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## “Just One More Time before I Die” : Securing the Relationship between Inuit and Whales in the Arctic Regions

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## **“Just One More Time before I Die”: Securing the Relationship between Inuit and Whales in the Arctic Regions**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Given the climatic and geographic conditions found in the North American Arctic regions, hunting, fishing and gathering of foods provides the basis of food production. For coastal peoples, the sea offers a more plentiful and reliable source of nutritious food than does the inland tundra.

Gathering is a seasonal activity in many Arctic regions that importantly supplements the diet with shellfish, sea urchins, birds' eggs, and berries. Fishing is also seasonal: netting or spearing fish as they descend rivers in the spring and return to lakes in the fall, and some summer and fall net-fishing in the sea or lakes; some winter and spring jigging and spearing fish through holes in the ice also occurs. The fish fauna in the arctic regions is impoverished compared to that found in temperate or Sub-Arctic marine areas, although in some areas of the Arctic there is an abundance of a few important fish species.

For most Inuit, hunting is the most important means of food production. Migratory warm-blooded animals (e.g. whales, geese and seabirds, and caribou) arrive in abundance in the late spring and early summer, and several seal species, walrus and polar bears may be found throughout many areas during all seasons. At these high latitudes therefore, biogeographic factors strongly influence the food choices people make, with a variety of large-bodied and locally-available marine mammals being the preferred food sources [FREEMAN 1984].

Hunting marine mammals—especially larger species such as whales—from small boats or on the sea ice and at the floe edge can be a dangerous activity, involving loss of hunters at

sea or on the sea-ice. Such dangers are somewhat reduced today due to the introduction of modern technology. However, it is important when considering the cultural importance of whaling to remember that these marine-hunting societies elaborated their systems of belief at times when whaling was a far more dangerous activity than is arguably the case today. As a consequence of the risks associated with whaling, many religious and ritual beliefs and ceremonial practices became closely associated with whale hunting. Therefore it is not surprising that among peoples who hunt and consume large whales, the act of whaling itself and celebrating the whale is, in varying degrees, retained as a core feature of these hunting societies' social, symbolic, aesthetic, ceremonial, spiritual, and dietary cultures to this day.

Whaling is an open-water activity, and even though whales may be found throughout the year in some regions of the Arctic, most are hunted from the edge of the land-fast ice in spring or in open water in the summer and fall. Although whales are hunted for only a few months each year, these animals often provide sufficient meat, blubber and mattak (the skin and attached blubber) to be part of the diet throughout the year. Methods of storing whale products include freezing in ice-cellars dug into the permafrost, or in above-ground caches from September through April when average air temperatures remain below freezing. Meat is also dried, and mattak is stored in oil or subject to controlled fermentation. Mattak from the bowhead whale is noteworthy in that it can be stored unfrozen at cool temperatures without deteriorating [FREEMAN et al. 1992: 61].

In this paper, the continuing dependence of contemporary Inuit societies on whales and whaling will be discussed. This longstanding dependence continues for a number of reasons, including the economic and dietary importance of accessing highly preferred, customary, and nutritionally-superior local foods, and the cultural and social importance of hunting, processing, distributing, consuming and celebrating whales. Such activities remain important for maintaining Inuit social relationships and cultural identity, as well as in reinforcing peoples' relatedness to the living world upon which they depend. The means by which this latter relationship continues to be sustained in the face of profound changes in governance, demography, technological transformations, and a variety of other influences of modernization, will also be considered. The entry point for this discussion is the importance placed on sustaining an appropriate human/food-resource relationship in Inuit society.

