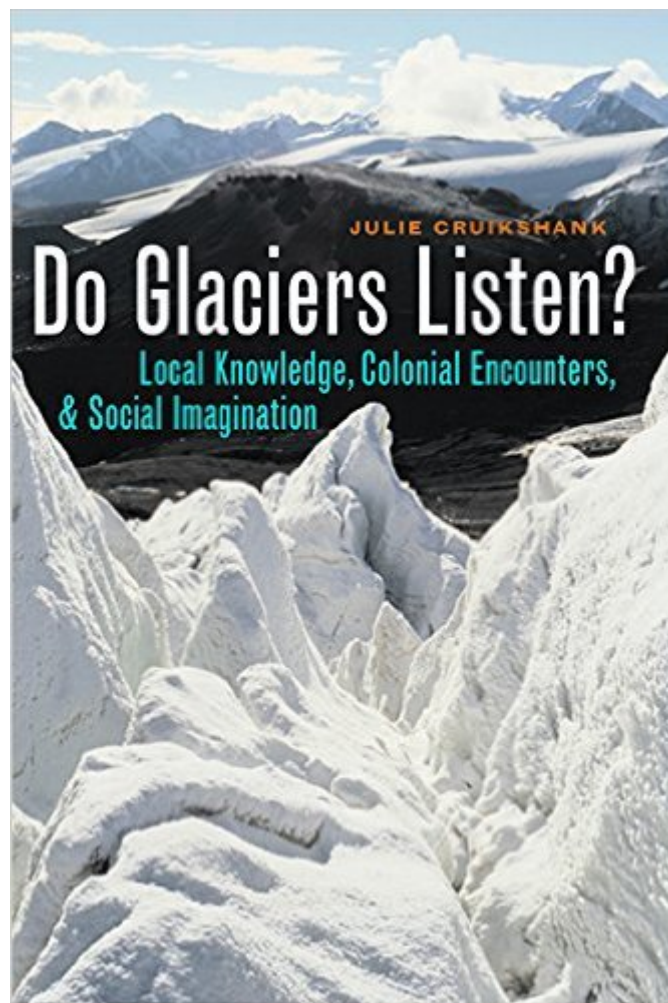


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# Do Glaciers Listen?: Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, And Social Imagination (Canadian Studies Series)



## Synopsis

The glaciers creep like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains, slow rolling on. "Percy Shelley, "Mont Blanc," 1816

Glaciers in America's far northwest figure prominently in indigenous oral traditions, early travelers' journals, and the work of geophysical scientists. By following such stories across three centuries, this book explores local knowledge, colonial encounters, and environmental change. *Do Glaciers Listen?* examines conflicting depictions of glaciers to show how natural and social histories are entangled. During late stages of the Little Ice Age, significant geophysical changes coincided with dramatic social upheaval in the Saint Elias Mountains. European visitors brought conceptions of Nature as sublime, as spiritual, or as a resource for human progress. They saw glaciers as inanimate, subject to empirical investigation and measurement. Aboriginal responses were strikingly different. From their perspectives, glaciers were sentient, animate, and quick to respond to human behaviour. In each case, experiences and ideas surrounding glaciers were incorporated into interpretations of social relations. Focusing on these contrasting views, Julie Cruikshank demonstrates how local knowledge is produced, rather than "discovered," through such encounters, and how oral histories conjoin social and biophysical processes. She traces how divergent views continue to weave through contemporary debates about protected areas, parks and the new World Heritage site that encompasses the area where Alaska, British Columbia, and the Yukon Territory now meet. Students and scholars of Native studies and anthropology as well as readers interested in northern studies and colonial encounters will find *Do Glaciers Listen?* a fascinating read and a rich addition to circumpolar literature. Winner of the Victor Turner Prize for Ethnographic Writing, 2006

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The book, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters & Social Imagination*, demonstrates that local knowledge and scientific knowledge differ not in their empirical outcomes, but rather, in their respective ontological and epistemological underpinnings; which, however, can strongly influence the type of spatialities that would be produced in a given place. This picture is seen in all places that have undergone European imperialism, as the social, cultural, and geophysical landscapes of these places are altered to fit those of European worldviews. Drawing on climate histories, colonial records, and Aboriginal oral histories, Cruikshank makes this picture more apparent as she examines the relationship between glaciers and the Indigenous people of northwestern North America during the little Ice Age, and how this relationship is subsequently impacted by Western contact. In a nutshell, the book examines how the view of nature, society and culture as unavoidably entwined is contested, and a view of these components as disaggregates gradually takes center stage in Northwestern North America. The ontology of the Indigenous people of northwestern North America, particularly, Tlingit people on the Gulf of Alaska Coast and the interior Athapaskans, is that nature and society are inseparable. Hence, the native people view nature, in this case, glaciers, as sentient beings with as much agency as their human counterparts. There is mutual respect between glaciers and humans, as glaciers can respond to insolent behavior â€” making obscene remarks about glaciers, insulting elderly people, calling glaciers and cooking greasy food around glaciers â€” leading to dire consequence, such as their deluge on entire settlements.

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