutting tasks. There are numerous functionally related ulu shapes that are not systematically recorded in

the literature (Oakes 1996). The use of functional analysis to decipher the technology, manufacture and the use of various sizes and types of uluit has not been attempted.

Among the technologies that are both linked to the processing of anadromous fish and recovered in archaeological investigations, uluit could be seen as the most diagnostic. Yet, even with their presence in great numbers and their association with cultural change, ulu knives are not treated as chronological markers in arctic archaeological research.

Ames (1985:171) has outlined three archaeological correlates for resource intensification in the North Pacific, which are useful in testing for evidence of salmon intensification in the archaeological record. These include: 1) an increase in specialized technology for procurement and processing, 2) an increasing emphasis on particular resources (resource specialization), and 3) an increasing reliance on storage technology.

As evidence for the first of Ames' correlates, specialized procurement technology, are noted materials indicative of mass fish procurement, such as netting technology, weirs, and traps. Even the ubiquitous "notched stones" or net weights found in Late Kachemak phase receive more attention than the ulu. This relates back to our earlier discussion, where women's activities and tools are mere "adjunct" to the procurement process and thus deserving of less status.

#### 4.5 Replicative analysis

The use of experimentally produced tools with associated experiments can yield useful information about artifacts. Selection and modification of raw materials can reveal desired characteristics of the stone, the stages of manufacture as well as illuminate lithic procurement strategies, preferred sources and reveal trade patterns. Petrologic and geochemical petrographic thin section, neutron analysis, stable isotope analysis X-ray fluorescence, though relatively newer can result in additional information regarding sources and trade.

Signs of diagnostic damage enable use/wear analysis and the investigation of functional attributes. Yet there is a "dearth of published research—ethnographic and

archaeological—addressing the details of how uluit and other slate knives were made.” (Graesch 2007:582) No studies have addressed how uluit were designed, manufactured and utilized. Graesch who models the replication of slate fish knives in an adjacent cultural area of the Pacific NorthWest finds this somewhat surprising, given that the manufacture and use of slate knives were as important to intensive seasonal fishing activities as the production and use of the tools used to catch fish, such as dip nets. (Graesch 2007:602)

He also discusses the problems with analysis of what would be considered “debitage” or waste from the slate tool production process. The byproducts of slate tool making can be very small, and as much as “75 percent of a slate artifact assemblage may go unrecovered when field investigators use sieves with mesh larger than 3.2 mm (1/8 in.) or do not retain screen residue for laboratory processing (Graesch 2007). Methods for studying the replication of uluit through the analysis of finished uluit, pre-forms, production errors or broken forms, and by-products have received little attention.

Many of the uluit recovered during archaeological excavation have slate blades. Ulu blades were also made of other stones such as chert and jade as well as metal. Metal uluit prior to contact were made of copper and meteoritic iron. These production processes have not been described or experimentally modeled. The adoption of metal from European trade has been addressed. Whitridge (2004), finding not uluit on the floors of the houses he excavates, but only personal adornment items he associates with women, suggests metal was used by women only for prestige, not practical purposes. I would suggest that metal uluit may have been absent because they are a highly curated and very portable artifact. It is also possible that the use of metal was delayed in the production of uluit for other reasons, perhaps because to do so would violate spiritual observances or even more simply the metallic taste imparted to the food was undesirable.

Systematic classification is used in archaeology to generate and sort cultural variability based on artifact analysis. The ability to measure this variability can enhance understanding of the archaeological record in such areas as adaptation to the environment, cultural interaction and spatial and temporal changes. Efforts in the Arctic

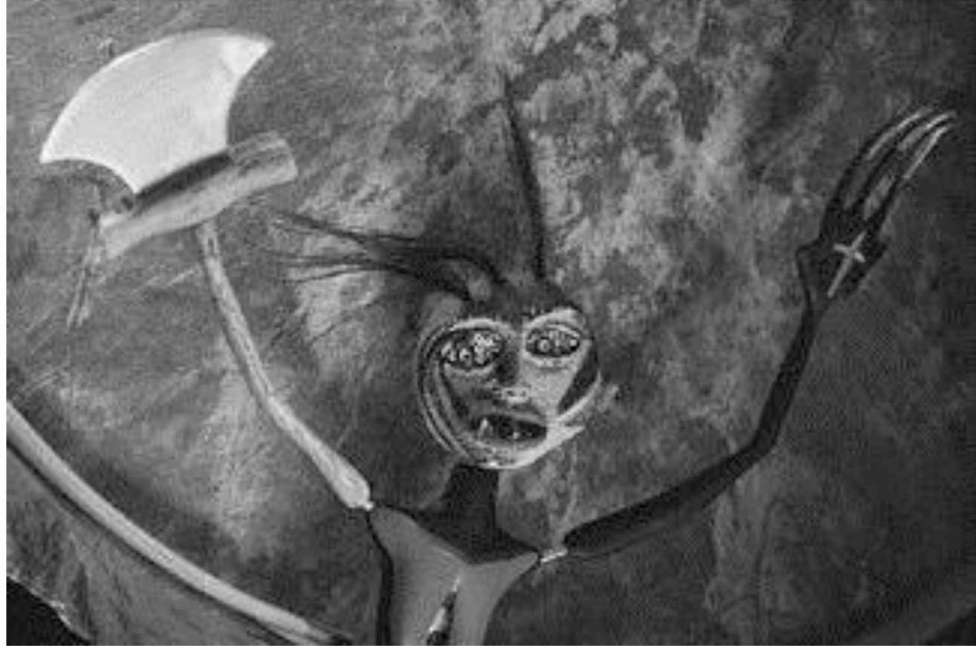


to apply systematic classification to the ulu as an artifact class have been isolated and sporadic.

The use of stylistic attributes by applying a seriation method coupled with complementary radiocarbon dating and stratigraphic analysis from associated site areas could contribute to a chronology of uluit. Additionally while it is recognized (Rankin and LaBreche 1991) little attention has been paid to the detailed aesthetic differences in ulu form and decoration as in indicator of regional differences. The ulu could benefit from the application of stylistic attributes to track changes through time and the use of functional attributes to examine variability. It could be worth the effort to examine a selection of previously excavated uluit and associated archaeological reports to acquire significant new knowledge about the ulu.