## 2. SOCIAL BASIS OF FOOD PRODUCTION

The basic unit of food production in most traditional Inuit societies was the household, generally consisting of a married couple and their unmarried children. Seasonal settlements, which in most cases were small in size, consisted of households of related kin, with the eldest active kinsman the "leader" of the settlement group—although in Inuit society, a high degree of individual autonomy is retained by household heads [SPENCER 1959: 151, 153, 161; FREEMAN 1967: 163; DAMAS 1984: 400, 413–404; KEMP 1984: 472]. A larger and more structured form of settlement organization was found in Iñupiat whaling societies of North Alaska where whaling-crew solidarity was an important requirement [SPENCER 1959: 65, 140–144, 332–342; WORL 1980; see STEVENSON 1997 for similar social arrangements in a Canadian Eastern Arctic bowhead whaling community].

Settlements often relocated on a seasonal basis several times each year [SPENCER 1959: 140–141; FREEMAN 1967], with seasonal sites chosen to optimize access to important food resources, for example, proximity to the sea-ice edge (a preferred hunting location) or to animal migration routes. Some locations served as traditional trading sites or for staging large-scale collective hunts, particularly whale drives [MCGHEE 1974; FRIESEN and ARNOLD 1995; LUCIER and VANSTONE 1995].

Within each Inuit household, a gender-based division of labour is found, although domestic circumstances may vary the allocation of tasks. It is usual for men to undertake the hunting and flensing of whales, with women processing some of the meat for immediate consumption and drying some for later consumption. Women are considered critical to the success of the whale hunt in some Inuit societies. For example, among bowhead hunters in North Alaska, women are considered co-captains (or even captains) of the whaling crews—even if not being physically present during the hunt:

*The whaling captain's wife is like a general. Her responsibilities are so great that the captain doesn't go out to seek the whale... the captain's wife... is the main catcher... She "brings in" the whale... she makes it easier for the captain to harvest a whale... and is called a "crew captain"*

[Frank LONG, in JOLLES 1995: 331; see also BODENHORN 1990].

In the Eastern Canadian Arctic, women had to wash carefully to avoid frightening the game, especially after giving birth or during their menses [SALADIN D'ANGLURE 1984: 496]. Women used to sing special whaling songs on the beach during whale hunts, calling the whales and thus making it easier for the hunters to be successful [FREEMAN, James Bay field notes, 1966].

### 3. THE IMPORTANCE OF WHALES AS FOOD

Inuit report a loss of vitality, lack of resistance to illness and a lessened sense of well-being when not eating their customary local foods. For these reasons, local foods are highly preferred, compared to imported foods [e.g., WEIN and FREEMAN 1992, WEIN et al. 1996; KLEIVAN 1996]. The reasons for these food preferences is summarized by a Greenlander in the following words:

*Inuit foods give us health, well-being, and identity. Inuit foods are our way of life. Total health includes spiritual well-being. For us to be fully healthy, we must have our foods, recognizing the benefits they bring... Foreign foods do not bring joy when we share them. They do not tie families and communities together and to one another. Only Inuit food sustains the Inuit way of life.*

[EGEDE 1995].

This is not to say that many Inuit do not enjoy eating a variety of imported or non-local foods, but rather, that the diet is considered markedly incomplete if it does not provide at least periodic access to traditional foods [FREEMAN et al. 1998: 35–39].

High among the preferred traditional food is *mattak* (the skin and blubber of various whale

species). So strong is the desire for mattak that Inuit elders in the Canadian Arctic have, on numerous occasions [e.g., HAY et al. 2000: 56–57] expressed extreme sadness at the thought of not eating bowhead mattak before they die—even though mattak of narwhals and beluga whales remains part of their customary diet today:

*The three men who killed the bowhead [in 1994, did so] because an elderly man who was dying wanted to taste [the food] before he died. The [food] from the whale was shared with the people of that community as well as other communities.* [Sheena MACHMER, in FREEMAN et al. 1998: 33].

*My grandparents and many relatives were gathered and eating mataaq [beluga mattak] when my grandfather sighed and said to himself “just one more time before I die”. I did not understand: then my grandmother turned to him and said “one day we will eat, one day there will be bowhead for us”. I’ve heard many more conversations similar to that one... Many elders have passed on without tasting their beloved mataq [bowhead mattak] one more time.*

[Adina DUFFY, in FREEMAN et al. 1998: 37].

