



## CHAPTER 7

# Risky Decisions, Precarious Moralties

## The Case of Autumn Whaling in Barrow, Alaska

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### Foreword

In the spring of 1997, I was in Fairbanks, along with Mike Pedersen (Science Officer for the Arctic Slope Native Association) at an NSF sponsored conference on ‘the Human Impact of Global Warming in the Arctic’.<sup>1</sup> As we were sitting outside in the spring sunshine taking a break, Mike received the message that an ice calving event had stranded 147 whalers on the ice just off Barrow. To make matters worse, the spring conditions had generated dense fog, creating zero visibility. By that evening we had heard everyone had been recovered safely – made possible largely by state-of-the-art Search and Rescue helicopters and the fact that virtually all of the whaling boats were equipped with GPS – and heaved a collective sigh of relief. Once back in Barrow, I began to hear different sorts of conversations; mixed in with expressions of gratitude for the technologies that had hastened rescue, I also heard from whaling captains who said, ‘Of course we didn’t go out; I had been watching those cracks for weeks!’ (which I understood) and, more puzzling for me, ‘We didn’t go out because the wind had dropped’. What I did not know then but know now was that wind and water currents at this time of year flow in opposite directions. If the wind stops, the water has the force to lift great chunks of ice from its short-fast ice base and set it adrift in the open water. Thus

began my interest in how Iñupiaq whalers assess uncertain conditions when faced with the urgent need to make decisions in response. Faced with the same conditions and generally equipped with similar environmental knowledge, individual whaling captains had made quite different decisions about whether or not to venture out onto the ice with their crews. I was also hearing about the same decisions that had been made on different sets of information. My first opportunity to explore these issues in detail came during the following autumn whaling season. In the present chapter I consider decisions taken about the conduct of whaling at the collective level by the Barrow Whaling Captains' Association, at the crew level and by individuals. In doing so, I explore the myriad of grounds on which people were explicitly talking about why they made one decision or another: moral (cosmological), social, political, economic; and the ways in which they took multiple possible consequences into consideration. It is, I feel, a perfect illustration of the extent to which the challenges described in this volume contain within them 'constellations of risk'.

## Introduction

As just mentioned, this chapter traces some of the multi-layered reasons Iñupiaq whalers articulated for the strategies they followed in the conduct of the 1997 autumn hunt. I use this material to consider several still influential models of risk that were reviewed in the Introduction. My main point is straightforward, but bears emphasis: at the level of policy, single-stranded cause and effect models of risk may well inform the basis on which policies are generated and deployed. At the level of daily practice, as this material reveals in striking detail, what constitutes 'a risk', what its possible consequences might be, and what alternative choices of action are considered possible all draw on multiple models.

In the following pages, I look at how (some) Barrow whalers talked to me about the shifts in whaling practices that took place during the 1996/97 autumn whaling seasons. The language in which whalers discuss the strategies they collectively developed reveal, in Douglas and Wildavsky's (1982) words, different orders of 'goods' and 'bads' that were taken into account. It illustrates how what often might appear as cost-effective conditions in cultural terms do not necessarily lead to predictable decisions.

At the time of the 1997 ice calving event, the 'techno/scientific/realistic' approach to risk was dominant in scientific circles, as we

mentioned in the Introduction. Certainly, when I asked whaling captains either why they had gone out or not, a certain number replied in terms of the material technology under their control. But as we shall see, in my experience it was never taken as the single authoritative form of explanation.

We discussed Douglas and Wildavsky in the Introduction, but I want to reiterate one of their quotes here because it is so apropos to the discussion to come: ‘fear of risk coupled with the confidence to face it has something to do with knowledge and something to do with the kind of people we are’. Different people worry about different things. ‘[T]o organise [in the face of perceived risk] means to organise some things in and other things out’ (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982: 8). These processes of identifying risk, of assessing it and creating strategies with relation to its perceived implications are all bound up in considering ‘goods’ and ‘bads’ which are moral and consequently always both cultural and political.

The material to come can be useful to think in a number of ways. With reference to the ‘expert/lay divide’ as explored and critiqued by Wynne (1996), Iñupiat are quite aware of the political traps in the definition of their knowledge as ‘not scientific’ – traps that can be analysed quite easily with Foucauldian notions of power/knowledge. Iñupiat often act strategically in that awareness. At the same time, however, it is important that we recognize different domains of knowledge that are not necessarily in opposition to each other. Iñupiaq knowledge categories include the recognition of *taiguaqti*, or ‘readers’ whose expert abilities to read the environment are connected to their ability to tell what they know to others. The morality of sharing information is, according to Raymond Neakok, Sr, ‘one of the rules’.<sup>2</sup> In many ways, Iñupiat do not set up barriers between ‘our’ and ‘their’ knowledge and are quite keen to learn what whale biologists think, without ever assuming their own knowledge of whale behaviour is somehow ‘less’. As I have said, Iñupiaq discussions draw on more than one order of knowing and they take place at institutional and individual levels.

I find myself in sympathy with Douglas and Wildavsky: we need to keep in mind ‘rules into which a vision of the good life can be translated’ (1982: 175) before thinking about how these may or may not be framed with reference to physical or moral dangers. The good life, according to the vast majority of Iñupiat with whom I have spoken since 1980, is defined through hunting in general and whaling in particular. In contrast to the US Declaration of Independence with its assertion of an individual’s self-evident entitlement to ‘life, liberty and

the pursuit of happiness', this good life is not expressed in a language of rights, but as a social relationship articulated as a responsibility to other humans but also, crucially, to the animals on whom Iñupiat depend. As we shall see, this generates quite a different sort of language of risk than many of the examples drawn on in the literature cited in the Introduction. Equally, it makes a difference that Iñupiat are both egalitarian and value individual autonomy in ways that are quite distinct from the mainstream society surrounding them. Thus, Douglas and Wildavsky's distinctions that we noted earlier, between egalitarian and hierarchical social organization as factors that will generate different definitions of risk, and different strategies for dealing with it, are ones to take into consideration. But those factors need to be further contextualized. What we have just touched on are the seeming contradictory values of collective responsibility and individual autonomy. I make a distinction between the sort of possessive individualism that assumes all value can be owned as private property and the kind of individualism that assumes all beings have autonomy; that whales and caribou give themselves up to hunters they deem worthy; that babies choose when to be born; and that the decisions one makes should be thoughtful because they carry weight in the world. Those distinctions play a role when precarity is demanding attention.

Similarly, the Foucauldian approaches mentioned above make important points that are relevant to the decisions Iñupiat whalers make. The extent to which the actions they take are subject to various forms of oversight and regulation, which generate local versions of oversight and regulation, is a central aspect of contemporary whaling. Yet to frame these decisions purely as expressions of governmentality would simply be to miss a great number of points. By the same token, it is of course important to realize the weaknesses inherent in assuming hazards are 'out there' floating free of culture in some way whereas risks are socially and culturally defined. The danger, once again, is to fall into a kind of descriptive language that implies everything is constructed and therefore of the same order.

