

Book Reviews

SAQQAQ: AN INUIT HUNTING COMMUNITY IN THE MODERN WORLD. Jens Dahl. 2000. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press. xii + 277 p, soft cover. ISBN 0-8020-8237-8. £16.00; \$Can24.95.

The demise of subsistence hunting in the Arctic has been greatly exaggerated as recent ethnographies from the circumpolar north demonstrate, but there are changes nonetheless. Jens Dahl's account is especially compelling because he observes closely the shifting connections between hunting and modernization during the two-decade implementation of Greenland's Home Rule, negotiated with Denmark in 1979. Dahl's anthropological research in Greenland began in 1980, and he tackles the complex issue of what fundamental changes in governance have meant for Greenlanders, and especially for hunters. He draws out some of the unanticipated consequences that follow when government policies centred on principles of full rights to self-determination for all Greenlanders begin to override the opportunities for local autonomy that characterized Danish colonial rule. Unification necessarily requires centralization, and attention to categorical rights inevitably diminishes state tolerance for local autonomy. The 1999 establishment of Nunavut coincides with the twentieth anniversary of Home Rule and makes this a timely book for those following developments in Arctic Canada.

Dahl illustrates how detailed ethnographic work in one small community can illuminate large social and economic processes. He begins by pointing to a key contradiction. Saqqaq, a Greenlandic community distant but not isolated from centres of power, epitomizes for both Greenlanders and non-Greenlanders a 'traditional Greenlandic hunting community,' and is often held up as a model that represents the best of the 'old' life (page 6). Yet Saqqaq co-exists with and is fully part of the modern world, where customs and traditions have been formed and shaped over a period of several hundred years by a modernizing process that long predates Home Rule. Examples of highly valued traditions in contemporary Greenland include, for instance, the ability to read and write Greenlandic (brought by missionaries), the incorporation of hunting into world markets (introduced by Danish traders in 1721), and even the contemporary Lutheran church to which many Greenlanders belong.

In this community, Dahl argues, hunting is *the* activity that gives meaning to daily life, and his research focuses on two linked questions. First, what adjustments are needed to maintain a tradition that insists on the centrality of 'the hunting mode of life' in a world where competing uses of the terms like tradition and modernity have gained political significance at the end of the millennium? Greenlanders use the term tradition in its most modern sense — to defend their rights to self-determination — at the same time that

animal rights groups insist on equating 'tradition' with archaic practices and use the term to attack modern sealing and whaling practices. Second, how does an understanding of local meanings surrounding a mode of living learned by years of listening to conversations and observing on the spot contribute to issues of modern Greenlandic identity?

In *Saqqaq*, the reader comes to understand how these issues are bound together in whaling, fishing, and sealing, discussed in three of the book's nine chapters. Beluga whale hunting, for instance (chapter 2) is a community-wide activity that involves all members in collective life, framed by clear, long-standing local rules about participation, roles, and distribution of meat. Now that hunting regulations are issued by the Home Rule government, generalized rights based on belonging to the Greenlandic nation (allowing hunters from other communities to hunt in Saqqaq) override community-based hunting rights, and traditional rules are becoming insufficient to cope with globalization that reaches even 'remote' communities. This is particularly well illustrated by changes in fishing (chapter 3). With the dramatic increase in prices for Greenland halibut during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Greenlandic government has placed growing pressure on communities to devote more time and resources to commercial fishing. Superficially, this may set up an opposition between hunting and fishing, but Dahl shows how, by providing additional income, fishing is becoming an economic mainstay that actually enables (and finances) the more culturally meaningful hunting activities. This logic is especially clear for seal hunting (chapter 4) an activity that is not especially economically viable in Saqqaq but crucial to social relations because the exchange of seal meat is fundamental to all interpersonal exchanges. Simply stated, 'the hunter who returns with a seal is a provider' (page 134), and seal is the key to reciprocal relations despite its low 'economic' return.

Hunting, Dahl insists, is a mode of living that is learned by years of listening and observing, and while it is handed down from one generation to another it also flows through a public information network that includes everyone (pages 176–177). While he is careful to discuss gender relations, this is still very much an analysis of male hunting life (for example, chapter 5, 'Man and territory'), and his account leaves unanswered questions about how women participate in these public conversations. In many circumpolar northern communities there appears to be a growing gap between male commitment to hunting and opportunities that are emerging for women, and Dahl hints (chapter 6) that this may also be occurring in Greenland.

While this book is not 'about' Home Rule, issues surrounding governance and policy are never far from

Dahl's discussion of the links between one local Greenlandic community, national policies and priorities, and international markets. He takes up these issues in the book's concluding chapters, arguing that 'creation of a new national Greenlandic identity has actually diminished both the significance of the local identities (-mioq) and the identity of being an ethnic Greenlander' (page 254).