For the Inuit, the food of the animals they eat is an integral part of their identity. “We are what we eat” is a saying heard in many societies worldwide. For the Inuit it is a profound truth:

*Whales are very important to the people who eat whales... once we don’t have the whales’ nutrients in our bodies, it’s like part of our bodies is missing.* [Tina NETSER, in FREEMAN et al. 1998: 39]

*There are not words for the emptiness I would feel if we didn’t have mattak... I could not even imagine such a thing, it is so much a part of me.* [Alaskan elder, in FREEMAN et al. 1998: 38]

#### 4. THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARING

A basic ethic among Inuit—as indeed, among many other hunter-gatherers—is that food and certain other essential materials are to be shared [NUTTALL 1998: 85]. This cultural norm is especially strongly developed in regard to food: to withhold food is considered tantamount to threatening life itself, and so is considered dangerously anti-social behaviour and strongly sanctioned. This ethic of sharing food remains very strong among Inuit today:

*We always share here with our neighbours even if we only have a small amount... [Inuvialuit] all want the bowhead mattak and meat. We share food with those who don’t have it. So the Aklavik people will hunt it for all the Inuvialuit.... we will distribute the meat to any of the communities that want it. We always share our food.*

[Dorothy AREY, in FREEMAN et al. 1992: 61]

Today, Inuit live in increasingly large communities in which many co-residents are not kin. It was kinship and participation in the hunt, which in former times were important in structuring formal sharing arrangements [discussed in detail in BORDENHORN 2000; KISHIGAMI 2000; WENZEL 2000]. Today, as Inuit communities become progressively and significantly

larger than in the historic past, it becomes increasingly difficult to share hunted foods in an effective manner on a community-wide basis. This results in greater importance accorded to hunting whales, for these large-bodied animals allow for the fuller expression of widespread communal sharing of the products of the hunt, as well as a greater degree of community participation when assisting with the landing and processing of carcasses.

## 5. CULTURAL NORMS AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION

Although mattak is among the most highly regarded customary foods, and despite an approximate doubling of the Western Canadian Arctic Inuvialuit population over the past twenty years, the number of beluga whales taken each year in that region has remained almost constant at about 120 [STABLER 2001: 11–12]. This constancy has occurred at a time when the hunting technology has significantly improved and without externally-imposed quotas.

Beluga mattak, meat, and blubber continue to be shared in these Inuit communities and sent as gifts to relatives and friends in neighbouring communities. Importantly, the cultural norms that insure the hunt is sustainable are not currently threatened by the many effects of modernization found in these communities. Local hunting practices remain firmly under community control, based on respect for the hunting culture, the animals, and the environment. Sustainable use of the important customary food resource species is occurring—without the need to change effective use-limiting practices that have persisted for generations [FREESE and EWINS 1998: 51; FREEMAN 2001a: 164–165].

As an example of these persistent practices, one hunting norm holds that female beluga are not to be killed if accompanied by calves or juvenile whales. This norm has been formally introduced into the hunting by-laws of Western Canadian Arctic Inuit communities [BINDER 2001; FJMC 2001]. Thus, for example, when strong winds cause a high degree of turbidity in the shallow inshore waters where hunting occurs, hunts are suspended to avoid accidentally killing a female beluga that may be accompanied by an unseen calf or juvenile whale.

It is evident that any system of external management of this sustainable hunt that might change hunters' strategic hunting decisions could result in potentially negative impacts upon the beluga population—and indeed, upon resource conservation in general (since similar considerations, based on respect, apply to the hunting or fishing for other species). A widespread measure used by state managers for "managing" fisheries is through the imposition of quotas in an effort to insure sustainable hunting. Fortunately this measure has not been applied to beluga whaling in the Western Canadian Arctic [see FREEMAN 2001b for some of the problems introduced by quotas].