The discussions I shall not enter into are those about 'modernity'. Iñupiat today are dealing with thoroughly capitalist and governmental institutions on a daily basis. They do so with great determination to 'do it their way' which at times includes thoroughly capitalist and governmental actions. I have been struck in much of the current risk literature at the extent to which many anthropological discussions of the last several decades – about contemporaneity of peoples, and about the difficulties with assuming 'the Enlightenment Project' is an all-encompassing social fact of modernity – seem to be entirely

ignored. The multiple sorts of discussions Iñupiat engage in when talking about whaling remind me in fact of Latour's (1993) opening remarks in *We Have Never Been Modern*. Discussing an article about Antarctica and the ozone layer, he says, 'The same article mixes together chemical reactions and political reactions (and disagreements between chemists and meteorologists). A single thread links the most esoteric sciences and the most sordid politics, the most distant sky and some factory in the Lyon suburb' (1993: 1). His argument concerns what he calls 'the proliferation of hybrids'. Mine simply tries to untangle the different modes these discussions assume.

Nor am I going to explore the question of untranslatable categories. Iñupiat exist in a world in which official languages of risk have defined their whaling negotiations since 1978 at least when the International Whaling Commission declared that subsistence whaling should cease because it endangered the bowhead population. Their efficacy depends on being able to interpret others' concerns and being able to communicate about their own. For the moment at least I find it useful to accept the separation of 'hazard' and 'risk'. As a working definition I shall modify the BMA definition slightly and suggest hazards are recognized dangers to social goods; the risk is the potential negative consequence.

Thinning ice, thus is a hazard; the risks may include the dangers faced by crews wanting to bring a whale up on the ice, or the likelihood that hunters will not be able to find harbour seal who habitually give birth to their young at the ice edge. What I do not include as a core part of my definition is the notion of calculability. Some of the decisions whalers make – about the best time to begin autumn whaling for instance – are clear instances of complex calculations involving multiple factors. Others – such as the possibility of whales withholding themselves if people are not properly generous – cannot be subjected to the same calculus.

## The Ethnography

The general framework for this discussion is set out in two ways. First, with the help of information provided by North Slope elders, we consider how rules about the proper conduct of whaling influence Iñupiaq social life in general and look at the potential consequences of ignoring them. We then turn to the formal organization of whaling, examining the different institutional levels at which whaling strategies are discussed and implemented.

### ***'Iñupiaq Food Is Social Food' – Whaling as a Way of Organizing the Social***

The social organization of whaling is often talked about in terms of its division of labour: how people organize themselves to hunt, butcher, distribute and share the whale. This is an exceedingly important part, but nonetheless only a part, of the story.

'I am Iñupiaq; I eat Iñupiaq food' is an equation that I have heard many times over the years – in many contexts and by many different people. But it is not just the nature of the food itself that is so important. 'Iñupiaq food is social food', Fannie Akpik said one evening in the autumn of 1997. And indeed, that is very literally true in many cases. People who may be forced to eat Iñupiaq food on their own – in hospital rooms for instance – talk of how incomplete that experience is. What makes it social, however, is not just that it tastes better when you can eat it together, but that it is a consequence of many social relationships – between humans, between humans and animals and among animals themselves.

It is common to hear that whales may give or withhold of themselves.<sup>3</sup> In the women's session of the 1991 Elders' Conference, organized by the Iñupiaq History, Language and Culture Commission,<sup>4</sup> Ida Koonuk spoke of this explicitly: 'The bowhead is a very distinguished mammal', she said. 'It can give itself up, which can make it very easy for the captain and crew, or it can withhold itself from another captain and crew and can be struck and lost' (IHLC 1991a: 12). The gift relationship between whales and humans is a social one that depends on two other kinds of social behaviour: generosity among humans and communication among the whales themselves. Kirk Oviok, from Point Hope, remembered his own upbringing:

Like my aunt said, the whales have ears and are more like people. The first batch of whales seen would show up to check which ones in the whaling crews would be more hospitable to be caught. Then the whales would come back to their pack and tell them about the situation stating, 'we have someone available for us', ... This is what my wife and I have heard from my aunt Negovanna. I firmly believe this is true, that whales have ears. (IHLC 1991b: 4–5)

This is echoed by Mary Aveoganna, from Barrow. 'Always be ready with hospitality', she instructed, 'so the whale will see an inviting place' (IHLC 1991a: tape 2). In his 1985 address to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, Patrick Attungana (whose words also feature in Edwardson's chapter in this volume), another Point Hoper and

ordained minister of the Episcopal Church, related an *unipkaaḡ* (story passed down through the generations) that expresses this even more explicitly:

When the whales come, ... one of them stops, like it was camping, being caught by the people. ... That one that is like camping... it knows when its relatives are coming back. ... Those that are returning want to listen to what that one that is like camping has to say. That one tells them the stories, that he had a good host with those two, the married ones [the whaling captain couple] ... That one that talks about having good hosts, starts looking forward to going back to those hosts when they return the following year. And the other one that said it did not have good hosts said that it will not camp again but will go to another host. (1986: 5–6)<sup>5</sup>

Thus, assumptions about whale/whale sociality also have consequences for the moral weight Iñupiat place on human social behaviour. This does not simply concern the way in which the whale hunt is conducted but extends to the generosity with which humans treat each other throughout the year. The moral universe is full of social beings acting with intent. To use the language of the risk literature just reviewed, the hazard of impolite human behaviour carries with it the very considerable risk that whales will withhold themselves from the gift relationship. They may simply not show up; they may be struck but slip under the ice; or a wounded whale may be escorted away by two or more of its pod. In my experience, the latter two sorts of instances may be read as evidence that particular individuals had not acted properly. But equally – as in the case of a severe accident several years ago that resulted in the death of someone helping to pull a whale to shore – the responsibility is collective. In this latter case people did not seek to assign individual blame, but rather assumed there had been too much conflict in town and talked about the entire community having to mend its ways and unify itself. At the end of the speech cited above, Attungana concluded that the whale gives itself to all; to receive the gift Iñupiat need to be able to ‘hunt in harmony; that is what holds our hunting together’ (1986: 6).

From these general statements about the moral aspects of whaling, let us turn to some of the quite specific aspects of human behaviour that North Slope elders consider hazardous to the human/whale relationship. The comments refer to ways that these elders learned to behave in preparation for whaling, during the whale hunt itself, in the immediate aftermath of a successful hunt and during the year overall. Although we begin with references to cleaning ice cellars because this was mentioned so many times as crucial preparatory activity, we

should bear in mind that, as Maggie Ahmaogak emphasized when we were talking about the responsibilities of whaling captain wives, the cycle has no clear beginning and no absolute end. The whaling celebration is at once an opportunity to give thanks for a successful season and an opportunity to provide the hospitality that, as we have heard, will encourage whales to give of themselves again in the future.