We can't forget the ramifications of how the process of classifying this artifact affects the perception of Inuit women and their role in society. By not esteeming the ulu as an instrumental tool in the Inuit culture, archaeologists display disrespect for the women with whom it is associated as well. However, lack of archaeological study can also be seen as an opportunity. Worldwide, members of Indigenous communities have viewed archaeology as a colonialist enterprise, just another tool of oppression. They have argued that anthropology objectifies them, while archaeology disenfranchises them from their own histories (Watkins 2000). Thus, for Indigenous peoples what is at stake is their right to control their own identity. There exists an opportunity where Inuit women could design the "research" strategies and "take back the knife."

## Chapter 5 Taking Back the Knife: Expressions of Strength



**Figure 6: All the Rage**

Original work, Susie Silook, mixed media (image courtesy of Ewe Tribe)

If someone hadn't raped artist Susie Silook, Grant Hall might have stood empty. Instead, it bustled with the opening of a bold art show/happening titled *Ceremony of Healing*.

Had authorities identified a suspect, Silook might not have produced work that screams out so explosively. *All the Rage* (Figure 6) is a fanged, howling female. Her beaded eyes glare wildly. One raised hand holds an ulu, symbol of Eskimo womanhood; the other flashes claws and a bloody cross.

Had the assault been an isolated event, the show would have been a solo exhibit. But it has drawn together a formidable sisterhood of prominent Alaska artists, all Native women. The work explores not just the epidemic of violence against Alaska Native women, but the attitude that discounts them as submissive, ignorable, as drunks who deserve what they get.

Some say cultural conditioning and shame keep women from seeking help and telling their stories, retreating in anonymous silence that makes them even more vulnerable to attackers.

With this show, that anonymity ends.

“I am the stereotype,” said Silook. “I am that drunken Native woman who got sexually assaulted. It's not like I want to be the poster child -- but let's put a face on it.”

“The stopping has to start somewhere.” [Dunham 2001]

### 5.1 Healing Ceremony

Susie Silook is a Yupik/Inupiaq writer, carver and sculptor from St. Lawrence Island. While she uses traditional materials and techniques, she also challenges tradition at every turn. Breaking with the tradition that sculpture is only done by men, she also depicts women rather than men and animals as had been done in the past. The themes of her carvings, sculptures, poems and essays are the issues confronting contemporary Alaskan women including high unemployment, alcoholism and violence — especially violence against women.

The reclaimed voice is a shared strength. The art that results is part of a chain of experience where one voice is heard by another and urges the other to speak as well. A word, an image may elicit recognition: This also happened to me . . . this is my story, too. The statistics on violence against Indigenous women are staggering, one in five Native women in Alaska, one in three Native women in Canada may become victims of sexual assault, and these are statistics which are believed to be too conservative due to underreporting. Many women have suffered some form of sexual abuse and have been effectively silenced by being disbelieved or ignored or blamed.

Victims of sexual abuse are victims of a misuse of power. Perpetrators of the crimes are protected by a system that silences their victims. Breaking the silence unleashes tremendous energy. Creative acts can bear witness and give testimony to the

unending violence against women. Michelle LeBeau's essay, *A Healing Process*, demonstrates the way in which history lives inside a woman, "the way in which we come to know the furious wind of violence and the fierce courage to survive." She says, "We take a journey with words, and in our minds, we go there" (2002:110).

For the renewal, we go back to the beginning, to draw from the strength of our originality, to remember who we are, in relation to each other, in relation to our peoples, in relation to ourselves (Hernandez-Avila 2002:xi). The ulu is an enduring object in the lives of Inuit women. If you begin to explore the iconography of female roles in Inuit society, the ulu, or woman's knife takes on a symbolic force (Sibbald 2000:679).

I offer the following version of a tale told with slight variations throughout the Arctic . . .

*Sun and Moon once were humans on earth,  
Not as husband and wife, but brother and sister.  
Golden Sun was the younger sister of Moon,  
Entranced by her light, he would go to her in the night,  
Not a lover she knew, Sun smeared soot on his face.  
By day, seeing the mark, on her brother  
She grabbed her ulu, sliced off her breasts  
Offering them to him  
Lighting a wick of lampmoss,  
She ran round in a circle, rising in a spiral into the air.  
Taking pursuit, he imitated her but stumbled and his wick went out  
Only a glowing ember, Moon has light yet no warmth.*

This story speaks on many levels of the creation of the sun and moon and the foreboding associated with eclipses (when the moon catches the sun and rapes her again). While the taboo on incestuous behavior is most often seen as the "moral" of this story by missionaries and ethnographers, it may actually been a cautionary statement that reflects

the closeness and passed on family traits between siblings in a matriarchal culture. Yet the truth of the matter may be that as many Indigenous people see it, “women who are at the peak of their fecundity are believed to possess a power so strong, it throws a man’s power out of kilter” (Gunn-Allen 2004:59). What has been downplayed or confused in translation is the reclaimed power of the Sun. She does not remain a victim of her brother the Moon. Raising an ulu in anger is a powerful action of a strong woman.

“The story... hasn’t changed for hundreds, maybe thousands of years,” Beth Brant writes, “the retelling. The continuity of spirit. We believe in that. We believe in community in its most basic form. We recognize each other. Visible spirit” (1989:9).

Silko’s art is connected to the story of her people; it is her personal narrative, but it is seen as part of the collective story as well. Leslie Silko states, “No matter how funny or sad an incident might be, someone [in her community] could always recall a similar incident,” thus allowing a natural mechanism by which an individual could see herself or himself in relation to the community, as opposed to feeling separate(d) either by good fortune or misfortune (Silko 1996:90-91).