Whaling quotas were recently imposed on the Inuit of Arctic Quebec [see KISHIGAMI, this volume; DUBOIS and OLPINSKI 2002]. This regional Inuit population's numbers and hunting capacity have increased in similar fashion to that occurring in the Western Arctic. As with the Western Canadian Arctic situation, the annual beluga take has also remained more or less constant over a twenty years period, averaging about 270 whales per year in this particular case [OLPINSKI 1999].

Externally-imposed hunting quotas on narwhal have recently been removed in the Eastern Canadian Arctic, as well as from beluga hunts in some of the communities in this region. These

measures were taken by the newly-created regional wildlife and fisheries co-management board that is seeking to decentralize regulation of whaling as a means of improving on earlier centralized (state) management approaches that have demonstrated certain inadequacies. One such inadequacy involves the difficulty of obtaining accurate data on the number of whales not recovered after being shot. By devolving responsibility for good hunting practices to the community-based hunters' organization in each of the several communities (as has always been the practice in the Western Canadian Arctic), access to accurate statistics required for conservation purposes will likely be enhanced [e.g. STABLER 2001: 11].

## 6. CONTROLLING ACCESS TO RESOURCES

There is now a growing appreciation in many parts of the world that in addition to centralized or state management systems for regulating resource use, there exist other, local-level, systems which mediate the interactions between local peoples and the food species upon which they depend. These local or indigenous institutions are based upon systems of knowing variously referred to as practical or user knowledge, indigenous knowledge, traditional ecological knowledge [TEK] or *traditional ecological and management systems* [TEKMS] [see e.g., FREEMAN and CARBYN 1988; JOHNSON 1992; INGLIS 1993; NUTTALL 1998: 72–79; JOHANNES et al. 2000]. Thus in northern Canada and Alaska, efforts at more co-operative forms of management (or co-management) are beginning to replace state management systems [HUNTINGTON 1992; NOTZKE 1995; USHER 1995; FREEMAN et al. 1998: 115ff].

Critics of local-level management, who tend to support the imposition of state-level management, cite various well-known historical incidents of resource over-exploitation. However, the examples cited are often cases that characterize frontier development, colonial economies, and other examples of laissez-faire industrial (or state) capitalism, situations in which pre-existing indigenous property rights are dismantled, ignored or are not enforceable [BERKES 1996: 94–95]. Such situations include, for example, European colonists or mercantile interests encountering and subsequently decimating northern stocks of Steller's sea cow and Greenland right whales in the 16th and 17th centuries, and industrial whaling in the Arctic and other parts of the world in the 19th and first-half of the 20th centuries.

However, it would be incorrect to conclude that subsistence or pre-modern marine resource users were always prudent in the use of resources [e.g. MCGOODWIN 1990: 49–64]. Nevertheless, despite examples of resource over-use, there is also a considerable body of evidence which suggests that in many settled human societies, resource users' relationships with the local resources are effectively mediated by social institutions that adequately regulate human use of the resource [e.g. RUDDLE and JOHANNES 1985; NRC 1986; MCCAY and ACHESON 1987; BERKES et al. 1989; FEENY et al. 1990; OSTROM 1990; FREEMAN et al. 1988, 1991; BROMLEY 1992].

State management policies affecting resource use cannot be understood without reference to existing systems of property rights or tenure, which in turn reflect the fundamental political arrangements found in societies in which these systems occur [USHER 1984: 389]. The notion that an item becomes a commodity or property only after it has been subjected to human labour is common in Western thinking. Thus, by extension, wild nature—not yet subject to human labour—is not property, nor does it have an actual commodity value until appropriated in some

way. This conclusion provides the implicit justification for state managers to appropriate resources into "management" regimes.