Ida Koonuk of Point Hope explained why it was so important to clean out ice cellars in March:<sup>6</sup>

We are told the one we are so expectant about does not like to be laid to rest in a messy cellar. That was one of the foremost teachings we have always heard! My mother-in-law would tell me, 'When you are done with cleaning up of the cellar, before you climb up, say verbally, "you can now expect to be filled".' It has gotten to be a habit with me now, saying it inside the cellar before I climb out of it. (IHLC 1991a: 12)

Carol Omnik, also of Point Hope, concurred:

It is exactly like one of the former speakers, Ida, said. That the first thing that has to be done is the ice cellar. I, too, grew up when I would see people work to clean out cellars. It has always been a practice from time immemorial, a piece of whale meat from last year cannot be saved until a later time. It has to be taken out. Because the anticipated whale always sees and hears all that goes on. (IHLC 1991a: 13)

Mary Aveoganna, of Barrow, expanded this somewhat:

We, the Aveoganna crew, my children and their spouses started on an ice cellar, for the proper storage of the mighty bowhead. For it is common knowledge, as we are told from time immemorial, that the bowhead would discern what/how they are to be handled, distributed and stored as they give themselves up to this particular captain and crew. Every one of the crew members gave of their time and labour to get the cellar done in time for whaling. I kept encouraging them, telling them that it will anticipate to be filled with what we all are hoping, praying for. It is so clean and prepared for what we all have awaited for. (IHLC 1991a: 15)

The ice cellar, then, must be prepared as an inviting resting place for the whale. The meat that has been removed in the process cannot be hoarded, as Berna Brower of Barrow related:

When my daughter-in-law asked what are we going to do with all the meat and fish that were put out from the ice cellar? Shall we put them back into the cellar? [I told her] No!. Just leave enough fish and meat for



the whaling season, for your whalers, then take the extras to the widows and the Elders. So all day she went out and gave away all the meat and fish to different homes that she knew of.

Then one of the Elders spoke and said may she receive something tender and delicious to give away. So that is why we should always give priority to widows and Elders. (IHLC 1991a: 2)

The hope is not that one gives away to get something tasty for oneself, but to receive something worthy of being an appreciated gift again. I want to act properly so that a whale will give itself up to my crew; if that happens, the whale doesn't become 'mine' to have, but the community's to take part in.

The exhortation to share and be generous, especially to those less fortunate, appeared in almost every participant's testimony. Not only Berna Brower, but Ida Koonuk ('take widows and orphans under our wing'), Alice Solomon ('feed the hungry, the orphans, the poor'), Terza Hopson ('What the elders have said about "taking under your wing, so to speak, the poor, the orphans" fits right in with the commandments of our Lord'), Dorcas Tagarook ('we were taught not to omit anyone'), Jennie Ahkivgak ('feed the poor'), Carl Omnik ('take responsibility for the orphans and the elders'), and Mary Aveoganna ('don't hoard') reflected the consistency of this message from across the North Slope region (IHLC 1991a: 2–15).<sup>7</sup>

The need for cleanliness was echoed in the men's session.<sup>8</sup> Eli Solomon drew an explicit parallel with the women's responsibilities on shore: 'Just as the women keep the qanitchat (entry ways) clean, so everything around the tent should be clean – especially the left side of the boat' (IHLC 1991b: 9) [for this way, the whale will 'see' its way to its resting place and be more likely to give itself up].<sup>9</sup> Wyborn Nungasak was also clear that one of the whaling captain's responsibilities was to ensure that 'the environment needs to be clean and acceptable by all' (IHLC 1991d, tape 2: 3).

Words as well as deeds must be treated carefully. 'Watch your words!' Arthur Neakok, originally from Nuvuk (Point Barrow) said to the men; 'refrain your tongue from backbiting', exhorted Carol Omnik while fellow Point Hoper Ida Koonuk emphasized: 'Harsh words do no good; the whale listens in [and reports back to other whales]. Because the whale we are all so eager for listens in, whoever we are dealing with' (IHLC 1991a: 12).

Once the whale has given itself up, it is important to handle the meat with care: treat it 'tenderly' in the process of butchering, storing

and preparing the meat for the various feasts during which it will be consumed throughout the year.

‘It has always been said’, according to Carol Omnik, ‘that as the whales gather together, they would communicate one to the other, that this particular does not work on me with tender, loving hands. Some would report that this one is the best person to be with. There are some others who would like to go to someone else, all because they want to be worked on tenderly. So the conversation goes on’. (IHLC 1991a: 14)

Above all, women and men reiterated, it is important to ‘be in harmony’. Levi Greist remembered a story: ‘Long ago, just before going out on a whaling venture, man and wife had a dispute. It was not long after they got to the open lead where they set up camp, that a whale came up and started chopping the ice off with his flukes. Therefore, unity is continually stressed’ (IHLC 1991c: 14).

Patrick Attungana underscored the same message on a wider level in his 1985 address to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission: ‘When you hunt in harmony, you don’t have problems catching the animals. This is what needs to be thought about. If the hunters from Barter to St. Lawrence Island hunt in harmony, the animals will keep going. They will acquire, they will catch the animal’ (1986: 16ff). The whaling captain couple, the whaling crew and the whaling crews together are enjoined over and over to ‘work together’ and to ‘be grateful’ to the whales for their gift of themselves.

In many important ways, the annual cycle is a marked celebration of whaling. Nalukataq (the spring whaling feast), Thanksgiving and Christmas all incorporate the distribution of shares, the communal consumption of a feast centred on whale meat and maktak, and the clear expression of thanks that whales made this possible.<sup>10</sup> These feasts are intensely social, celebrated in commensality, singing, dancing and prayer, but the exhortations presented above are about the rules of sociality to be followed throughout the year.

The exhortation for humans to be social in particular ways quite explicitly underpins the sociality of the whale/human gift relationship. Messy cellars, messy camps, harsh words and social tensions are all presented as hazards that have the potential to discourage whales from offering themselves. Once a whale has offered itself, thoughtless treatment of the whale’s body – either by treating the meat roughly during butchering and storage or by not sharing it fully – is experienced as inhospitable. Those who are not ‘good

hosts' create the danger that whales will not want to return. Very specific things need to be done, but generally the decisions about how to do them are left open.

To return to the theoretical literature, this set of conversations does not reflect a model that suggests the dangers are 'out there' which must be dealt with socially. The dangers and their potential consequences are both expressed in social terms with social actors – human and non-human – at the centre.<sup>11</sup> These events are very clearly explained as a function of an explicit cause and effect relationship just as the rules guiding proper behaviour are explained as means to a specified end. They are a function of individual actions and individual responsibilities – primarily personified through the whaling captain couple – with consequences for the entire social group. Thus, while we have both rational explanation and institutionalized individual autonomy, the reasoning, self-interested, maximizing economic individual of rational choice theory does not provide us with satisfying explanatory power. Although individuals are left to decide for themselves how to act, for the most part, negative consequences are spoken of in terms of collective responsibility. And as we shall see, the decisions that are made cannot always be predicted in terms of rational self-interest – whether that interest is framed, to borrow from Bourdieu, in terms of material, cultural or intellectual capital.

I do not want to give the impression that either Iñupiaq beliefs or practices are uniform, coherent and somehow hermetically sealed. They are not. How people talk about the social relationships between whales/humans/God varies from person to person, between denominations and between villages. As Isaac Akootchook pointed out, customs at times 'have to be altered to fit our way of life. ... What will be effective in your village will not be good for our part of the country' (IHLC 1991c: 1). Nor, clearly, am I trying to reproduce a picture of 'pure' Iñupiaq ideas that can be viewed through intervening layers of Christian doctrines. The participants in both the men's and women's sessions who were quoted above are for the most part practising Christians of several denominations. For many, an active reliance on Christian prayer formed the backbone of proper behaviour. Indeed, Mary Lou Leavitt was firm that 'above all, the woman of the house should be a praying woman' (IHLC 1991b: 3) Just as Terza Hopson drew a parallel between pre-Christian and Christian Iñupiaq practices above, so Jennie Ahkivgak also pointed out that many aspects of the ways in which Iñupiat talk about whaling – whether or not from an explicitly 'Christian' viewpoint – are remarkably consistent.

