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## Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination

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the author similarly wants to see agents with more complicated motivation sets than currently have been modeled. However, the current Agent-Based Modeling approach does already provide the potential for clear examination of when individual agents, in concert or in parallel, can produce fundamental change in social systems. In other words, tipping points, oscillations, punctuated equilibrium, lock-ins/run-aways, and persistent cohesion all can be studied via the probabilistic behaviors of individuals over time. What is lacking, then, is validation, or being able to detail the story of exactly how those specific people participated in that specific social change, given just a few simple maxims of human behavior. And that, of course, will have to wait until social scientists regularly team up with ethnographers, historians and mathematical modelers.

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## **Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination**

JULIE CRUIKSHANK

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA PRESS,  
VANCOUVER, BC, 2005  
328 PP. \$32.95 PAPERBACK

REVIEWED BY REBECCA K. ZARGER

This fascinating book weaves together a study of memory, oral history and transformations through a series of encounters between people and glaciers in the region where the Saint Elias Mountains and the Alsek River converge in the southwest Yukon Territory and Alaska. I recently selected Cruikshank's award winning book (winner of the 2006 Julian Steward Award, given by the American

Anthropological Association's Anthropology and Environment section, a 2007 Clio Award from the Canadian Historical Association and the 2006 Victor Turner Prize in Ethnographic Writing, awarded by the Society for Humanistic Anthropology) for required reading in a graduate seminar in environmental anthropology. This review is framed within the discussion and critique that emerged from the seminar, with the aim of providing not just a synopsis of the intellectual and practical contributions of the book, but its pedagogical value as well.

One compelling illustration of the impact of this book is the attention that has been paid to it across a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, history, and science and area studies. Clearly Cruikshank is speaking across chasms of inquiry as she writes about stories of glaciers' connections to human communities and oral traditions as local people, explorers and scientists negotiate meanings in a particular, out-of-the way cultural landscape. Another reason this book was chosen for the graduate seminar was the way the author engages with the topics of local (or traditional) environmental knowledge, environmental change, and social memory. Historical documents, carefully presented Tlingit and Athapaskan oral histories, 19<sup>th</sup> century explorer's accounts, and the current politics of conservation, identities and territories are analyzed with equal intensity. As the author links these lines of evidence together (in some chapters more seamlessly than others), bridges are created between types of inquiry, voices of local elders, the human-nature divide, and local and global histories.

*Do Glaciers Listen?* is divided into three sections. Part one, "Matters of Locality" situates the reader in time and space (during the Little Ice Age) as well as within current theories of the nature of knowledge and its representations. The three chapters in the first section convey, through tales of the actions of both glaciers and humans in response to one another, the distinctions between narratives of Athapaskan/Tlingit elders and geophysical scientists. Extensive passages from "glacier stories" of three women, including excerpts from thirteen different stories shared by Kitty Smith, Annie Ned and Angela Sidney, tell us of the dangers of falling through glaciers, traveling under

glacier bridges, and the imaginative power of glaciers. The second section of the book is devoted to "Practices of Exploration," where the author considers the ways scientific and territorial exploration shaped alternative narratives of the Saint Elias glaciers—stories that were told around the globe in addition to local communities. The diaries and journal accounts of La Pérouse, Muir, and Glave, contextualized with local oral histories of the same events, provide the opportunity to examine what the author terms the "epistemological consequences of such encounters." For example, Muir is viewed as a protector of pristine lands through his conservation activities, resulting in protected areas like Glacier Bay National Park. But Muir also, simultaneously, through his writings in popular magazines, claimed to make discoveries of untouched wilderness after Tlingit lead him there, thereby contributing to the invisibility of local people in what was actually a human-modified cultural landscape. The third section of the book, "Scientific Research in Sentient Places," explores the theme of new boundaries that were created in the landscape through mapping, nationhood and displacement. The section concludes with a discussion of current debates over access to resources, land tenure claims, indigenous rights, and translating local environmental knowledge for scientific audiences. A significant strength of the book is the generous attention paid to maps, sketches, lithographs, and other images from different time periods and sources throughout the book. These give the reader a sense of the ways images and stories fit together to create differing narratives of the same place.

One question that was raised during graduate seminar discussions about the book was, what is the answer to the question posed in its title? The author clearly demonstrates in rich accessible prose the particular ways that the answer depends not only on who is asking the question, but also on who responds with their narratives (scientific, local, and hybrids

of both). As Cruikshank explains, local people "use glacier stories to comment on broad human issues and the process of history-making...to narrate complexities in local economic and social life." (p. 75) In contrast, accounts of visitors during the eighteenth century to the present drew on the physical presence of the glaciers and mountains "in the name of other social forms—imperial expansion, science, religion and nationhood." (p. 75)

Students were engaged with the authors' presentation of local oral histories and the ways these were interwoven with explorers' and scientists' accounts. However, they expressed a desire for the incorporation of a more detailed discussion of the current politics of global warming, glacier melt, protected areas and parks, and displacement of indigenous communities, in the last chapter of book. What are alternative fora for the representation and re-telling of local environmental knowledge, in addition to seemingly ineffective efforts of the past? How does discourse, through oral histories, allow spaces for confrontations between ways of interacting with particular local landscapes?

This elegantly conceptualized ethnography provided the seminar with the stimulus for a lively discussion as we considered its contributions to historical ecology, environmental history, and environmental anthropology. The book is well-suited for an upper-division undergraduate course or graduate seminar in any of these fields of study, as well as an excellent example of the insights that can be gained from carrying out long-term ethnographic field research in a particular locality and considering how human and "nature" relationships are constructed from multiple perspectives.

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