In contrast to this Euro-American need to conceptually transform wild species into commodities or property, indigenous resource users in North America hold quite different conceptions of nature. Indeed, the fundamental Euro-American distinction between people and resources (or between humankind and nature) is either lacking altogether, or is far less pronounced in indigenous world views than occurs in Western metropolitan society:

*This is the way I think. A person is born with animals. He has to eat animals. That is why the animals and a person are just like one.*

[Peter OKPIK, in BRODY 1976: 203].

Thus, in Inuit society what remains important is to maintain the relationship that secures the oneness between human and non-human persons [FIENUP-RIORDAN 1990: 48; WENZEL 1991: 60–61]. In indigenous traditions, people living in socially- and territorially-defined groups enjoyed the rights and ability to access and dispose of living resources in their territories according to socially-sanctioned norms. The local food species were considered communal resources, with access, benefits, and responsibilities shared among a community of users. Access was limited only if such limitation was considered necessary to maintain social harmony and the all-important human/non-human relationship.

Thus a number of social institutions and cultural norms have consequently been adopted over time in order to insure the sustainability of the human/resource relationship and thereby control socially-disruptive over-use of resources. One important question asked today is whether these adaptive institutions that appeared to function well in the past remain effective for insuring sustainable resource use in the face of changing economic, technological, demographic and administrative circumstances that are occurring [e.g., SEJERSEN 2001]. This question will be addressed below.

## 7. INDIGENOUS ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE USE PRACTICES

Included among Inuit institutional arrangements that support sustainable resource use practices is a prescriptive system of ethics governing attitudes and behaviour toward living resources. Individually such normative practices may not constitute an effective "management system", but together they appear to exert an effective influence on what can be considered a rational system of resource use.

One such ethical norm is that the taking of food animals is only carried out in response to the need for food. In the absence of need, no hunting should occur:

*It was Inuit law not to abuse or play with animals, and even today I'm afraid to break these laws. I've taught my children and grandchildren not to abuse them either. Also we are taught not to wound an animal if we aren't going to eat it.*

[Matilda SULURAYOK and John KAUNAK, in McDONALD et al. 1997: 6].



Of course, 'need' is not only current or immediate need: at certain seasons it may be necessary to gather and store supplies for predictable scarcity that will invariably occur later in the year. Hunters are also aware of the needs of others who also require traditional foods:

*... why did I become a whaling captain? Because of the opportunity to feed the community... the whale basically is a community whale... you have the honour of feeding your community... it's not that we go whaling for individual gain; it is for community gain.*

[Don LONG, in FREEMAN et al. 1998: 32].

A second ethical norm is that waste of food should be avoided; this encourages widespread sharing as has been noted earlier. Northern ethnographies are full of references to the emphasis attached to generosity and insuring that others have access to available food at all times; this importance is still very evident among Inuit today:

*When a hunter kills a whale, the meat is never wasted. Everyone gets a piece of the whale for the family. God put them there for a reason, and the people use it wisely... if the people do have too much, they give the leftovers to the people who need it.*

[Eastern Canadian Arctic junior high school student, in FREEMAN et al. 1998: 39].

A third ethical norm is to limit the physical disturbance of the animal population when taking from it, which can be expressed as always being mindful of the consequences of the act of taking:

*Anyone who has observed a whale hunt will have seen how little disturbance is caused by the take of a large whale, or a number of small whales. Although the actual school of whales is momentarily disturbed, nevertheless they come back again, day after day, year after year.*

[Ingmar EGEDE, in FREEMAN et al. 1998: 13].