Especially when I read the Iñupiat Bible, she mused. All that is written thereon is no different from the Iñupiaq customs and way of life. What we knew to be a fact, that our forefathers did not read, but by their verbal expressions it would sound like they were reading the Iñupiat Bible as they gave instructions to live good moral lives. (IHLC 1991a: 12)

Whether from the spirit of God or of the Whale or a combination of both, these moral codes thus provide a backdrop with reference to which a broad range of decisions is generated.

## **The Institutional Organization of Whaling**

We have examined whaling beliefs in terms of what seems to me to be an explicitly moral language of ‘risky relationships’; we turn now to contexts in which decisions are made and not just talked about. What emerges clearly is that the Elders’ statements we have heard are by no means simply ideal statements; they continue to inform the reasons for fundamental decisions concerning whaling. However, it is clear that improper human behaviour is by no means the only hazard confronting Iñupiaq whalers. Taking a single case example in which ‘waste’ was defined as a serious problem, we see how discussions include not only moral, but physical and political dimensions. This chapter begins with cultural statements of beliefs in part, as Douglas and Wildavsky affirm, because it is important to get a sense of how people envision a ‘good life’ before trying to understand how they define threats to it. In this case as well, some of these formal decision-making pathways may look so familiar in non-Iñupiaq settings that it is easy to lose sight of the very specifically Iñupiaq ideas and beliefs that inform particular strategies undertaken on the North Slope. Before turning to the case example, then, let us take a look at the institutions through which whaling strategies are created.

The Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC) is the largest – and the newest – of these formal institutions. Created in 1978 in response to the International Whaling Commission’s proposed moratorium on indigenous whaling, it is made up of locally elected Commissioners from each of the ten Alaska whaling villages.<sup>12</sup> In important ways, the AEWC is a bridging organization, representing regional interests to national and international bodies and ensuring that local whaling captains’ associations are kept ‘in the loop’ of information and decision-making. Iñupiaq whalers are keenly aware that without that

information, decisions are likely to be taken for them rather than with them. The task of the AEWC is to negotiate with non-Iñupiaq organizations, primarily the US Federal Government and indirectly the International Whaling Commission (IWC), about management plans in general and the quota system in particular.<sup>13</sup> It is also their responsibility to monitor local implementation of the plans once they have been set. As part of this, they mediate the division of the quota among the member villages and keep track of inter-village quota transfers.

The Barrow Whaling Captain's Association (BWCA) is, as it sounds, a community-based organization and has counterparts in all other AEWC member villages. Although not a formally incorporated organization like the AEWC, its status is one of a locally recognized institution and in fact comes out of a long-standing association of whaling captains.<sup>14</sup> According to several Barrow people who talked to me during the 1980s, the *umialingat* (literally, the whaling captains) used to meet regularly to discuss many issues affecting the community as a whole. Since, as we have already heard, the gift of whales to the community was dependent on their perceptions of proper human behaviour, it was important for the captains to keep track of what was going on in the village. They were a collective decision-making body that played a major role in social life.<sup>15</sup> Today, the BWCA decides on local best practice on matters affecting Barrow crews collectively, a process we shall examine in our case example.

The Barrow Whaling Women's Auxiliary (*Utqiagvik Agvigsiuqtit Agnangiich*, or UAA) also meets regularly to consider matters that are pertinent to the efficient meeting of responsibilities of the wife's side of the whaling captain couple. In the past few years UAA members have created a Documenting Committee to ensure, for instance, that needed skills in the preparation of the skin boat were not being lost; they have considered how best to prepare feasts for hundreds of people in the safest possible conditions; and they raise funds throughout the year to support the very considerable expenses whaling captains must incur as part of the whaling process.

Each crew is also an organized group unto itself. The whaling captain husband/wife couple, often aided by a co-captain, must make decisions on the intra-crew division of labour, whether to go out on a particular day, and the like. Many of these decisions are discussed as overall responsibilities in the 1991 Elders' Conference. Martha Aiken (2000) asserted that the whaling captain's wife's major responsibility was the safety of the crew. In many ways, as we have already seen, this theme was reiterated by the elders with respect to both halves of the whaling captain couple. Whaling captains are responsible for

deciding when and where to cut the ice trails out to the spring camp (most important to be able to return to shore quickly if the ice begins to break); they need to monitor ice conditions constantly, checking for cracks and for flooding. They need to recruit the crew, organize the equipment, prepare the boat and make sure that it is in good repair. Above all, they need to make sure that the crew knows how to do things properly – as emphasized by Isaac Akootchook: ‘When we start getting ready for autumn whaling we [captains] teach/talk to everyone involved in whaling, especially to crew members and what is expected of them, also what gear to work on and to bring along during whaling. We also let our crew members know what to do within the boat, etc.’ (IHL 1991c: 2).

‘The wife’s job is more broad and varied’, Wyborn Nungasak suggested (IHL 1991c: 3) and indeed, it often seems that whaling captains’ wives need to be in all places at all times. As we have already heard, they are responsible for the cleanliness of the house, the ice cellars and the entryways. They make sure the crew has adequate clothing, arrange for the sewers to prepare the skin boat cover, prepare the food for the crew as well as the community feasts, help with the butchering, the storing and the preservation of the meat. Like the whaling captains, Jennie Ahkivgak suggested, their job is also to instruct the younger wives and, as Mary Aveoganna pointed out, both husband and wife are responsible for being hospitable – ‘good hosts’ in an echo of Patrick Attungana. It is their job to make sure help is provided if people are in need. This is carried out by individual wives as well as through the regular meetings of the UAA which take place throughout the year.

Individuals control their own labour and may offer it in a multiplicity of contexts: moving from crew to crew; working with more than one crew; or deciding how much to work in any one season.

Barrow whaling, then, is affected by local decision-making on at least four related but recognisably separate levels: individual, crew, community and regional. At all levels, decisions are constantly being made in response to all sorts of changing conditions. To take a closer look at this process, let us turn to a case example from the 1996/97 autumn whaling seasons.

### **Case Example: So Many Whales; So Little Time!**

Nineteen whales were taken between 10 and 26 September during the relatively short 1996 autumn whaling season in Barrow. On five

of those days, between two and five whales were landed on the same day, causing a labour crisis. A mature bowhead produces about a ton of useable food per foot in length. Even ‘small’ whales (fifteen to thirty feet) thus require a lot of hands to butcher the animal, transport and store the meat, prepare the feast for the entire community and clean up the butchering site. In 1996, the whales landed in Barrow ranged in size from twenty-five to forty-four feet; their mean size was thirty-eight and a half feet. Significantly, only three of the nineteen fell into the twenty-five-to-thirty-foot range that reflects Barrow preferences and eleven of the nineteen (58 per cent) were forty-two feet long or more. Thus, not only were there many more whales than was customary, but they were about fifteen feet longer than usual as well. Fifteen feet means fifteen more tons of meat to butcher for each whale. It was daunting.