The key here is community. The stories are given back and forth, shared and cherished. They are sustained by humans, by the relations in the natural world, by those in the spirit world, by the earth herself. Silko says that “a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener; the storyteller’s role is to draw the story out of the listeners” (Silko 1996:51). This is a traditional perspective on narrative—of story within story, the idea that one story is only the beginning of many stories and the sense that stories never truly end. The stories help us all (not only Native peoples) to know who we are (Silko 1996:51). Indigenous women’s perspectives and ways help to “make sense for ourselves of the crazy sicknesses, the raw ruthlessness, and at the same time, the amazing gracefulness of the world in which we live” (Hernandez-Avila 2002). *All the Rage* could be seen as a ritualized piece that reclaims the ulu by putting it in its original context as an object of woman’s power. *Ceremony of Healing* was “starkly painful, disturbing and laced with anger but also held elements of hope and community solidarity” (Gerjevic 2001).



Inupiaq (Barrow, AK)  
 18 cm x 10 cm  
 Whale bone riveted handle  
 Steel blade – sharpened on one side

**Figure 7: Uluqpak**

## 5.2 Barrow

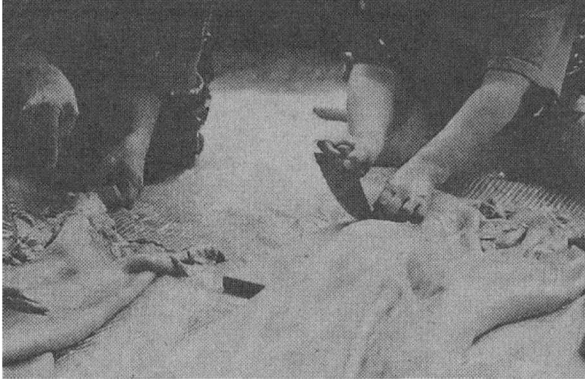
There are partially frozen *tuttu* (caribou legs) lying on blue plastic tarp covering the floor of the carpeted conference room of Ilisagvik College in Barrow. An uluqpak (Figure 7) lies next to a bucket of water. Inupiaq women begin to slowly arrive, taking off their parkas and settling into comfortable upholstered chairs. This group has been involved in documenting one aspect of whaling practices, the making of the *amiq* – the skin covering for the *umiaq* – a traditional boat still used in spring whaling. As the process is studied, the realization comes that many women do not know how to produce *ivalu* – thread made out of sinew used to sew the skins together. *Ivalu* is essential in the construction of watertight seams. Being made from the toughest fibers in an animal's body – the tendons will withstand abrasion and not snap under pressure. Sinew also has a quality that causes it to swell when wet, allowing it to fill any gaps in the seams. This is a quality artificial thread or rope does not have. When the hunters are in the *umiaq* in icy seas, it is a quality their lives depend upon.



**Figure 8: Preparing Ivalu**

Under the guidance of one of the elders, Martha Aiken (Figure 8), the group will learn the step by step the process of preparing ivalu. They will strip the tendons, cure them to retain their flexibility, split the fibers into appropriate size strands and braid together to form a stronger thread. Later they will meet at the whaling captain's home to join together seal skins with ivalu for the amiq.

Although the amiq is sewn together in late winter, preparations start much earlier in the year. In August, *ugruk* (bearded seals) are caught while sunning themselves on the ice. In the fall, *tuttu* are hunted so ivalu can be made from the tendons in their legs or the backstrap. It is important that these materials are gathered and processed when they are available and of the highest quality. There is no waiting until the last moment, rushing about to find what one needs. Each step in creating an amiq (Figure 9) is part of a seasonal ritual that gives meaning to daily life (Gillam 1999). And in each step the *uluqpak* is used – from butchering the seal to cutting a piece of whale to eat at *Nalukataq*.



**Figure 9: Cutting Skins for the Amiq**

Utqiagvik Agviqsiiuqtit Agnanich (Barrow Women's Whaling Association) has established goals to look in detail at the responsibilities of Inupiaq women and men with relation to their customary whaling practices. The Commission of Inupiat Heritage Language and Culture aided in the recording of the sessions and workshops. But such efforts are not new, Dorothy Panikpak Edwardsen spent more than a dozen years transcribing and translating *Uqaluktuat the 1980 Elder Women's Conference*. In the preface she says,

In a day or another one recalls teachings. We have learned that if we need to know something, then those that came before us would counsel us, giving the words which we would not quickly forget . . . these our mother, grandmothers, great-grandmothers have very willingly given us these stories hoping that perhaps they would be of some help to someone who will learn from either reading or listening [Edwardsen 1993:i].

These goals were intended as a means to both document knowledge and to pass on the skills to the next generation. But they also became a way to address how traditional roles and values could be used as a touchstone for balance in the complexities of modern life.





Inupiaq (Nome, AK)  
 8 cm x 6 cm  
 Seal figurine of fossilized ivory  
 handle  
 Steel blade with tang –  
 sharpened on both sides

**Figure 10: Uluuraq**

### 5.3 Pilgrim Hot Springs

We got out of the rental car and walked around to look at the right rear tire. The rim of the wheel rested on the remnants of the tire shredded by the sharp as glass igneous rocks that ran in veins across the road we had just traveled. Looking in the trunk we found not one, but two likewise destroyed tires. We were left 60 miles north of Nome, without transportation and without any phone, radio or means to contact a rescue.

Fortunately, the Brantley family had chosen this day to visit the hot springs. After poking great fun at us in our plight (and unremittingly throughout the rest of the day), they assured us they would need to travel the road back to Nome to return home. They lived in Teller which was just a short snowmachine ride across the hills (Kigluiak Mountains) to the east when everything was frozen in the winter. They had to take the long way down to Nome and back up the coast in the summer. They invited us to “just relax,” enjoy the springs and join them later for lunch.

The temperature of the hot spring was near perfect as I sunk into the big, wooden tub. After kneeling on semi-frozen ground day after day while excavating house ruins near Safety Sound, the warmth of the water was a welcome relief. Grandma Johanna, shot me a big smile, sunk slowly until her head was submerged underwater and rose again to rest against the side of the tub, eyes closed.