A fourth prevailing belief is that success in the hunt will result because the hunter (and often others in the hunter's family or community) shows respect toward animals [FIENUP-RIORDAN 1990: 172, 184–187; McDONALD et al. 1997: 6; BODENHORN 2000: 30, 33–34]. Respect includes not abusing an animal and reducing to a minimum the suffering an animal may experience [to "kill it gently", SALADIN D'ANGLURE 1984: 496]. Skilled hunters know the importance of reducing animals' suffering and how to hunt in this manner:

*There was no fear in trying to kill a great whale... My father... knew the right place to stick in the spear. He would paddle beside the whale, carefully looking at her body. There is a place below the spine where you can see a movement... that's where the kidney is, and that's the only place where it is safe to... spear. This was done carefully and quietly, and you may be surprised to know that the whale did not even know that she was being killed. There was no fight. She kept swimming on. We would follow her... until she died.*

[Jim KILABUK, in FREEMAN et al. 1998: 77–78]

## 8. THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPECT AND RECIPROCITY

In effect, these various ethical precepts concerning animals and nature can be captured by the notion *respect*.

*The word respect is key to understanding wildlife and environment. If there is no respect then environmental problems arise... respect toward nature is needed in order to have food and a good living.*

[Lucassie ARRAGUTAINAQ, in McDONALD et al. 1997: 5]

Respect is considered basic to maintaining a healthy relationship between human and non-human beings with whom the environment is shared. In earlier times this relationship was described as being religious or magico-religious [SPECK 1935]. However, it has been noted that when writing about contemporary Inupiat whaling, many scholars tend to simply emphasize the subsistence importance of whales, without drawing attention to their importance "*as an element of a deeply embedded and valued socioreligious identity...*" [JOLLES 1995: 334]. Despite this observation, there is evidence that northern hunters and students of the hunt today believe the relationship is sacred [TANNER 1979; BRIGHTMAN 1993; LOWENSTEIN 1994; FREEMAN et al. 1998: 53–58; HESS 1999; PELLY 2001].

The generalized reciprocity that insures that members of society will always receive food when in need extends to non-human beings as well. Thus hunters and their families have an obligation to show respect to those non-human beings that supply their food and other necessities, and in turn, the non-human beings reciprocate by being willing to be taken by worthy human persons. The many ways of demonstrating this worthiness include following the ethical norms referred to earlier, e.g., by limiting the take to that required to satisfy legitimate food and social needs, and reducing wasteful practices in other ways. Wasteful practices can be further reduced by developing skill as a hunter, thus reducing the numbers of animals wounded but lost through escape. Clearly then, the benefits to the human community of having hunters with highly developed skill levels also contributes to the conservation of food resources and hence both directly and indirectly to food security.

Apart from the respect that must be shown toward whales during the hunt, celebrating the gift of life-sustaining food the whale has given to the community requires appropriate expression outside of the actual hunt. This is most elaborated in several of the Inupiat communities in North Alaska where such ceremonies as *apugauti* (beaching the successful hunters whaling boat at the end of the spring hunting season), *anirug* and *qinu* (the Whale Tail festivals held in spring and fall respectively) are celebrated. The main community feasts, *qagruq* and *nalukataq*, are held at the end of the whaling season and involve the blanket-toss (using the walrus-hide or bearded seal skin-covering of the whaling boat) and drum dancing [FREEMAN et al. 1998: 73, 79–80; see also, BODENHORN 2000: 36–38]. These occasions also involve feasting on special whale dishes, including *mikigak* (fermented maktak) and the heart and other parts of the whale [Maggie AHMAOGAK, in JOLLES 1995: 327–328].

However, this need for respect requires not just appropriate action, but also appropriate thought. So it is considered inappropriate, when setting out on a hunt, for the hunter to believe that he is going to be successful, or that the taking of the animal will be easy or fast, or that a

particular number of animals will be taken. Such thoughts imply that animals lack an ability to decide for themselves whether or not to present themselves to the hunter [FIENUP-RIORDAN 1990: 169, 172–3; TURNER 1991; BODENHORN 2000: 33–34]. Thus, in accounting for an unexpected absence of bowhead whales in the vicinity of an Inuvialuit whaling camp in 1991, a whaler's wife explained:

*You must not speak of getting an animal on a particular occasion—if you want it, or say you will get it, you won't have any success... If they want to give themselves they will, if they don't you won't have any success.*  
[Dorothy AREY, in FREEMAN et al. 1992: 57].