In fact, on 12 September, the four landed whales were, respectively, forty-two, forty-two, forty-four, and forty feet long. Just two days later, before people had been able to recuperate, three more whales – forty-four, thirty-seven and forty-seven feet long – were landed within hours of each other. The serious strain on manpower, tempting – even forcing – people to cut corners, and the sudden glut of meat combined to generate the threat of waste. This had the potential to generate unwanted consequences that were explicitly recognized and discussed on multiple fronts:

- It is disrespectful to whales, potentially discouraging their return: a moral hazard;
- It can attract polar bears who pose a physical threat to humans;
- It discourages potential helpers from showing up, thus creating further pressure for the people who do show up: a social hazard;
- It may attract the negative attention of outsiders, potentially weakening the negotiating position of the AEWG with the IWC: clearly framed in political terms.

We have already heard about the general importance of cleanliness. The specific issue of waste is often discussed in formal institutions. Sam Taalak, Edward Hopson and Walter Akpik all spoke at the 1991 Elders’ Conference about what they perceived as the larger implications of incomplete storage of whale meat and maktak, with implications for both customary practice and political action on national and international levels. According to Taalak:

Since I came back to Barrow [from Nuiqsut] this last spring, I have gone out to the dump and have found some maktak in plastic bags, real thick slices of flukes, and meat ... I say the captain is to blame for such

wastes – I know the uati meat has a lot of tendon on it ... We should be more careful how we do things ... because one picture like that, when it is shown, they will see to it that our quota is taken all away. Like one speaker said, during Christmas all the uati should be cut up and taken to the feast. (IHLC 1991c: 8)

Edward Hopson, from Barrow, made a similar point:

These meetings I understand are to improve anything about our whaling system ... About the whale, we the Iñupiat ... make our own rules about the whale ... Therefore, we are our own Public Safety about whaling. ... Therefore I feel we should be more careful what we do to the whale. This is not only for Barrow; it involves Nuiqsut too, where one does not take the top layer off only and leaves the rest of it because it froze. Those that oppose whaling will do something drastic when they hear about this. In this meeting we should request AEWG to tell the captains not to throw away any meat or maktak, because when one puts maktak with blubber in the ice cellar, it keeps, no matter how long it stays there. When the top portion from the maktak is cut off, it tastes even better. (Ibid.:13)

Walter Akpik, of Atqusaq, said succinctly: ‘Think of what the oil companies can do if they find out ... we do not store the whale meat like we’re supposed to. And another thing I do not need to remind you, we all love to eat the whale. Therefore we ought to take into consideration what we do with our share’ (ibid.:15).

In each of these statements, the political stakes are posed somewhat differently; all three point to ‘external’ dangers posed by non-Iñupiaq institutions as well as values defined as Iñupiat; each invokes the notion of responsibility in different ways: political ‘bads’ and moral ‘goods’. Taalak suggests that captains are responsible for wasted meat; the risk is the potential loss of the quota, but then he alludes to the moral rule that uati should be distributed during Christmas feasts, thus defining his concern as thoroughly grounded in Iñupiaq values. Hopson points to the value – and the tenuous nature – of Iñupiaq sovereignty: ‘We are our own Public Safety about whaling’ and urges more collective care. He identifies the AEWG as the proper institution to encourage captains not to waste meat – but then suggests that much of this meat will taste ‘even better’ if the top layer is cut off. Walter Akpik specifically identified oil companies as powerfully threatening external entities, couched his fears in terms of collective responsibilities but also reminded listeners ‘we all love to eat the whale’. All three are quite clear that Iñupiaq behaviour can generate the risk of adverse actions on the parts of



external institutions with whom they are in political relationships, whether they like it or not.

## **Formal, Collective Decisions: 1997 Responses to 1996 Events**

The risks outlined above were the subject of serious discussion as Barrow whaling captains prepared for the 1997 autumn hunt and several strategies were formally adopted by the Barrow Whaling Captains' Association as a whole.

1. Whales migrate in 'waves', grouped roughly by size. The population of the first wave is for the most part significantly larger than that of the second wave, a fact long-known by experienced whalers and corroborated by harvest data generated by the NSB Wildlife Management Department.<sup>16</sup> The Association decided that Barrow whalers should wait for the second migration wave to begin the autumn hunt. The whales would be the smaller, preferred size and the meat would be more tender. Butchering would thus demand less labour power and elders as well as youngers would enjoy the meat more.<sup>17</sup>
2. Again in an effort to limit the demands on available labour power, the BWCA instituted a daily take limit of two whales.
3. Furthermore, the Association instituted a moratorium on crews taking off to whale again until the previous catch had been completely butchered and the site had been cleaned up.

With all of these strategies, the need for coherence was plainly expressed to me by a number of captains. If one crew went out before time, the pressure on others would be intolerable.<sup>18</sup> As with so many aspects of whaling, the view that 'there has to be agreement' was keenly felt.

Quantitative data gathered by the AEWEC and the North Slope Borough Wildlife Management Department provides comparative information which illustrates the degree to which decisions taken in the autumn of 1997 resulted in a strikingly different harvest. The total harvest in the 1997 autumn hunt was twenty-one bowhead, slightly higher than the nineteen taken in 1996. Although the size range was also slightly larger, the mean size dropped by seven feet. The mode is even more revealing. In 1997, only three whales were longer than forty feet whereas in 1996 more than half were longer than forty-one feet.

It is also worth comparing the daily take in both seasons. Even though the two seasons began on virtually the same day with the catch of a forty-two foot whale, the ‘tempo’ of each hunt was strikingly different. In 1996 whalers landed sixteen whales, the vast majority of the season’s take, before 20 September; ten of these were forty-two feet or longer. By contrast, Barrow whalers only took three whales in the comparable 1997 period. In 1997, the most intense whaling took place during the last week of September and only two whales exceeded thirty-four feet. Although the two-per-day limit was not strictly followed, no more than three whales were ever landed on one day, a radical cutting back from the previous year. The 1997 season extended almost to the end of October, increasing the likelihood of landing smaller whales and the number of landed whales was much more evenly and reasonably distributed throughout the season, as suggested by the Association. The lessened strain on labour power was evident.<sup>19</sup>

### **Weighing Up the Risks: What’s at Stake in Such a Decision?**

As we have said, to reduce the risk of waste (and its accompanying knock-on hazards detailed above), the Barrow Whalers Association made several decisions: to delay the opening of the autumn hunt in order to increase the likelihood of catching smaller whales; to limit the daily catch; to require that whalers not return to their boats until each butchering session was completed and cleaned up. Each of these decisions had some obvious benefits, but also carried their own hazards.

The decision to delay the start of autumn whaling was a conscious calculation based on the knowledge that the ‘second wave’ of migrating whales are the smaller ones. There are many advantages to this: smaller whales, according to Barrow people, are tastier and more tender; they require less work to butcher and thus do not put the same intolerable strain on available labour. That makes it much easier to clean up, reducing the likelihood of waste.

