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Akulmiut Neqait / Fish and Food of the Akulmiut, University of
Alaska Press, 2019, 452 pages

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Book Review

Fienup-Riordan, Ann, Marie Meadem and Alice Rearden.
Akulmiut Neqait / Fish and Food of the Akulmiut,
University of Alaska Press, 2019, 452 pages.

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This bilingual book (English-Yup'ik) was co-written after a four-year study with Calista Education and Culture, Inc. (CEC), formerly Calista Elders Council. Funded by the Office of Subsistence Management of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the study focused on gathering Yup'ik traditional knowledge about Whitefish and non-Salmon species. The purpose of this collaborative research is to preserve that part of Yup'ik culture by collecting knowledge via a qualitative approach of two annual meetings, each three days in length, between the multidisciplinary team and the resident Elders of the Akulmiut communities (Kasigluk, Nunaoitchuk, Atmautluak, Napaskiak, Napakiak and Oscarville). The collected data was meant to enhance and share the Yup'ik ways of taking care of fish and the worldview of respecting the land to the Youth Yupiit and the generations to come. By participating in this research, the Yup'ik Elders aspired to make Yup'ik and non-Yup'ik aware of how people's actions affect the fish, such as the decline of the Blackfish and Whitefish population, in addition to proposing some solutions to these current problems and more. The research was meant to build a bridge between the land-keepers' heritage and the non-Yup'ik authorities and make them aware of local knowledge.

In the introduction, the authors briefly describe their methodologies through various interviews with Yup'ik elders. They speak of the importance of incorporating Yup'ik terms and understanding the oral account of their knowledge and, also, how traditional terms pass guidance to the Youth. From here, the book turns to a history of the Akulmiut region and how the introduction of non-Yup'ik technologies, life in the settlements, and Yupiit participation in the commercial fishery affected their day-to-day interactions with the land and keep them pauperized. This rising level of impoverishment and the

attraction of new ways to earn money led some of the Yupiit to break with tradition and the transmission of knowledge.

In a chapter on the annual cycle of fish, the authors describe anecdotes from their interactions with the Yup'ik Elders and how the impact of knowledge lost (or not-yet shared), has impacted the fish migrations and the regular cycles by permitting youth to use inappropriate nets and waste/disrespect food, be that by scrap and pollution, the way food ends up at the dump, disturbing the spawning time, or a decrease in the fish population. These findings echo that of the Elders, who do not consider the fishery regulations, which require quota and small gill nets suitable to the environmental reality of the Akulmiut region, because of the damage they cause to the ecosystem and the lack of consideration for local knowledge.

The conversation recorded led to a discussion about the guiding principles of Yup'ik ethics in the next three chapters on knowledge of land and wilderness, on the care of fish and food, and on the awareness of things, and more specifically, how to harvest and take care of the fish by using proper practices that respect the traditional Yup'ik way of living and land use. It is a useful reminder that their ancestors knew how to rebalance the ecosystem and protect endangered populations without being monitored by non-Yupiit. It logically follows how changes in the environment, food shortages, a lack/an unawareness of local knowledge, and the disrespect of nature are intrinsically linked to the loss of traditional knowledge (“Our World and Weather are Changing”), an admonishment directed at both Youth Yupiit and US’s hunting and fishing regulations.

The second and last section of the book has six sub-sections, which are each longer than necessary, in part due to the authors’ arguments, but also because the Elders’ anecdotes are bilingual and told in English and Yup'ik, and because the authors revisit topics covered in the first section. This length becomes worthwhile, though, as multiple narratives complement and build on one another, in ways that take into consideration the understanding and the need to transmit and preserve traditional Yup'ik knowledge.

The book offers a fresh perspective on how traditional local knowledge can be a viable solution for current problems, and inform a history of the environment and changes to the weather. In addition, the research makes a contribution by gathering the knowledge harvested from the Elders of the Alkulmiut region in English as well as in the Yup'ik language, providing better and more accessible information to Yup'ik and non-Yup'ik. Ann Fienup-Riordan has lived

with and written about the Yupiit since the 1970s. Since 2014, she has dedicated her time to working with the CEC. From this partnership they used the gathering meeting format to produce books, including: *Yup'ik Elders at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin: Fieldwork Turned on Its Head* (Fienup-Riordan 2005). It also resulted in the publication of bilingual books that she has authored or co-authored. *Akulmiut Neqait / Fish and Food of the Akulmiut* is an engaging, collaborative research project that fits into the CEC's wider research project as well as into Fienup-Riordan's career of contributing to the preservation of Yup'ik culture, language, and history.

For all these reasons, the book represents a path for those who seek to learn some of the Yup'ik worldviews, their customs, their beliefs, and their spirituality. It offers a valuable context for addressing collaborative research and decolonizing the research process. This book may be appreciated by anthropologists for whom oral tradition and material culture is a primary research focus. Another range of audiences are non-Yupiit, including local authorities who debate and vote on regulations but who wish to be better allies, or who want to contribute to a better understanding of the local stakes.