Even though Pilgrim Hot Springs (formerly known as Kruzgamepa) was used as a “spa” during the gold rush era, according to the Brantleys, it has always been considered a place of healing. When the influenza epidemic struck the area in 1918, many of the adults did not survive, including the residents of nearby Mary’s Igloo. The orphaned children were brought to Pilgrim where they were attended to by the Catholic Jesuit priests and Ursuline nuns. Johanna Brantley was among them.

Lunch included a thick, rich caribou soup with a bounty of vegetables from the prolific gardens growing in the warm soil caused by geothermal activity. One of Johanna’s daughters handed her an ulaaq. As she chopped up some of the carrots, she waved the ulaaq proudly at me. Her daughter translated that the uluuraq (Figure 10) was proof that despite the devastation of disease and trauma of spiritual, physical and sexual abuse by clergy; their culture had survived.



Yup'ik (Aleknagik, AK)  
 13 cm x 9 cm  
 Antler handle  
 Steel blade with two riveted stems -  
 sharpened on both sides  
 Hanging perforation

**Figure 11: Uluag (Nushagak)**

#### 5.4 Nushagak Bay

I knock on the door of a modest, little house in Aleknagik. When the door is opened, light thrown into the darkness of the *kunichuk* where I stand, spotlights braids of grass hanging to dry. I am struck by the neatness and care with which this grass is stored, waiting to be made into the exquisite baskets for which this region is known.

Working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), I am in town with a crew conducting archaeological surveys of Native allotments. In 1906 Congress instated the Alaska Native Allotment Act, which entitled each individual Native to select up to 160 acres of land. When ANCSA was passed this act was repealed. In response many Alaska Natives filed for land they had already been using for centuries. However, even now much active litigation continues over literally thousands of pending allotment applications. The surveys made by the BIA are in relation to proposed development and removal of restrictions for sale, but also as part of the documentation process in securing legal Native title to the land. Access to lands traditionally visited for subsistence activities including fishing, hunting and gathering foodstuffs is also crucial to acquiring the raw materials used for Native arts.

Because it is late summer, grass is currently being gathered and I jump at the chance to accompany a group that afternoon. Anna Chythlook grabs her uluaq (Figure 11) and after a short ride in a truck, everyone piles out to a stretch of beach where the grass is “just right.” Grabbing sheaves of grass with one hand and slicing them off near the ground with the ulu in the other, she quickly has a great deal of grass. Tied in bundles, the blades of grass will be sorted and dried so they do not mildew. Later in the winter these fibers can be moistened with water to restore their resiliency and “sewn” into baskets (Figure 12) for which the women of Nushagak are famous.



Grass basket with lid  
17 cm x 12 cm  
Decoration dyed seal intestine

**Figure 12: Nushagak Basket**



Yup'ik (Aniak, AK)  
 17 cm x 12 cm  
 Ligna Vita handle  
 Metal blade with cut-out stems, one  
 piece riveted  
 sharpened on both sides

**Figure 13: Uluaq (Kuskokwim)**

### 5.5 Kuskokwim River

The sun is sinking low, but the fishing was good today. The silvers are running strong on the Kuskokwim and as long as Alaska Fish & Game doesn't interfere with unwanted restrictions, there should be enough for everyone. Summer fish camps remain an integral part of Alaska Native life. Fish caught at these camps form the basis for a local diet in a mixed subsistence/cash based economy. Participation in fish camp with an extended family is also part of cultural renewal. Many Native urban professionals travel back to their villages to participate in this annual event.

The first fish camp I participated in was over two decades ago as part of a cultural immersion camp led by Yup'ik scholar, A. Oscar Kawagley. He speaks of the importance of the uluaq (Figure 13) to this cultural activity:

The uluaq, or woman's cutting knife, is a traditional tool. The size determines whether it is used for delicate or heavy work. The one for cutting fish is usually five to six inches across the curved blade. For cutting through fish bone, the front end of the blade is placed against the bone: then pressure is applied with the hand and arm. The cutting force can be awesome because the arm, the handle and the blade become

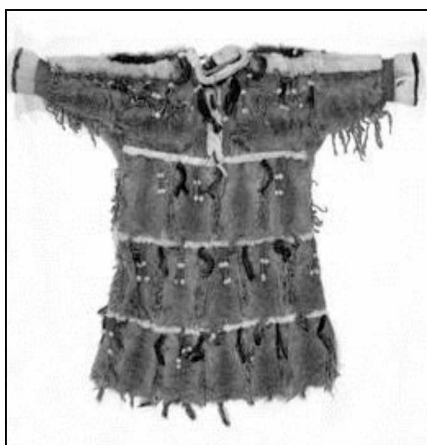
aligned when weight is applied. For filleting, the blade and wrist become a smoothly operating machine. If the cut is away from the woman, the filleting is started with the front of the blade, and the wrist is rotated away as the cut is made. The woman does the opposite move if she is cutting toward herself. Many women have very smooth, efficient wrist movements, bringing their hands back and forth to make deft, even cuts. The uluaq is truly a marvelous tool, using a minimum of materials and energy and has numerous uses. [Kawagley 1995:65]

Yup'ik women cut up salmon with great speed and efficiency (Figure 14), filleting a single fish in much less than a minute. Their skill has been exploited by commercial



**Figure 14: Cutting up Salmon**

fishing interests and rewarded in contests such as those which are part of the World Eskimo – Indian Olympics (WEIO). While there have been several exhibits and heritage projects highlighting the successes of Yupiaq “science” and technology, none gives as central of role to the ulu as the above excerpt from *A Yupiaq Worldview*.



Sugpiaq (Alutiiq)  
 Region: Alaska Peninsula  
 Village: Ugashik  
 Length 121cm  
 Accession Date: 1884  
 Source: William J. Fisher (collector)  
 National Museum of Natural History  
 Museum ID Number: E090469  
 Image courtesy of Smithsonian NMNH

**Figure 15: Qanganag - ground squirrel parka**

#### 5.6 Washington, D.C. — Kodiak — Homer

We are walking down the cement sidewalk on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. As we pass by the White House, Grace stoops down, picking up a rock she eyes a squirrel on the Presidential lawn. Susan quickly grabs her arm, but Grace protests, “there aren’t any squirrels at home, how are we supposed to get enough together to make a whole parka?”