But of course, neither the BWCA nor individual whaling captains can simply decide when they want to undertake autumn whaling. Weather conditions in the autumn as in the spring are critical factors. Not surprisingly, these are very different. In the spring, for ice-based whaling, as we saw in the opening vignette, the relationship between wind direction and current is a crucial factor in ice movement; in the autumn, when whaling is conducted in ice-free water,

wind direction is much less important than wind speed (C. George, personal communication). In the autumn, days may go by during which the wind is too high for whalers to go out at all and differences in weather conditions from year to year will be reflected in different annual harvest patterns. Of most importance to the BWCA discussions, the later one goes out whaling in the autumn, the greater the risk of severe storms, rarely a factor in the spring. Thus, a decision to wait until 16, 20 or 24 September is a decision in which whaling captains calculate quite explicitly how much difference one or two days might make in terms of their knowledge of variability in whale migration patterns, autumn weather patterns and their decision to opt for smaller whales.<sup>20</sup> In these discussions, it should be emphasized that ‘the weather’ is talked about as a hazard that is ‘out there’. It is not talked about in terms of social relations, it cannot be propitiated; it is not a function of improper human behaviour; survival (and for whaling captains, the survival of their crew) depends on taking observant care. Here it seems to me we can think about conscious balancing of ‘goods’ and ‘bads’, although what emerges is the extent to which the proposed solution to the threat of waste – a threat that drove the decisions modifying subsequent hunts – must be concerned in terms of further risks.

Not only was the problem of waste discussed in terms of threats that originated in moral, physical and political environments, the solution generated a close examination of further threats that were strategized on (other) moral, physical and political grounds. We are definitely talking about rational choices here – choices that are discussed at length by whaling captains every year. It is, to echo Weber, a moral rationality that begins with the given that whaling is a positively moral goal that underpins all decisions. But even within that moral universe, whaling captains have opted to cut back on the time of the whaling season, and have opted for the most dangerous portion of it. This is in order to land smaller whales which require less labour to butcher. But in a world in which spring whaling is becoming increasingly precarious, the decision to limit the number of whales taken in the autumn means that the captains have opted to restrict the amount of whale meat they can provide to the community and beyond. As we said earlier, a whale provides approximately a tonne of meat per foot in length, so to opt for a thirty-six-foot whale instead of a forty-four-foot one means a reduction of around eight tonnes of meat per whale. Economistic and individually self-interested it is not.

The harvest patterns of 1997 suggest strongly that the strategies put forward by the BWCA were consistently followed by Barrow whalers

throughout the season. In 1998 the BWCA decided to wait until 20 September to begin their autumn season in order to maximize their chances of landing primarily small whales and that decision was honoured in full.

## Discussion

Various languages of risk have been heard throughout this chapter. That they are neither necessarily mutually coherent, nor inevitably contradictory should be evident from the material we have just examined. In this final section, I want to consider them together more systematically. Accepting for the moment the distinction between ‘hazard’ and ‘risk’ as analytically useful, I want to consider the hazards identified in people’s statements, the particular risks these hazards were said to pose, the bases of the risks, and the strategies put forward to ameliorate them. In part, this endeavour points out some of the difficulties in such a bi-partite presentation; what looks like a hazard from one perspective becomes a risk from another. Still, trying for such a separation does reveal the extent to which single factors such as ‘waste’ may be thought to create different orders of unwanted consequences.

The comments reflect three broad types of risk:

- \* moral: the consequences of improper human behaviour that can result in the whale’s withdrawal of the gift itself.
- \* physical: the threats to a successful hunt, or even survival itself, if environmental conditions are not attended to or if thoughtless decisions are made that put the crew into danger (knowledge of the wind, currents, ice conditions, proper care of equipment, creating ice roads, choosing the place to set up camp, etc.). This clearly engages with both mental and material technology and addresses most particularly the responsibilities of whaling captains and their wives.
- \* political: the threats to autonomous Iñupiaq conduct of the hunt posed by powerful external institutions such as the International Whaling Commission, the US Government or British Petroleum which very clearly can be influenced by outsiders’ perceptions of local actions. ‘We are the endangered species’, exclaimed Arnold Brower, Jr. at a public hearing some years ago.

In the first and last cases, Iñupiat talk about the dangers that may be created by certain kinds of human behaviour. Both the moral environment within which whales and humans interact and the political environment in which Iñupiat must deal with powerful external institutions are ones in which the hazards and the risks they generate are defined by Iñupiat themselves as social. Both are internal to the social system. The ways in which Iñupiat talked about the physical environment reflect a different sort of classification. Thinning polar ice, shore-fast ice that is not fixed securely to the ocean bottom, high winds, low visibility or the likelihood of severe autumn storms are defined as potentially dangerous, but not as a function of human action. The hazard is thus ‘out there’; inasmuch as the risks are defined in human terms – and demand human action – they are social.

I want to return briefly to the issue of political action. Because the focus of this discussion has been on BWCA decisions and not the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC), we have not examined actions that engage with these external institutions directly. It is worth spending a few moments shifting our institutional focus. Iñupiat are quite clear that others’ perceptions of them may be of different orders. Quantifiable ‘risk management’ policies such as those developed by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) thrive on numbers in which Iñupiaq whaling is defined largely in terms of ‘efficiency’: whether or not the overall population of bowhead remains healthy enough to reproduce; what the ‘struck and lost’ numbers are; the length of time it takes a whale to die if hunted with one kind of bomb or another. But these policies also have a moral dimension. If Iñupiaq whaling practices are not seen as being traditional ‘enough’, Iñupiat risk being defined as ‘trophy’ or ‘sports’ hunters who then lose the moral authority underlying their right to continue subsistence whaling. If state or national news media characterize them as ‘oil-rich Arabs of the north’, then the claim that they need to whale becomes suspect.

Over the years the AEWC has constructed multiple strategies that build on their awareness of these potentially hazardous perceptions. They have invited IWC and Greenpeace officials to Barrow during spring whaling so that they have a chance to experience the depth of feeling whaling generates (and both IWC and Greenpeace accepted the cultural importance of whaling for Iñupiat during the 1990s); they have made trips to non-whaling member nations of the IWC so that AEWC Commissioners can talk to them personally about whaling; they make regular interventions in public hearings of all kinds pertaining to Arctic environmental issues; and they are committed to

the kind of science that can both inform their own decisions and be heard at national and international levels.

This brings us to a final, brief, discussion of ‘lay’ and ‘expert’ knowledge and, as we discussed in the Introduction, a consideration of the possibility of not only communicating but collaborating across knowledge boundaries. When the Barrow Whaling Captains began to discuss the possibility of postponing the start of autumn whaling, they called in Craig George, a whale biologist working for the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management. He was not called in because he was the expert, but because he was an expert, as were the whalers; he is recognized as knowledgeable and accessible and they wanted to add his knowledge to their own; it is a process that, with local scientists, often works in reverse as well. The very existence of the Department is a direct outcome of struggles over whose knowledge ‘counts’. When the IWC first claimed that the bowhead were on the verge of extinction, Iñupiat whalers disagreed. The IWC reaction was that Iñupiat knowledge was not ‘scientific’ and therefore could be discounted. The local reaction was to form the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, a collective of whaling communities that encompasses the North Slope and beyond. Through the AEWC, the whaling captains lobbied successfully for the right to have the responsibility of conducting scientifically acceptable whale counts and to do this, they established a local body of scientific researchers whose work would be available for peer group assessment and therefore would be accepted within ‘the scientific community’ but whose work would also grow in conjunction with local interests and would be accessible to them. As Harry Brower, Sr. pointed out in his conversations with Karen Brewster (2004), the history of Iñupiaq/scientist collaborative interactions has roots extending at least back to the establishing of the Naval Arctic Research Lab (NARL) at the height of the Cold War. By the time Bodenhorn was facilitating interchanges between Iñupiaq and Zapotec youth during the first decade of this century, the Department had Iñupiaq as well as non Iñupiaq members and UIC, the village corporation, sponsored an Arctic Research Center (see Bodenhorn 2012).

