

Whale Snow: Iñupiat, Climate Change, and Multispecies Resilience in Arctic Alaska. By Chie Sakakibara. 2020. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. 304 pp.

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Titled after the children's book *Uqsruaġnaq* ("Whale Snow"; Edwardson et al. 2004), the lived stories of the research of Chie Sakakibara are presented in her unique and insightful multispecies ethnography also called *Whale Snow*. Although the character Amiqqaq in *Uqsruaġnaq* is fictional, the excitement that he expresses when his family catches a bowhead whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) is like the feeling that is shared by Iñupiaq people of Alaska's North Slope when a bowhead whale is sighted and caught. As vividly described by Sakakibara in *Whale Snow: Iñupiat, Climate Change, and Multispecies Resilience in Arctic Alaska*, the successful catch and bringing in of a whale is celebrated throughout the community, and throughout the region news of a catch travels quickly. But as is made apparent in the children's book *Uqsruaġnaq*, there is much more to catching a whale than spotting, hunting, and transporting it back to the community, and this concerns the spirit-of-the-whale itself.

Chie Sakakibara, too, is careful to consider the spiritual aspects of the whale, and she appropriately does this from within the context of the local Iñupiaq worldview. This enables the reader to better understand the spiritual role and reality that the whale plays in Iñupiaq culture, and its importance in a larger socioecological context. The whale itself is understood and explained to the reader as a microcosm of existence itself, and its role as a non-human person in the natural and social environments is described. As with all aspects of human culture, everything carries multiple meanings to the observer,

which are rooted in local culture and communicated through culturally specific metaphors and idioms. By exploring these through the author's experiences, the reader is introduced to a world rich with cultural context and relationship-based social and ecological description.

Due to Chie Sakakibara's development of personal relationships with the people of Utqiagvik, Alaska, until recently known by its colonial name, Barrow, she was included in many community events, enabling a deeper and more accurate understanding of the customs and traditions surrounding the whale. Referred to as a notion of "cetaceousness," the whaling cycle is characterized as multidimensional, with human-whale relations fundamental to the process, which itself is an ever-changing, living tradition. This is a centrally important point that is emphasized throughout the work: Tradition is not stagnation, it is not a relic of the past, but it is custom as inherited tradition from past generations, interpreted in relation to current conditions.

Unlike other similar research that focuses on multispecies communities that often are presented with the human element artificially removed, Chie Sakakibara recognizes the centrality of humanity in social and ecological conditions, and this was accomplished in a local, Iñupiaq context through the author's description of her experiences living in northern Alaska and according to Iñupiaq ways of life. By using her experiences and her cultural knowledge learned through these, Sakakibara frames with valuable context the notions of multispecies



communities and relationships within their appropriate Iñupiaq cultural and worldview contexts. As a result, a deeper understanding of human customs and socioecological process are attained, and the interdependent relationships between these are revealed.

Through the contextualized stories of relationships within an Iñupiaq worldview, the cultural value of the whale is described, as are the values that accompany behaviors associated with the whaling cycle, but these are also associated with the behaviors of daily social life. Included are notions of reciprocity (mutual and interdependent sharing) and respect (treating others as one would want to be treated), alongside deference, humility, and inclusiveness. These values are importantly communicated through stories that are passed across generations, and that contain ancient local, traditional, Indigenous knowledge about place, people, and events; these are critically important for the contextualization of interrelatedness of all aspects of the socioecological environment.

An understanding of the interrelation and interdependency of all aspects of life is symbolized by the whale (particularly the bowhead whale) as a mythical creature—a creature who is more than its body and mind. Responsible for and representing transformations in the world, whales are described in *Whale Snow* in terms of the role they play in all aspects of Iñupiaq ways of life, including its social importance and impacts to the community. Sakakibara does this by taking a multispecies ethnographic approach, within an ecological context, to demonstrate how humans interact with other entities (living and nonliving), how these relations came to be, and how and why they came to be characterized as they are. By exploring these multispecies interactions, interdependencies, and relatedness, Sakakibara shows the reader how these intimate relationships enable humans to survive and thrive in otherwise difficult environments.

This is immediately applicable to climate change concerns of resiliency and adaptation in the present, as this local, traditional, Indigenous knowledge has successfully sustained populations for millennia.

Chie Sakakibara's multispecies ethnographic and ecological approach to understanding the central role of the whale—especially the bowhead whale—in Iñupiaq culture is unique and refreshing, recognizing the self-imposed limitations to deep understanding by artificial categorization and isolation of research subjects. By this approach, Sakakibara describes and demonstrates Iñupiaq cultural success through resiliency based on deep knowledge of the relationships between the entities of the land, sky, and waters—human and otherwise. And though this relationship-based deep understanding is being disrupted by current conditions of climate change, the knowledge is, and always has been, predicated on the interdependency between species that has always characterized successful survival in the Arctic. In no way a static tradition, local traditions of Indigenous knowledge continue to change in response to changing local conditions, and their flexibility and resilience is based on the practical concerns of everyday life and respecting the needs for all life. By the Iñupiaq adaptation and continuation of these traditions, they continue to be the authentic decision-makers in their own inherent sovereignty, and this is central to the stories found in the chapters of Sakakibara's *Whale Snow: Iñupiat, Climate Change, and Multispecies Resilience in Arctic Alaska*.

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