We dissolve in laughter at the thought of security personnel alarmed by Grace attempting to “hunt” on their watch.

Grace Harrod and Susan Malutin traveled to the Smithsonian to document and replicate an Alutiiq man’s ground squirrel parka or Qanganag from the William J. Fisher collection (see Figure 15 above). While this garment was made for inclusion in the exhibit *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People* (see Crowell et al. 2001), Grace explained to me that it wasn’t so much about the final show as it was the process of making the parka that added to your knowledge of the past, allowed you to heal your connection to the artifact and bring it forward to your children.

During the time there we looked at other artifacts in the collections. When viewing an ancient slate ulukag, we marveled at how skilled an Alutiiq woman would

have been to use such a tool in skin clothing construction. Not surprisingly, arctic clothing studies are where the ulu sees the most attention and the highest level of collaboration with Inuit women.

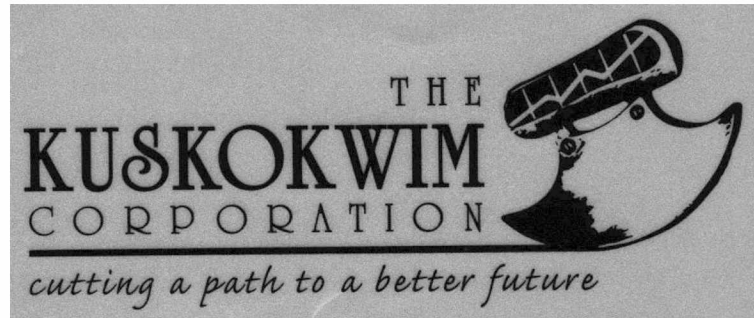
The arctic adaptations of the Inuit have inspired some remarkable innovations and technologies. For thousands of years, traditional, tailored Inuit fur and skin clothing have provided protection from a harsh, severe environment. Each region has unique designs which provide a sense of identity for Inuit people. Several studies have been conducted across the Arctic, which have examined the technological, historical, spiritual, social and artistic elements of skin clothing construction in Canada, Alaska, Greenland and northeastern Siberia. *Our Boots: an Inuit Women's Art* (Oakes 1996) and *Sinews of Survival: the Living Legacy of Inuit Clothing* (Issenman 1997) are two publications that feature the voices and input of Inuit women across the Canadian Arctic. Both include extended discussions of uluit.

Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association completed an intensive study in 2001 on the amauti, traditional Inuit women's parka and addressed how intellectual property conventions could protect it from "misappropriation" by outsiders (Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association 2002). Participants recognized that this project was just the first step and that other aspects of Inuit culture including the ulu were equally threatened and could benefit from the work being done.

*Arctic Clothing of North America* (King et al. 2005) is the compilation of contributions from an arctic clothing conference that included Inuit artists and seamstresses. In her essay in this book, Dixie Masek Dayo asks, "How do we heal?" She mentions making a tool pouch that held an uluqpak made by her nephew and a stone uluqpak to show respect for her ancestors. But more importantly she suggests it is important to take time to bead, sew and wear traditional clothing to continue the living culture. She reminds us of, "horror stories of Indigenous people's clothing being burned at residential schools as part of the assimilation process." She feels traditional clothing should be part of our everyday lives because, "there is magic in making and wearing traditional clothing" (Dayo 2005:36).



## 5.7 Cutting a path to the Future — logos



**Figure 16: The Ulu as a Logo**

Recently designed letterhead  
Image courtesy of the Kuskokwim Corporation

Logos embody each organization’s mission, ideological statement or heritage. They appeal to an abstract, symbolic language to present a product, idea or identity. Logos are intended as branding for products or as representing corporate entities to create immediate customer recognition. With Alaska Native corporations and organizations that may serve a very different purpose in that they act to foster Native shareholder or group solidarity. They do not commodify culture to gain an advantage in the business or public non-profit arena, but to instill cultural pride among those involved with the cooperative endeavor — whether a new emergency medical rescue team or an ANCSA subsidiary.

Many Inuit logos have spears, drums and masks incorporated into their design. Yet as more women become involved in executive leadership, the ulu is appearing in logos, letterheads and advertising. The Kuskokwim Corporation is an example of an Alaska Native corporation with predominately female management. Their logo (Figure 16) combines elements from different cultures in an interesting and unique way, but in a more surprising move, they actually animate the ulu on their website (<http://www.kuskokwim.com/>).

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami recently changed their logo to incorporate an ulu at its center.

As we celebrated our 30th anniversary, we changed our name from Inuit Tapirisat of Canada to Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. We also adopted a new logo. At its heart is Canada's maple leaf, circled by Inuit representing the four Settlement Regions, all anchored to the ulu. Together they demonstrate our cultural distinctions and unity, as well as our commitment to Canada. [Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2002]

And of course, we can't forget the ulu medal of the Arctic Winter Games as a symbol of proud achievement. The uniqueness of the Arctic Winter Games manifests itself in many different ways. Perhaps none more so than the medal which is presented to the winning athletes. While the traditional colors still exist, gold, silver and bronze, the medal itself is in the shape of an ulu.

Just how the ulu came to be the shape of the medals was no accident according to Ken McKinnon, the first President of the Arctic Winter Games International Committee. The original three participating contingents, and their representatives from Alaska, Yukon and the NorthWest Territories, introduced the concept of an Arctic Winter Games. In order to make the Games different from any other competition, they had to build upon the uniqueness of the north and the cultural ties that bind us together. McKinnon said, "the ulu was adopted as the shape of the medal — a truly northern Indigenous symbol that would recognize excellence in athletic performance" (Arctic Winter Games 2009).