The extent to which local participants are helping to define research directions is also growing. When a group of National Science Foundation researchers visited Wainwright and Kaktovik to discuss research results and future directions, Wainwright whaling captains had specific suggestions of specific biological research they thought should be conducted in the Wainwright area; what Kaktovik whaling captains wanted was archaeological research done on some whale

bones close to the airport. These bones are ‘old’ – older than the first commercial whaling ventures to take place in the area at the end of the last century. Isaac Akootchook, the senior member of the Kaktovik Whaling Captains Association, was explicit that they wanted any information they could get from archaeologists about the conduct of whaling in the area before Euro-americans showed up. The Wainwright suggestions were primarily about issues the whaling captains themselves were interested in; the Kaktovik suggestion was almost purely political. In my experience on the North Slope, ‘science’ is neither privileged nor rejected as a way of knowing things. It is precisely a particular sort of knowledge about certain kinds of environments and as such, people are curious about ‘it’. Scientists – who are in social relationships – are seen as potential sources of specific sorts of useful information, of valuable support and of irritation, particularly if they are dismissive of Iñupiaq expertise. The divide is in the political definition of authoritative accounts as such, not in the knowledge itself.

## Conclusions

We return now to Douglas and Wildavsky’s exhortation to understand risk in cultural terms. I have suggested that an underlying ideology asserting the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness might generate different perceptions of risk than one enjoining people to maintain proper relations in a social universe.<sup>21</sup> In many ways, the language of rights as it has developed in the United States is one that presumes that if one does not enjoy them, someone (else) must be accountable. And if it is ‘an inalienable right’, it must be possible. As I have discussed elsewhere (Bodenhorn 2000), individual Iñupiat certainly have non-negotiable rights – to shares for instance – but these are explicitly connected to the individual responsibility to contribute to the hunting effort. The discussions we have just been considering also centre on notions of responsibility: what are the consequences of our actions and what should we do if they are negative? It is a very ‘agentive’ position – and one that has served Iñupiat very well indeed in their history of quasi-colonial relations with the world around them. It is perhaps the difference which leads Barrow whaling captains to agree collectively to shorten their whaling period and catch smaller whales in order to ameliorate a risk, whereas the mandate to wear a mask to ameliorate the risk of spreading COVID has created such controversy across the United States.

Within the United States, Iñupiat are clearly operating from a peripheral position – in some ways showing the characteristics proposed by Douglas and Wildavsky (that core groups tend to be present oriented whereas peripheral ones tend to look to the future or to the past) and in other ways departing quite radically from their model. For instance, in a discussion with then NSB Mayor George Ahmaogak in 2000, I asked what issues he felt were most pressing as far as NSB/British Petroleum relations were concerned. His most immediate concern was to begin planning for the time when North Slope oil was no longer viable. BP has derived tremendous profits from North Slope oil fields and he was upset that they seemed ‘just not interested’ in taking part in any such planning.<sup>22</sup> When I brought up this issue for discussion among BP executives in March 2001, one of the responses was, ‘but that isn’t going to happen for twenty-five years!’ The Douglas and Wildavsky suggestion that peripheral positions are likely to be past and/or future oriented whereas core positions opt for as little change as possible is thus not surprising.<sup>23</sup> However, they also suggest that the peripheral position tends to generate ideologies that are sectarian, demanding ritual statements of allegiance and reflected in a language which suggests the current course is one of disaster, often the product of conspiracy of sorts (1982: 173/4). Here it seems to me that the model simply does not play out. In the conversations I have had in Barrow, the tenor more often than not is open, exploratory, pragmatic and agentive. It is the US President who must appear in public flanked by the American flag and end virtually all speeches with the phrase, ‘God bless America’; it is the national political landscape that seems increasingly sectarian in the twenty-first century.

The languages of risk we’ve heard in this chapter are those used by Iñupiat today. They are languages that reflect values felt to be profoundly Iñupiaq and they are languages that express an acute understanding of connections across a number of systems. We can neither understand these languages in terms of a ‘globalization’ model that assumes we belong to the same global village, nor can we adopt a relativist position that assumes a kind of cultural difference that prevents intelligible interaction. Iñupiat live in a world in which oil development, global warming and international regimes of animal protection are factors they must take into consideration on a daily basis. There are nonetheless cultural differences which, as we have just discussed, have implications for the ways in which these factors contribute to the perception of risks and the development of options to deal with them. Those discussions are not easy. As Rachel



Edwardson so eloquently points out in this volume, there continue to be heated arguments about what the ‘real’ risks are and what should be done about them. Ways of talking about the profound importance of sharing which underwrites the whale/human relationship may not be easily grasped by many people who have been brought up in other systems. But the importance of preserving the reproductive capabilities of the bowhead population is as important to Iñupiat as it is to Greenpeace, albeit for different reasons. That many Iñupiat believe in the possibilities of cultural translation is evidenced in their consistent and effective commitment to doing just that. Thus, pace Douglas and Wildavsky, some of the languages we have heard do indeed reflect a peripheral difference, but others assume the possibility of common connection.

What seems to me to be most relevant – whether we are thinking about Iñupiaq strategies, or the process of strategy construction more generally – is that we have not heard a single language of risk, but different languages, revealing incommensurable goods and bads within a single cultural setting. It is not just that different people worry about different things but that the same things may be worried about by the same people for multiple reasons. Difficulties in making decisions, it seems to me, are less often due to a lack of information, than they are because so many orders of values are involved – values that cannot be easily ranked or balanced out.

That these processes must be understood at least in part as a function of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense is probably self-evident. Iñupiat find themselves under increasingly regulatory regimes (to do with the animals they hunt, the ways their children can learn, or the things they can do with the resources at their disposal, for instance) which demand forms to be filled, meetings to be attended and minutes to be filed. In reaction to the IWC challenge in the 1970s, the AEWC continues in 2022 to produce ‘evidence’ of all sorts and has thus itself instituted methods of surveillance that demand careful record keeping on the parts of whaling captains and North Slope Borough scientists alike. But we cannot usefully understand either Iñupiat discussions of the dangers of autumn storms or of messy cellars through the same framework. In a similar way, although we should recognize the frequency and the ease with which ‘science’ can become part of governmentality, we need to be wary of assuming this is in the nature of science itself. It is more important to look explicitly at those contexts where ‘science’ is a marked category as well as others where it is thought of as one of a number of knowledge forms. If Iñupiat can do it, I assume the rest of us can as well.

