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par Ned (Edmund) Searles

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JOLLES, Carol Zane (with Elinor Mikaghaq Oozeva)

2002 *Faith Food and Family in a Yupik Whaling Community*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 364 pages.

“At the end of 1879, St. Lawrence Island was devastated” (p. 310). So begins the concluding chapter of Carol Jolles’ insightful ethnography of a group of Yupik Eskimos who live on a stretch of volcanic peaks and plateaus rising out of the Bering Sea. Although an estimated 1,000 of 1,200 people died in that late 19<sup>th</sup> century catastrophe caused by famine and disease, the Island has experienced a demographic and cultural resurgence. Its two settlements, Savoonga and Gambell, have a combined population of 1,301 according to the 2000 US Census, and part of Jolles’s objective is to explain how a group of people who suffered so much tragedy were able to thrive in such a remote place with such an inhospitable climate. Using data she collected during several years of fieldwork as well as information she has gleaned from extensive archival research, including the letters and journals of former missionaries, Jolles argues that faith, food, and family were (and continue to be) “the driving forces in the rebuilding of the St. Lawrence Island community” (p. 310).

This ethnography is much more than a story about revival, however. It has much to offer a wide range of students and scholars. For the introductory level college student, Jolles provides a window into a wide range of cultural practices and social institutions. Her analysis of rituals and beliefs surrounding pregnancy, miscarriage, birth, and death provide excellent examples of how culture comes into play at crucial moments of the life course. Her analysis of traditional marriage customs and kinship dynamics, such as how marriages are arranged, preferred partners, the practice of “buying” the bride, and

the institution of an obligatory groom service following marriage provide interesting composites of how cultural rules are interwoven into the fabric of everyday experience. Her description of whaling and the ways in which it contributes to individual and group identity provides a wonderful illustration of how a whale hunt creates all sorts of opportunities for the affirmation of individual prestige and family solidarity. To strike a whale is a source of great honour for the captain of the whaling boat, the striker and the crew. The transformation of a whale into widely distributed food gifts affirms the many social ties radiating from the individual to the *ramka* (clan), and beyond.

Jolles's text has much to offer advanced scholars of Inuit studies as well. Those concerned about the recent rise in suicide in the Arctic and who attribute its underlying causes to the perils of modernity might want to know that St. Lawrence Islanders sanctioned a type of suicide before they encountered Christianity. Elders remember a number of islanders who committed suicide to appease malevolent spirits, such as a parent who took his own life in order to save an afflicted child. The parent's death, the community believed, might placate those spirits who were the source of sickness.

Jolles also portrays with great care the faith life of contemporary St. Lawrence Islanders, including their many ceremonies, forms of prayer, and religious affiliations. This ethnography is one of only a handful about Native North Americans that focuses specifically on the place of Christianity in everyday life. Jolles's careful weaving of contemporary accounts of faith with ethnohistorical documentation provides a nuanced view of the encounter between Christianity and a pre-Christian belief system. She argues that there exist as many points of continuity and convergence between the two systems as episodes of rupture and contradiction. A recurring theme in Jolles's ethnography is that although all islanders have converted to Christianity, they continue to retain many pre-Christian beliefs and practices. Although contemporary islanders refer to themselves as Presbyterians or Seventh Day Adventists—the two dominant denominations on the island—they do things that Presbyterians in other parts of the world might find strange if not heretical. Although Presbyterian islanders bury their dead with a service and ceremony that conforms to conventional Presbyterian doctrine, they also burn the clothing of the deceased in order to assure that spirits of the dead do not return to that person's home (p. 199). Surprisingly, self-sacrificing suicide is one practice that serves as a point of continuity between Christianity and pre-Christian beliefs, "[...] the islanders' acceptance of a son of God who sacrificed himself at his father's request is not difficult to explain. Men and women alike are usually in tears when they describe the agony that they assume was felt by God when He was forced to make this request" (p. 270).

The ways in which Christianity informs the myriad aspects of social and ceremonial life on St. Lawrence Island is one of the core themes of this ethnography and the book's greatest scholarly contribution. Jolles's willingness to study a topic almost entirely overlooked by anthropologists makes her ethnography required reading for anyone interested in the contemporary practice of Christianity. Disappointed by the dearth of anthropological studies that focus on contemporary Christians, at least one scholar has asked publicly why there is no anthropology of Christianity similar to the anthropology of Islam (Robbins 2003). Jolles's study is a welcome contribution to this

emerging and important topic, and her in-depth portrait of how Christianity is practiced on a daily basis will be useful to scholars who want a model of how to study contemporary Christians with rigor and precision.