## 5.8 Symbols of strength

A basket is placed strategically on a podium during a presentation by Julie Kitka, President of the Alaska Federation of Natives. Observing this purposeful action, Molly Lee remarks that Native baskets, while popular with tourists, have not until recently been regarded as a significant art. For an object to be elevated to this stature — where it represents Native culture and subsistence in a general yet meaningful manner — signals a shift in its valuation (Lee 2003:590). She asserts that “art is now more than ever in a position to serve as a source of imagery for promoting politically motivated actions.” In the various arenas where Inuit fight for land ownership and management rights, artifact repatriation and access to equality in social service and education, “the use of Native artifacts as symbols of resistance and dissent can be expected to proliferate,” (Lee 2003:590).

The extent to which Inuit use art as a basis for individual and collective political action may yet see the attention it deserves. Indeed if one is to pay close attention, what may appear as simple adornment in the form of ulu earrings (Figure 17) or pendants may actually represent a political statement declaring or acknowledging the strength and power of women within Inuit culture.



**Figure 17: Earrings**

The use of an ulu may also be seen as a symbolic gesture. As evidence of such, National Inuit Leader, Mary Simon, current President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, gave the following address:

On behalf of the Inuit of Canada I applaud our Governor General, Michaëlle Jean for her public support of traditional Inuit culture and practices by her respectful and genuine willingness during her visit to Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, to help skin a seal and to eat some of the seal meat, which is a significant activity and nutritious food source for Inuit. To us, this kind gesture is an acknowledgement by the Governor General of our culture and our dependence upon our wildlife as an important resource for our communities today. [Simon 2009]

In his nicely observed account of the episode, Canadian Press's Alex Panetta mentions that Jean used an ulu, the traditional knife of Inuit women, to carve her seal. Another reporter is intrigued with the idea of Jean wielding an ulu. "It's a concrete, tactile thing, familiar to many hands up North ... The curve can seem womanly to the eye, but as a cutting instrument, this emblem of the feminine is hardly soft" (Geddes 2009). The significance of this gesture is difficult to miss. The raised ulu in the hand of a woman is recognition of the power of Inuit women and their contributions to their communities and their culture.

## 5.9 Sewing it All Together

Never underestimate the power of an appropriate exploratory metaphor. Within the world of traditional women's work, the cultural work of the theoretical *bricoleur*, who fashions meaning from the fragments of discourse at hand, finds powerful embodiment in the figure of the quilt-maker (hooks 1990:86).

In *Aesthetic Inheritances*, bell hooks describes quilt-making as one of the principle aesthetic activities used by rural black women to “negotiate the world” they inhabited. What she describes is quilt-making as a technology for the embodiment of lived experience:

Although she did not make story quilts, Baba (*hook's grandmother*) believed that each quilt had its own narrative – a story that began from the moment she considered making a particular quilt . . . To her mind these quilts were maps charting the source of our lives. They were history as life lived. [hooks 1990:120-121 emphasis added]

The qualitative researcher is a “quilt-maker” who stitches, edits and puts slices of reality together. This process creates and brings psychological and emotional unity to an interpretive experience. Using the aesthetic and material tool of her craft by deploying either the strategies, methods or empirical “materials” at hand or inventing a new tool or “piecing together” techniques, the researcher answers those needs” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:4-6).

In texts created through “quilt making” many things are going on at once, different voices, different perspectives, point of view, angles of vision. These texts presume an active audience and work to both create and enact moral meaning. It is in this sense that the researcher or “quilter” realizes that research is an interactive process shaped by her own personal history, biography, ethnicity, gender, social class and by

those people who she engages in with the making of the “quilt.” The writing becomes a act of “witness” where the result is both an “inscription of self and description of an object” (Behar 1996:20).

Reflexivity is revealed as each piece articulates, influences and is influenced by the others. Just as the full pattern of a quilt emerges through the blending of individual scraps, the combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers is best understood, then as a “strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (Flick 1998:231).

Craft is the expression of a need by which you use raw material to make something that is required. But as in quilts: the clothing, the baskets and even the skin boat covers created by Inuit women display an almost extravagant aesthetic that goes far beyond the basic of what is needed. Unequaled in utility, these items for daily use are unsurpassed in their beauty.

This section on the (re)appropriation of the ulu, slices into pieces “expressions” of the ulu in particular places, by certain cultures and with specific intent. These “patches” are joined together with ivalu – made from the blended together threads of continuity, respect and reciprocity. Although each individual fiber is not enough on its own – braiding them together creates tremendous strength.

**Continuity** is present in both how the ulu has endured through time and how its meaning and use have been passed through the generations. When you hold an ulu in your hand you are connected back across many generations of women for thousands of years (Lolly Hopson 1996). Uliut speak to tradition in a tangible and immediate way:

tradition is the strong and resilient fiber of Native life that links objects to each other and ties their makers to their ancestors and descendants. It is the moving stream of values, forms and cultural identities carried forth by individuals into the future; it is dynamic enactment—creative expression within a lifetime’s cycle of growth, learning, production, sharing and change. [Fair 2006:256]

The knowledge of the ancestor is manifested in the physical aspects of an ulu such as the curve of the blade and the angle of the sharpened edge, but it is also believed that the spirit of the owner of an object is present as well (Nicholson 2008).

**Respect** is a means to counteract violence against women. Eleanor Ned-Sunnyboy recommends that each community needs to be responsible for teaching the cultural concept of respect for all things and one another, but especially “the traditional attitude that women are sacred needs to be reintroduced and relearned through the traditional teachings of our people” (2008:79). Ulu are often, although not exclusively, made for women by the men in their lives. The respect a man has for a woman is reflected in the beauty of the ulu he creates for her (John 2008).

The ulu is given to a young girl as a rite of passage, marking her journey as a woman, but also signifying her contribution to the well being of her people. This is a ritually inscribed ceremonial observance of a woman’s fecundity and power. Restoring this meaning is essential not only to our broad understanding of this object, but to the identity of the Inuit women (Korthuis 2007; Patkotak Grinage 2007).