## Acknowledgements

People on the North Slope have been talking to me about whaling and other things for a very long time and I owe a general debt of gratitude for all the hospitality, opportunities to help and information I have been offered since 1980 when I began working for the Iñupiaq Community of the Arctic Slope. I want to remember with thanks Raymond Neakok, Sr. and Mattie Bodfish, both of whom taught me, with humour and patience, teachings that remain after they themselves passed away. I also want to remember Eben Hobson, another long-time friend and conversation partner, who passed away from COVID in September 2021. And to Marie Neakok, George and Debbie Edwardson and their entire families I thank them for their companionship and lively ideas. For the specific purposes of this chapter, I would like to express special thanks to Maggie Ahmaogak, then Executive Director of the AEWG, for detailed discussions about the workings of the AEWG as well as about decisions local whalers have to make for themselves; Martha Aiken, now deceased, who was head of the Documenting Committee of the Barrow Whaling Women's Association when we did this research and was responsible for general discussions about the social responsibilities of whaling captain couples; Craig George, North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management, who was always ready to talk about harvest data, provided me with raw data and took the time to create the sorts of tabular versions I kept asking for. Arlene Glenn, who was Oral Historian at the Iñupiaq History, Language and Culture Commission at the time, provided me with access to both photographs and Elders' Conference transcribed material; Frances and Emma Mongoyak took the time to help me learn, through the Iñupiaq transcriptions of the Elders' Conference material as well as the English translations. Thanks too to the students who participated in the Research Methods Class I had the good fortune to teach at Ilisagvik College – especially Fannie Akpik, Dorothy Edwardson and Arlene Glenn – whose discussions were always acute, far-reaching, informative and full of laughter. They may have been students but they were already grown-ups and experts in their own right. Maggie Ahmaogak, Craig George and Roger Harritt all read the penultimate draft of the paper from which this chapter then developed, for which I am very grateful.

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## Notes

The ethnography on which this chapter is based was primarily gathered before Barrow's name reverted to Utqiagvik, its original form. In everyday conversations, people use both Barrow and Utqiagvik interchangeably.

1. The research combines archival work at the Iñupiat History, Language and Culture Commission (IHLC), interviews and group discussions with local experts, informal conversations with individuals and participant observation. Fieldwork was conducted during summer visits in 1995, 1996, an extended stay between January and September 1997, and shorter annual follow-up visits between 1998 and 2001. The present chapter relies particularly on the translated transcripts of the 1991 IHLC Elders' Conference held in Barrow (IHLC 1991a, b, c, d). The overall theme of the conference was whaling; the topics under discussion in the men's and women's session placed heavy emphasis on the obligations and responsibilities of crew members in general and of the whaling captain couple in particular. These transcripts were translated by Mabel Hopson and Mabel Paniegeo.
2. See Bodenhorn 1988 on sharing in general; Bodenhorn 1997 on sharing information in particular.
3. This material is taken primarily from the 1991 Elders' Conference held in Barrow, Alaska. Sponsored by the North Slope Borough Iñupiaq History Language and Culture Commission, Elders' Conferences are annual events that provide opportunities for elders from all of the North Slope member villages to participate in several days' intense discussion of specified issues. The women's session took place on 11 July 1991. The session transcript includes comments from (in order of their appearance in the transcript): Rosemary Oviok (Point Hope), Lora Oyagak (Barrow), Berna Brower (Barrow), Mary Lou Leavitt (Barrow), Alice Solomon (Barrow), Terza Hopson (Barrow), Dorcas Tagarook (Wainwright), Jennie Ahkivgak (Barrow), Ida Koonuk (Point Hope), Carol Omnik (Point Hope), Louise Ahkiviana (Barrow), Mary Aveoganna (Barrow), Jana Hacharak (Barrow) and Emma Bodfish (Barrow) presided.
4. The IHLC, as its name implies, is responsible for all manner of cultural and historical documentation, from organizing Elders' Conferences, to collecting genealogies, and publishing land use surveys.
5. In Barrow, Iñupiaq story genres include two general categories: *quliaqtuat* are stories of personal experience whereas *unipkaat* may provide accounts that extend well beyond the narrator's life. Generally translated into English as 'legends', the latter often provide moral, cosmological messages.
6. An ice cellar, built deep into the permafrost that is ubiquitous on the North Slope – for now – is a technology that allows frozen meat storage for up to a year. Because this is where the whale meat will be stored, it is like the whale's home and needs to be made welcoming each year in anticipation of a successful harvest.

7. This reflects sentiments expressed by North Slope residents; when I spent time in Wales, Alaska, the injunction to be generous after a successful harvest was talked about with enthusiasm, but when I mentioned that North Slope elders insisted that their responsibility extended throughout the year, I was met with some bemusement.
8. IHLC 01499tr1. The men's session also took place on 11 July 1991. Those present included, in order of contributing to this session: Ross Ahngasak (Barrow), Kenneth Toovak (Barrow), Noah Phillips (Barrow, Wainwright), Herman Rexford (Kaktovik), Alfred Leavitt (Barrow), Greg Tagarook (Wainwright, Point Hope), Sam Taalak (Nuiqsut, Barrow), Eli Solomon (Barrow), Roxy Oyagak (Barrow), Perry Akootchook (Kaktovik), Arthur Neakok (Point Barrow), Edward Hopson (Barrow), Levi Greist (Kuukpik River, Barrow), Walter Akpik (Atqasuk). Wyborn Nungasak (Barrow) presided; Mabel Panigeo transcribed and translated the tape.
9. This resonates strongly with Ann Fienup-Riordan's (1994) discussion of how important it is for Yup'ik hunters that the passageways between animal and human worlds are kept clear.
10. Maktak is the edible black skin and layer of fat of the bowhead which is highly prized as part of the Iñupiaq diet.
11. That there are also dangers that are perceived to be 'out there' – which also have to be dealt with socially – should not be forgotten. We will turn to these in the next section.
12. Member villages include both North Slope and non-North Slope communities. See AEWG website: <http://www.aewg-alaska.org>.
13. The AEWG attends meetings, for instance, but does not have voting rights. It was largely through AEWG efforts that the International Whaling Commission was convinced to change its stance from backing a total ban on aboriginal whaling to the present, ever-changing, negotiated quota system.
14. Maggie Ahmaogak alludes to this long-standing association: 'the whalers at the time – way back – had meetings of their own trying to decide what kind of policies and rules they had ... the way they would share with the community – the way they were to give to the poor...' (interview, September 1997).
15. To quote Raymond Neakok, Sr (in Bodenhorn 1988, vol.1: 26), 'Those people will determine exactly how we should treat a person that is breaking the structure of society's running ... how you behave – these were the elders, the *umialigiich*' (see also Marie Adams and Raymond Neakok in Bodenhorn 1988, vol.2: 254).
16. Craig George presented his data to the Barrow Whaling Captains' Association at their pre-autumn season meeting. The figures reproduced here are from the memo prepared for them (George 1997).
17. This would solve more than one problem simultaneously. 'I'm tired of getting big whales no one can eat!' one whaling captain said to Craig George.
18. Although the spring hunt continues to hold a central position, autumn whaling has in fact produced more meat than the spring hunt for the past several years. With spring conditions becoming increasingly perilous, this trend has continued through the first decades of the twenty-first century.

19. Statistics and cross tabulations were provided by Craig George, of the NSB Department of Wildlife. For more comprehensive tabular analysis, see Bodenhorn 2000.
20. George examines a number of environmental factors that are taken into consideration by captains since they influence the likelihood of whales being taken (see also George et al. 1998).
21. I am not suggesting that Iñupiat do not engage in languages of rights. They do – vociferously and effectively. I am suggesting this is not the moral cornerstone that it is in the mainstream US.
22. Interview, September 2000. I approached him before accepting an invitation to talk with BP executives in Cambridge concerning ‘ethics and cultural diversity’ early in 2001.
23. Of course, from another angle, the common stereotype of ‘Eskimos’ is that they are present oriented (as I have been told with great certainty by school principals several times over the years) and thus do not adapt easily to ‘Western’ time constraints. In this light, the respective NSB/BP positions ‘ought’ to be reversed.

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