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Iñupiat of the Sii: Historical Ethnography and Arctic Challenges. By Wanni W. Anderson and Douglas D. Anderson. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2024. 150 pages. \$87.00 hardcover; \$22.95 paper; \$19.95 e-book.

Iñupiat of the Sii provides a detailed historical record of Selawik, an Iñupiaq community on the Selawik River in northwest Alaska, from the perspective of Wanni W. Anderson and Douglas D. Anderson. The authors reflect on archaeological and ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 1968 and 1994, as well as historical accounts from local elders and early Euro-American explorers, missionaries, and government officials. Moving chronologically, the narrative transitions from previllage seasonal settlements in the Selawik River drainage to the emergence of Selawik as a centralized village around the school and church. It then follows the introduction and sociocultural impacts of the fur trade, reindeer herding, federal programs, housing projects, and Indigenous political institutions through the twentieth century. Amid these changes, the Selawik River remains central to the book by connecting subsistence and travel to kinship, social memory, and a sense of place.

The Andersons are clear that they write from their own relationships with Selawik and its residents, an experiential frame that is both the book's strength and source of friction. Descriptions of village life are immersive because they draw from long-standing relationships with Siilaviñmiut. However, Siilaviñmiut history is often presented as a support for archaeological or archival interpretations rather than as the foundation for understanding the community on its own terms. The prologue highlights this problem when the authors write that their archaeological field school served to "acquaint students with their own Native heritage" (xv), and later that another project taught students that history existed "in their own backyard" (xvi). Without a fuller discussion of local memory and heritage practices, history becomes visible primarily through formal research, even as the prologue also shows how integral Siilaviñmiut teachings were to the authors' safety.

Chapter one's strongest material comes from elders' accounts of seasonal settlement and resource practices, which explain why camps were placed near particular waterways and how those places were used throughout the year. The absence of a reference map makes the discussion harder to follow. However, the greater issue is the authors' use of "proto-history" to reference the period before European contact and Western material culture (6), positioning European presence as the threshold through which the Iñupiat past becomes recognizable as history. Read with chapter two's reconstruction of "history before the village years" mainly through early colonial accounts, the term makes a broader statement about intellectual authority. Early colonial records describe Siilaviñmiut poverty, morality, and the state-mission project to "civiliz[e] the Native" (11–18), while local oral histories that contrast these perspectives are often

paired with uncertainty through phrases such as “circumstantial evidence” (6) and “unconfirmed accounts” (33). The authors do not endorse the derogatory claims of early observers such as Simpson or Stoney, but the space given to verbatim colonial accounts and the indirect treatment of local knowledge positions written archives as gatekeepers to the past. This is not sufficiently confronted in later chapters and reproduces disciplinary histories that Indigenous scholars have long worked to dismantle (see Paulette Steeves’ *The Indigenous Paleolithic of the Western Hemisphere*, 2021).

Chapters three and four are more attentive to historical and ongoing tensions within colonial institutions. Chapter three characterizes the Selawik school as both an instrument of resettlement policy and a project shaped by local families, who advised its placement near fish-netting sites and built it based on plans for a traditional *kargi* house (20–21). The 1981 field school is one of the better examples of archaeology as an educational tool, where students helped locate the 1908 village site and an elder corroborated the findings (21–22). The same chapter records the institutional coercion of schooling: children were punished for speaking Iñupiaq and families had to restructure seasonal harvesting practices around the school calendar (23–24). Chapter four places missionary records beside Siilaviñmiut concerns. Its account of the 1912 trade fair shows how Christian regulations prohibited traditional dances and changed the social terms of exchange between Indigenous Alaskan communities.

The book’s sustained effort to present Selawik as a lived place raises similar tensions to its conceptualization of history. While Selawik comes alive through field reflections and local accounts, the authors’ interpretive frame emphasizes anthropological place theory rather than Iñupiat or Inuit scholarship. Feld and Basso’s *Senses of Place* (1996) supports the Andersons’ account of land-based practices and identity, but works such as Paul C. Ongtooguk and Claudia S. Dybdahl’s *Native Perspectives on Alaska’s History* (2010) and Rachel A. Qitsualik’s *Nalunaktuq: The Arctic as Force, Instead of Resource* (2006) are perhaps better positioned to approach these topics from Iñupiat and broader Inuit perspectives. The absence of Indigenous scholarship is also clear in discussions of market economies introduced through colonial contact. Chapter five shows how the fur credit system made families dependent on the market, but calling white traders “cultural agents” and “conduits of the cash economy” downplays the power they held over families through credit (38). Chapter six gives a stronger account of federal paternalism through government-initiated reindeer herding programs that placed teachers and missionaries in supervisory roles, but says less about what the herd’s eventual collapse meant for food security and trade from a Siilaviñmiut perspective.

Chapters seven, eight, and nine best fulfill the book’s interest in Selawik as a lived place. The Selawik River remains central as a fishing ground and winter travel route, with summer fishing supporting winter food security and muskrat harvesting linking subsistence to clothing production and trade. The authors effectively describe how Selawikers incorporate communal feasting and games into Euro-American holidays and maintain a rich tradition of art, storytelling, and humor. These chapters better present Siilaviñmiut lifeways as historically contingent but vibrant practices and hold some of the book’s most illustrative accounts of daily life.

The final chapter centers on modernization and self-determination, returning first to federal schooling and Christian missionization as colonial projects of control that punished Inupiaq speech, dance, and trade. They then describe efforts by these same institutions to build educational capacity by employing Siilavimmiut to teach local history and language revitalization courses. The chapter treats Inupiat Ilitqusait, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and the Red Dog Mine agreement as necessary steps toward self-determination, but gives limited attention to conflict within those initiatives. Closer analysis of the uneven effects of mining and wage labor in Selawik, for instance, would strengthen the chapter's argument. Overall, this chapter improves on earlier ones by exploring areas of productive conflict between Inupiat ways of knowing and Western-led social programs and research. Ultimately, *Inupiat of the Sii* offers a valuable documentary account of Selawik, but falls short of the book's stated objective to portray the village as a lived place centered on Inupiaq experiences.

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