**Reciprocity** is a fundamental value among Inuit people. In the Arctic world, reciprocity on a practical level means survival. Without the sharing of food and other necessities many people would have perished. The actions of giving and receiving establish and reinforce relationships that ensure the continued vitality of Inuit culture. When a woman is given an ulu respect is bestowed upon her as the member of a tribe, but her receipt of such an item acknowledges her agreement to be of service to others. That an ulu functions in this regard may be part of the reason ulu are generally not made for mass consumption by tourists.

Reciprocity, as in sharing strategies can also be seen in relationships between Inuit women combating violence they recognize as coming from the forces of colonization:

both home (where the heart lives), activism, and even academia (where the structured intellect lives), are intertwined in subtle and not so subtle ways

and that each can provide empowerment, trust, and survival, if one is willing to engage in the kind of reciprocity that involves both internal and external truth seeking and sharing. [Mayer 2007:38]

Whenever I have spoken to an Inuit women about uluit, there is no hesitation to speak with great conviction about its meaning to her. Very often the richest information concerning uluit came during the simplest of act: the taking of tea, waiting for the mail plane, sewing or preparing food. Interwoven with tidbits of gossip are the gems — those small revelations that give a glimpse into the deeper meaning of things like uluit — which also carry the understanding of continuity, respect and reciprocity as a personal obligation with a long term commitment to those who have shared. It is from these encounters that I have learned to view ethnography not as a representation but as a responsibility.



## Chapter 6 Conclusion

The early colonial incursions into the Arctic were aided by a period of warming associated with the late stages of the Little Ice Age. Cruikshank suggests that a time of significant geophysical changes, “coincided with dramatic social upheaval,” causing both “readjustments and realignments among resident peoples and the permanent problem of powerful strangers who came to stay” (Cruikshank 2005:10).

As the climate warms in the present day; the forces of imperialism and colonialism are once again at work. As the polar ice cap recedes, the industrial nations are seeking to expand their influence into the newly opened waters. Scientists probe and prod the ocean floor in order to delineate new boundaries based on the edge of their nation’s continental shelf. Large, international companies drill in search of mineral and petroleum resources.

Some of the physical dangers caused as the ice melts are obvious with respect to such things as coastal erosion, altered vegetation and animal migration patterns, and release of persistent organic pollutants into the environment. But there is a perhaps more immanent threat to Alaska Native culture and lifeways — the struggle over Arctic Sovereignty. In attempt to address this situation the Inuit Circumpolar Conference former Chair, Patricia Cochran stated:

we come from the position of a people who know the Arctic intimately. We have lived here for thousands and thousands of years and by making this declaration, we are saying to those who want to use Inuit Nunaat for their own purposes, you must talk to us and respect our rights. [Cochran 2009]

The Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Arctic Sovereignty emphasizes the unity of Inuit as one people across four countries. Will their voices be heard and are the Inuit ready for this next intrusion?

“We are no longer willing to be treated like artifacts in museums, and that includes our living culture which is embodied in our clothing and other symbols on Inuit culture such as the ulu (woman’s knife)” Veronica Dewar in *Arctic Clothing* (2005:25).

As Dorothy Lippert, a female Native archaeologist suggests “collections of artifacts in museums have long been regarded in a scholarly context, but in a postcolonial situation, the relationship between the original creators of the objects and their descendants can no longer be ignored” (Lippert 2006:435). The challenge is to examine the nature of museum collections of objects that have been defined by archaeologists as artifacts but that to Indigenous people maintain their cultural context. Applying Foucault’s “heterotopia” as the “awareness of the multiple contexts for the object” she observes heterotopias exist in many areas of archaeological work but go “largely unrecognized because most archaeologists do not seek them out and have been trained to view situations through an obscuring, ‘scientific’ lens” (Lippert 2006:433). Even with shifts toward Indigenous archaeology, the authority of an archaeologist over objects labeled as artifacts appears to be firmly rooted:

I find that many of my colleagues do not yet realize just how much power they hold when they have the ability to place an object within a scientific frame. This process reconstructs the piece and presents it to the world with a scholarly identity attached. At the same time, by creating it as an object of antiquity, the process removes the object from its Indigenous context and constructs an academic—and, frequently, spatial—barrier. [Lippert 2006:435]

The museum curator or archaeologist still “hold the keys” to the collections. While consultation is stipulated by the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act, the authority as to when and to what extent consultations take place often remains with them.

A tribe almost always has to travel to the facility, and the keys to the collection are literally and figuratively in the hands of the museum workers. The consultation maintains remnants of a colonial past, even as the process itself attempts to deconstruct it. This deconstruction, if acknowledged, is another way in which archaeology can shed some of its colonial legacy. Consultation can be a legally required action or it can be an activity in which past injustices are recognized for what they were. [Lippert 2006:437]

However, Lippert cautions such research should proceed with caution. The emerging approach called Indigenous archaeology is one that is very definitely born out of the repatriation movement. She reminds us that many Native people who work in archaeology today do so out of necessity. Tribal members were designated to represent their tribes as they faced the realization that they would be dealing with archaeological terminology and techniques when attempting to reclaim the human remains of their ancestors and relations for burial. There are a significant number of Native Americans who “came to work in archaeology through repatriation, and thus an experience derived from a great sorrow was the initiating factor for many Indigenous archaeologists” (Lippert 2005:63).

As noted earlier in this text, the modern legacy of the Smithsonian in Alaska includes the colonial history of alienated ownership of objects and ancestral remains, as well as contentions about their return and rightful ownership. Bitter feelings remain in the Alutiiq region (and elsewhere in Alaska) about the appropriation of Alaska Native people and culture (Pullar 1994, 2001). Yet the act of challenging government ownership and Western interpretations of appropriated burials and cultural items, was an “important step toward enhancing cultural pride” and acted to reaffirm “the strength and resolve of the people against seemingly long odds” (Pullar 2001:95).