Despite the tremendous breadth and depth of this ethnography, Jolles's use of theory to explain some of the phenomena she encountered is problematic in places. Although she argues that people embrace faith "to assure [their] spiritual and physical safety and success" (p. 200), it is doubtful her informants would have explained their faith in such strict utilitarian terms. Also, she could have better incorporated more information about contemporary Christian social movements that are non-denominational, including the "end of times" (or rapture) movements that have won the admiration and support of an enormous worldwide audience, including many rural Alaskans. Jolles's inclusion of one woman's Holy Spirit encounter includes explicit references to the rapture, indicating that this form of Christian evangelism is making inroads into St. Lawrence Island. She also claims that the acceptance of Protestant Christianity ushered in a shift in emphasis "from actions performed by and for the *ramka* to individual salvation" (p. 271). Such a comment merits much more discussion, especially considering that Jolles argues that the *ramka* are vital supports of community organization.

There is also the problem of censorship. Jolles clearly states in her introduction that "the history here is colored by an implicit *Sivuqaghmiut* [residents of Sivuqaq (Gambell)] bias in recognition of and out of respect for the community members who have contributed to its telling" (p. 10). Jolles, like other ethnographers working in the Arctic, was required to collaborate with the community throughout the fieldwork and write-up phases of her research. The residents of St. Lawrence Island, like those of other indigenous communities, want some measure of control over how they are represented. A simple Google search with the term "St. Lawrence Island," however, brings up a link to an online article written by a columnist for the *Washington Post*. The columnist portrays the other major village on St. Lawrence Island, Savoonga, as a place fraught with teenage suicides, alcoholism and parents addicted to bingo, reminding us that St. Lawrence Islanders suffer from more types of distress and social disharmony than Jolles included in her ethnography. This contrast begs the question why these issues are absent from Jolles's text. Although the desire of indigenous peoples to have greater control over how they are represented to the outside world can be viewed as an important step towards greater self-determination, it has some negative unforeseen consequences. Someone wanting to learn more about the people of St. Lawrence Island, for example, might view Jolles's ethnography as one that avoids those issues that are most urgent in the community. A better balance needs to be struck between local peoples's desires to control how they are represented ethnographically and the responsibility of ethnographers to portray the complex realities of village life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Still, Jolles's book provides a poignant portrait of how faith, food, and family saturate the lives of St. Lawrence Islanders.

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- KEITH, Darren (with Jerry Arqviq, Louie Kamookak, Jackie Ameralik and the Gjoa Haven Hunters' and Trappers' Organization)  
2005 *Inuit Qaujimaningit Nanurnut. Inuit Knowledge of Polar Bears. A project of the Gjoa Haven Hunters' and Trappers' Organization*, Edmonton, CCI Press, Solstice series, 4, 242 pages.

Cet ouvrage publié sous la responsabilité du géographe Darren Keith, s'inscrit dans la mouvance actuelle des publications sur l'*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (cf. l'ouvrage du même genre, *Thunder on the Tundra*, publié en 2001 par N. Thorpe, N. Hakongak, S. Eyegetok and the Kitikmeot Elders sur le caribou de la région de Bathurst). Il faut ici saluer l'auteur et les aînés inuit pour le contenu de ce volume qui présente de nombreux détails sur l'ours, son comportement et la manière dont il est chassé dans cette partie occidentale de la région du Kitikmeot, au Nunavut. Co-publié par la Gjoa Haven Hunters' and Trappers' Organization et le CCI Press, l'ouvrage est le fruit d'un travail collectif et divisé en huit sections auxquelles il faut ajouter une préface, une page de remerciements et une introduction, un résumé en inuktitut, une conclusion, une liste de références ainsi que cinq annexes.

La préface et l'introduction indiquent les principaux paramètres de l'étude qui a été financée par plusieurs organismes du Nunavut: Nunavut Department of Sustainable Development, Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, Bathurst Road and Port Project et Nunavut Tungavik Inc. Le point de départ du projet se situe dans le moratoire imposé aux chasseurs d'ours polaires en 2002, pour l'ensemble de la région autour du détroit de McClintock. Craignant un arrêt définitif de la chasse à l'ours, les Uqsurtuurmiut auraient décidé de réagir à ce nouveau règlement en souhaitant mieux faire connaître leurs savoirs cynégétiques et en prenant toutes les dispositions nécessaires pour assurer sa transmission aux plus jeunes générations.

D'entrée, l'auteur insiste sur la fragilisation des savoirs relatifs à l'ours polaire. Un certain déclin serait même clairement perceptible sur le plan linguistique, avec la disparition de toute une terminologie spécifique. Le contenu du volume résulte de trois séries d'entrevues menées avec 16 personnes de la communauté de Gjoa Haven (Uqsuqtuuq), entre les mois de janvier et de juin 2002. L'auteur indique que certaines