An Alaskan whaler observed that

*The animals of the land and sea have spirits, and it is firmly believed that the whale offers itself to the hunter. No hunter can be expected to be successful without following that belief.*  
[ANUGAZUK 1995: 340].

Therefore, issuing permits to hunters to allow them to hunt on a particular occasion can be seen to be a morally-troubling event to those who continue to believe strongly in traditional Inuit precepts and beliefs.

Utilizing the food from the hunt in an appropriate manner is considered pleasing to the animal that has offered itself for that purpose [WENZEL 1991: 139]. This understanding results in the prevailing belief among hunters that food animals must continue to be hunted to remain healthy and abundant, for only by hunting can the hunter demonstrate respect through the exercise of appropriate hunting rituals and food-sharing practices.

Another reason why some hunters do not believe that reducing their hunting will be effective in assisting recovery of a depleted animal population is because of their belief that animals possess a spirit (*inua*), that has to be released after death before another animal can become a vital being. It therefore makes no sense, when animals become scarce, to stop hunting them and thereby not release their spirits [FIENUP-RIORDAN 1990: 72–74, 171].

## 9. THE BASIS OF SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE USE IN THE ARCTIC REGIONS

Sustainable use of biological resources has a long history in the Arctic and is grounded in community-based indigenous systems of tenure. However, because all Arctic regions have in recent times come under Western science-based state management systems, the story that is more often heard concerns resource shortage, over-exploitation and the danger of species extinction [e.g., MACPHERSON 1991; THEBERGE 1981; FIENUP-RIORDAN 1999; SEJERSEN 2001: 433].

In some cases, talk of resource over-use is puzzling to the actual users who—being close to the resources and in communication with other resource users—do not interpret these northern realities in the same way:

*As Inuit, we have knowledge about animals vanishing for periods of time. From the Elders, we know...*

*all the [marine] mammals, including beluga whales are like that. One day there are many of them—so they vanish for a period of time and come back later.*

[Simeone AKPIK, in McDONALD et al. 1997: 6].

*Elders say that any kind of animal moves away for a while but, according to the government, animals are in decline. To the Inuit, they have moved, but not declined... From what I have heard, there used to be lots of walrus here. Now there isn't, but they're not gone. They have just moved... in our community there is a place called Ullikuluk where there hardly used to be any walrus. Now, there are many. The government says they became extinct when really they have just moved.*

[Peter ALOGUT, in McDONALD et al. 1997: 46]

According to a team of social scientists studying the sustainable use of marine mammals, there are five important criteria that need to be met for resource use to be sustainable over time [YOUNG et al. 1994]. These five conditions are:

- (1) The user group must share common social and cultural bonds that satisfy a variety of non-material aspects of everyday life.
- (2) The user group should operate within a reasonable distance of its residential community and within an identifiable territory.
- (3) Hunting practices must be socially reproducible over time, meaning that local knowledge (including rules and beliefs) is ordinarily passed inter-generationally within the community.
- (4) The hunting practices must be valued by community members multi-dimensionally, meaning that such practices should have, for example, historical, social, economic, nutritional, symbolic, aesthetic, ceremonial, and spiritual significance.
- (5) Recognizing that changes to the resource species and the total environment may occur irrespective of human-derived offtake, monitoring of the human/resource complex should take place so that socially equitable adaptive changes to on-going practices can be effected.

These characteristics are found in indigenous knowledge-based systems of resource stewardship common among Inuit in the past and today. It is these stewardship systems which Inuit continue to protect and practice at this time.