Sonya Atalay, another female, Native archaeologist agrees it is important not to avoid or minimize the horrors and tragedy of colonization. Drawing on Vizenor’s

definition of survivance, she reiterates that “Native people are active, present agents.” (Atalay 2008:279). Presenting the horror, injustice and multifaceted aspects of colonization while “simultaneously highlighting their active engagement in and resistance to such onslaughts, (Atalay 2008:280) is not portray Native people as victims. “One cannot appreciate and experience the power of Native survivance if the stories and memories of our histories are not placed in the context of struggle” (Atalay 2008:280).

Atalay proposes a decolonizing archaeology with topics that include: the social construction of cultural heritage, concerns over revitalization of tradition and Indigenous knowledge, issues of ownership and authority, cultural and intellectual property, and the history and role of museums, collections and collecting (Atalay 2006:302). She suggests we must ask questions such as:

- What does it mean to have ones history, story, or knowledge examined, interpreted and displayed by “outsiders”?
- Who has access to this knowledge? Who has the right to examine it, to write about it?
- Who owns the imagery, symbols, and knowledge of a cultural, social, or ethnic group, and who controls how that is used?
- Who has the right to interpret it, speak about it, display it, profit from it?

[Atalay 2006:302]

Addressing issues of representation and authority are essential to restoring the right to control one’s heritage and identity.

Most importantly, decolonization must do more than deconstruct Western scholarship; it must offer ways of doing research that contribute to the needs and survival of communities and individuals. Drawing upon Smith (1999) and earlier discussion, decolonizing methodologies in archaeology will recognize the rights of Indigenous communities to:

- share in the processes of knowledge production and choose how and when to do so;
- use ethnological/archaeological information to construct their own narratives and alternative histories that may enrich or disagree with “scientific” knowledge; and
- benefit from knowledge that comes from research conducted in their communities.

Some might argue as Audre Lorde does that the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house, and truthfully, some Indigenous activists agree with this stance, arguing that archaeology and the application of Western categories and knowledge created are part of the problem of an ongoing colonization in Indigenous communities—a problem where the only solution is to halt all archaeological research. However, Atalay disagrees and argues that although mainstream archaeology requires critical reflection and considerable change in order to become decolonized, this work is “beneficial for Indigenous communities because it will bring about positive and effective change from within the discipline that will result in a powerful research tool from which Indigenous people, and others around the globe, can benefit” (Atalay 2006:295).

The tools of analysis from material culture studies have been used with varying levels of collaboration and with different amounts of success throughout Alaska. Clifford, in probing the practice of heritage in Alaska, finds the “complex, unfinished colonial entanglements of anthropology and Native communities are being undone and rewoven” and hazards a guess that even the “most severe Indigenous critics of anthropology” are willing to “recognize the potential for alliances when they are based on shared resources, repositioned Indigenous and academic authorities and relations of genuine respect” (2004:6).

While particularly mindful of the Smithsonian’s well-remembered historical baggage, Aron Crowell of the Arctic Studies Program has worked throughout his career to “bring home” not only the material culture itself but the results of scholarly research

in anthropology, archaeology and history, and to make this knowledge accessible to Alaska Native communities for the first time. He suggests “expression, exploration and legitimation of Indigenous identities are the common purpose of a shared enterprise” and that, in this work, “the collections, records, and reconstructive work of anthropology and archaeology are used in conjunction with oral traditions and community-based knowledge to construct endogenous histories that fill voids left by colonial erasure” (Crowell 2004). It would have been impossible to imagine in the late nineteenth century, “the new uses of museum collections, especially the current strong emphasis on making them accessible for Alaska Native interpretation, cultural education, and community-based exhibitions” (Crowell 2009:111).

In Alaska the decision regarding what will be studied and by whom, if at all, increasingly lies in the hands of those who were the “objects” of study in the past. Inuit-guided projects, exhibitions and publications have utilized collections from the Smithsonian and other Western museums. An Inupiaq project, the *People of the Whaling* based on the Murdoch collection was conducted and presented at the Inupiat Heritage Center in Barrow. *Agayuliyararput: The Living Tradition of Yup'ik Masks* began as a study which focused on the Jacobsen and Nelson collections. As the process unfolded the desire to create an exhibition resulted with a debut in Toksook Bay before moving onto Anchorage and eventually to New York. *Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People* both an exhibit and publication explored contemporary Alutiiq identity through the examination and display of objects from the Fisher collection. In a somewhat ironic fashion objects once regarded as the “salvaged remnants of a dying race” have been “(re)appropriated” to express the heritage of Inuit culture that maintained despite the impacts of colonization.

The ulu is an object that has endured in the lives of Inuit women. Despite its appropriation as a tourist object, the voracious appetite of ethnographic collectors and the manner in which it was subsumed by archaeological analysis; the ulu has remained a constant in Inuit women’s lives. It is a practical tool, but it is also a symbol of their contribution to Inuit culture. The ulu is an expression of Inuit women’s strength.

Alfred warns, however, that while “symbols are crucially important they must not be confused with substance; when terminology, costume, and protocol are all that change, while unjust power relationships and colonized attitudes remain untouched, . . . reform becomes nothing more than a politically correct smokescreen” (Alfred 1999:27). He also argues “cloaking oneself in the mantle of tradition is no substitute for altering one’s behavior, especially where power is concerned” (Alfred 1999:27).

We need to share our experiences, for within our experiences live tradition. Ned-Sunnyboy emphasizes, “Survivors’ voices brought to the forefront is an invaluable expression of Alaska Native women’s realities” and can “address violence against women and children through the revitalization of cultural values and beliefs” (2008:81). These voices raised together begin a discourse that articulates the origins and effects of violence and abuse, challenges the barriers to change and calls for the revitalization of cultural value of respect for all things.

Researching back could also mean, “collecting back” as in gathering stories and examples of uluit that demonstrate the variety and vitality of this woman’s knife and how it places into tradition and identity. As the Arctic thaws such an action could encourage the flow of information in a circumpolar, instead of north-south direction and sharing these stories could encourage solidarity among Inuit women. Reciprocity as the necessity of sharing, in this case the story of the ulu, is a way to get underneath the wreckage of colonization and *Take Back the Knife*.

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