This is a valuable book grounded in a materialist framework and carefully documented with statistics and tables detailing an evolving hunting mode of life in Greenland. The volume sometimes reads like an updated dissertation, certainly valuable but also bearing pitfalls of repetition, including replication of complete sentences that should have been caught by an editor. *Saqqaq* will be of great interest to Arctic specialists and raises excellent topics for discussion in any graduate or senior undergraduate anthropology class. (Julie Cruikshank, Department of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 1Z1, Canada.)

ICE BLINK: THE TRAGIC FATE OF SIR JOHN FRANKLIN'S LOST POLAR EXPEDITION. Scott Cookman. 2000. Chichester and New York: John Wiley & Sons. xii + 244 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-471-37790-2. \$US24.95; \$Can34.95.

Starvation, scurvy, hypothermia, and lead poisoning have been suggested as factors causing, or contributing to, the death of Sir John Franklin's men. Scott Cookman, the author of *Ice blink*, proposes yet another cause — botulism, a disease characterized by rapid development and high mortality. Botulism is caused by an anaerobic bacterium, *Clostridium botulinum*, which produces one of the most powerful toxins known. It is widespread in nature and can survive for long periods at both high and low temperatures. According to Cookman, the London merchant Stephan Goldner obtained the Admiralty contract for preserved food by misleading advertising and underbidding, then purchased meats and vegetables of inferior quality, processed them in highly unsanitary conditions, failed to cook them thoroughly, provided them in cans larger than specified (to save time and money), soldered the cans imperfectly, and delivered them late.

Goldner was faced with the challenge of making about 30,000 cans (by hand), purchasing about 45 tons of meats and vegetables (in a season when fresh produce was largely unavailable), processing the ingredients, and sealing the cans, all within a month and a half. With only two weeks to go before sailing, less than 10 per cent of the canned meat had been delivered to the victualling yard. The soups did not reach dockside until 48 hours before departure (too late for any inspection), and instead of consisting of 20,000 one-pound cans, as specified in the contract, they were packed in nine- and 12-pound cans. They were the most dangerous part of the preserved food, Cookman points out, because vegetables would have been most likely to contain soil bacteria, and because the contents of the large cans may not have been cooked through to the

centre. 'The latest patented methods leached them of nutrients but left them tainted with bacteria and viruses. The canning processes contaminated them with lead and arsenic. Soldered shut to prevent admittance of the 'atmospherics' believed to cause spoilage, they were in fact death capsules packed with *Clostridium botulinum*' (page 210).

The discussion of Goldner and his methods is based largely upon manuscript records of the Admiralty, Home Office, and Supreme Court of Judicature, including Goldner's application for British citizenship, his food-preserving patents, his price lists and testimonials, his correspondence with the Admiralty, and his contracts to supply several Arctic expeditions. Most of the material comes from records of the Victualling Department (ADM 114) in the Public Record Office. As far as I am aware, no one before has searched so extensively in these manuscripts, with the possible exception of Richard Cyriax, who in 1939 wrote the most thorough and reliable book about the expedition. Cookman did not carry out this work himself, it should be pointed out; he commissioned two professional researchers.

Having formulated this bold (and doubtless controversial) hypothesis, Cookman should have bolstered his case by thoroughly documenting every significant point. But his text of 212 pages contains only half a dozen footnotes revealing sources, and none of these relates to the historical aspects. Unless he has published a carefully documented argument elsewhere, the botulism hypothesis will not be given the attention it deserves. One is sure to ask 'what is the evidence?' As far as I could ascertain, the closest thing to evidence is that spores of another kind of *Clostridium* (not *botulinum*) were found in the intestines of one of the corpses at Beechey Island during an autopsy performed in 1986, and that these spores 'were cultured and brought back to life' (page 124). Surely this is a crucial point, so why not elaborate upon it and provide a reference?

It is not exactly clear whom the botulism is supposed to have killed, and when. Only three men died during the first two years, from other causes, and the last 105 scurvy-ridden survivors starved to death after abandoning the ships in April 1848. But between May 1847 and April 1848, 21 others died, and one presumes that these were the only alleged victims of botulism. During spring sledging trips, Cookman asserts, they had to economize on fuel and therefore undercooked their canned food. 'The horrible death scene was played out 21 times' (page 153). But this is supposition masquerading as fact. No one knows that any sledging parties (other than the one under Gore) were sent out or that they carried canned food, or that the cans contained spores causing botulism, or that the sledgers died. Educated guesswork confidently presented as fact is likely to mislead readers. Indeed, this has already happened. An article in *The Times* (30 April 2000) entitled 'Cut-price food killed off Arctic explorers,' says 'research shows the 129-strong crew of Sir John Franklin's expedition probably perished from food poisoning caused by a corrupt Whitechapel supplier,' which is simply not true.