## 10. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Inuit whaling societies, numbering about one hundred in North America today, are undergoing significant and ongoing change. It is reasonable to ask whether extant cultural ties to whaling that have ancient roots will continue to persist. Despite the evident uncertainties associated with attempts to forecast future events, a historical perspective allows a guardedly positive answer to be given to this question. Specifically, in reviewing other threatening past events which have impacted Inuit whaling societies, whatever cultural change that has occurred appears not to have caused loss of adaptability, which in turn has allowed successive Inuit cultures to survive massive climatic (and more recently, anthropogenic) alterations affecting their world for more than two thousand years. Not every element of a peoples' current cultural inventory needs to survive for them to continue functioning as a self-determining people.

Cultures are dynamic, adaptive and resilient, and those elements that may become diminished, or may appear to disappear for a time, may subsequently be revived or re-invented. Core elements of a culture—those elements that are critical to a peoples' distinctive identity—are perhaps impossible to displace through external means. Hunting and sharing is at the core of Inuit culture, for it remains basic to indigenous peoples' cultural survival and health in the Arctic regions which remain their cherished homeland.

The essential Inuit cultural core is arguably most secure with respect to their whaling culture. This is so because of the large measure of food security and well-being these animals provide, the high degree of sharing and social solidarity the acts of hunting, processing, distributing and celebrating whales engenders, and because of the enrichment of the human spirit that follows from consuming and contemplating whales. It is for these reasons that those societies where whales are valued multi-dimensionally cannot even consider giving up whaling, for to do so is to surrender their identity, devalue their history and culture, and denigrate their forebears.

*The whale is the centre of our life and culture. We are the People of the Whale. The taking and sharing of the whale is our Eucharist and Passover. The whaling festival is our Easter and Christmas, the Arctic celebration of the mysteries of life.* [HOPSON 1979; see also, HESS 1999].

*Beluga is very important for all of us, because of our culture, how it was used by our grandparents and parents... for food, culture, lifestyle—it is very important to us! ... conservation and protection of beluga is important for our life, as food, and for the continuation of our culture.*

[David AGLUKARK, in FREEMAN et al. 1998: 59].

The Inuit Circumpolar Conference [ICC]—an organization representing the Inuit of Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Russia—commissioned an international study of whaling, whose findings help inform this article. At the end of the ICC report, the authors state that

*... to Inuit, as to people elsewhere, whales are special. Inuit, through their involvement in international efforts to safeguard the arctic environment and to engage in whale research, monitoring and management, have indicated that arctic whales are their responsibility, and that they will continue to exercise stewardship in regard to these magnificent creatures. This stewardship manifests itself through working with researchers, and government agencies... as well as through spiritual safeguards effected by prayer and traditional rituals.*

*For such determined conservation measures to continue, the culture and personal commitment of Inuit whale guardians must remain strong. For non-Inuit, the need to understand how their own actions help, or hinder, this front-line conservation effort must be seriously considered.*

[FREEMAN et al. 1998: 192].

A study of Inuit consumptive use and conservation of wild species, including whales, in the Canadian Arctic concluded that hunting is a major factor that forged the close relationship between Inuit and their natural environment. The study concluded that conservation of Arctic wild species and their ecosystems will in large part depend on maintaining the strength of this relationship [FRESE et al. n.d.: 23]. Thus the best interest of the whales and the best interest of

the Inuit whale guardians are inextricably bound together. Equitable and effective resource management and resource users' food security cannot be separated.

## NOTES

- 1) The term "waste" means different things in different cultures. A non-indigenous person is likely to see a partially-flensed whale on the beach as being a "waste" of food and therefore morally bad. However, Inuit would consider this same happening as morally bad only if none of the carcass were used for food. Meat and other edible tissues left on the carcass are not being "wasted", as other non-human beings (e.g., gulls, foxes, crustacea—and through the recycling of all organic matter, eventually seals and whales) obtain food from the carcass [see also FIENUP-RIORDAN 1990: 174–175; FREEMAN et al. 1992: 67].

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