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**Author**

Chiste, Katherine Beaty

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**Northern Athabascan Survival: Women, Community, and the Future.**

By Phyllis Ann Fast. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. 304 pages. \$55 cloth.

*Northern Athabascan Survival* invites—in fact, requires—interaction between reader and text. In her description and analysis of Northern Athabascan villages in Alaska and the Canadian North, Fast identifies three main issues: the communities' collective efforts to enact Athabascan values by expelling unwanted outsiders; the role of women in community sobriety and child-rearing efforts; and the broader economy in which these villages find themselves situated, described by Fast as an addictive economy created and bolstered by mainstream political domination of the Athabascan peoples. Fast calls these three issues "intertwining influences" (p. 15), and although she devotes a major chapter to each one, her discussion throughout is itself intertwining, laced with references to points raised earlier and points yet to come in the text. Fast also weaves together personal observations from her 1993 to 1995 fieldwork—including precise details of villager body language and speech—along with linguistic analysis, North American political history, indigenous scholarship, and the voices of Athabascan villagers themselves. The book is complex.

I found the political discussion on leadership in the villages and Northern Athabascan notions of strength and power (chapter four) to be the weakest of the three. Fast makes the point, of course, that most power over these villages (which ranged in population from 42 to 729 at the time of her study) rests "in the hands of mainstream U.S. or Canadian authorities" (p. 135), and discussing the power semiotics of the powerless is a problematic exercise. The author talks about traditional Northern Athabascan life and the strength which that life demanded: physical and spiritual, vested not just in the individual, but also in the collective. She finds a contemporary manifestation of that collective strength in a series of evictions of outside individuals and families from the villages: "Through this mechanism of efficiently and socially expressing effective antipathy toward specific behaviors and specific individuals, Northern Athabascans demonstrate that they are effective and efficient in acting out social solidarity" (p. 269). Fast seems to try to interpret the eviction stories as social positives despite the violence she describes. I'm not sure that I was convinced, and I wish I had a better sense of what has been going on in these villages in the years since 1995; the lack of a more current picture is frustrating.

Chapter five portrays Athabascan women in their roles as family members, as activists, and especially as agents of social control in their communities, women who are "actively struggling to find new models of behavior to counteract the ravages of alcoholism and other addictions" (p. 183). The chapter is framed by, or interwoven with, the scholarship of mainstream feminism, the autobiographical work of Native American women, the personal accounts of Northern Athabascan mothers and daughters, and Fast's own experiences in the villages. The imagery of weaving kept coming to my mind as I read this chapter, since I found no particular (or at least no mainstream) organizational pattern to it. Yet I ended up with a clear picture of Athabascan women as survivors, "strong, intelligent, socially independent, and willing to share this mental base with oth-

ers" (p. 221), who find their strength from a variety of sources, including the sharing networks of the villages, indigenous religious traditions, and both Alaska's statewide sobriety movement and local institutions of Christianity.

I was most struck by Fast's analysis of the "addictive economy" (chapter three and elsewhere) and her exploration of addiction not as a social pathology residing in the individual, but rather as a collective, cultural "depression" afflicting Northern Athabascans as well as other Native Americans (p. 257). As Fast points out, many economic stakeholders near and distant benefit from the drug, alcohol, and gambling addictions which oppress the villages: suppliers, transporters, traders, and the many employees of the "helping professions" who manage the human beings thus trapped. Fast observes, "the addictive system is far more lucrative than it is destructive for those who provide both addictive products and addictive healing mechanisms" (p. 27). She describes the villages as participants in an "extractive" economy, the agents of which harvest, as I understand her metaphor, the souls of the villagers, rather than the resources of the land for outside financial gain.

Because Fast's book is both interdisciplinary in nature and complex in perspective, it's difficult to situate in a single scholarly genre. I made mental comparisons to Bruce Miller's work on Native American women in tribal politics and administration; to Joan Ryan's study of Dene communities and healing; and to Rupert Ross's two books on Canadian aboriginal communities and the justice system. None of these sources is mentioned by Fast, and I expect that other readers will interact with the text in different ways. Temporally, her work can be located more precisely: she's writing about a decade before two events or series of events began to unfold in the north which seem likely to have a further impact on Northern Athabascans. First, there's some indication that the porcupine caribou herd (discussed by Fast on pp. 79–80) might in fact be recovering. Second, oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and pipelines to transport oil south either through Canada or Alaska, is back on the table again. Fast believes the natural resource exploitation which began in the 1960s to be the "fundamental source of turmoil" (p. 253) in the lives of Northern Athabascans, and I'm not sure if the prospects for a new round of resource extraction are any more optimistic.

Among many things I liked about this book is the author's extensive inclusion of Native American scholars, identified by their tribal affiliations, whose work is either unpublished or somewhat inaccessible and whose insights I would have missed otherwise. I also liked the many individual Northern Athabaskan stories she tells and her own reflections on her experiences in the villages. I wish Fast's data were more recent, I find her use of the term *colonialism* imprecise, and I think her editors could have productively excised the numerous "signposts" (to chapters up ahead and chapters already passed) which are scattered throughout the text sometimes three or four to a page. But these are relative quibbles. The *sui generis* narratives in *Northern Athabaskan Survival*, and its author's varied and thoughtful discussions, make the work of great value.