

NUNAVUT: INUIT REGAIN CONTROL OF THEIR LANDS AND THEIR LIVES. Edited by JENS DAHL, JACK HICKS and PETER JULL. Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2000. IWGIA Document No. 102. ISBN 87-90730-34-8. 223 p., map, bib. Softbound. US\$16.00.

The first didactic and enthusiastic wave of media reporting about the formation of Nunavut is over. Often encountering northern affairs or even Canada for the first time in 1999, reporters had to explain to their international readers (and many Canadians) what Nunavut was, who the Inuit were, and what the Arctic was like (no roads!). Generally, observers were also engaged by the celebration in Nunavut and in Canada that attended the creation of the new territory.

Given the early enthusiasm, in Nunavut and abroad, we are at risk now of entering a period of disenchantment. Communities and regions are manoeuvring for benefits, elected politicians are behaving as politicians everywhere do, social problems remain, the public service is struggling and leaking staff: Nunavut seems to be faltering. Not even two years after the creation of Nunavut, it is much too soon for such a conclusion. We have come, though, to a time when celebration should be replaced by careful public research and debate. Rather than disenchantment, what is needed is deep, clear, sound, and accessible contemporary political and economic analysis. Fortunately, such work has begun to appear.

Nunavut: Inuit Regain Control of Their Land and Their Lives is a collection of solid and clearly written articles by authors from four continents. Editors Jack Hicks (from Nunavut), Jens Dahl (Denmark), and Peter Jull (a Canadian living in Australia) pose “two fundamental questions about Nunavut which apply no less to other indigenous self-government models in the world”:

Does Nunavut represent a new type of political economy and society, as some of its supporters claim? Or, is it merely a changing of hands on the same old levers of power and on the keys to the cash-box? Will a true sustainable development economy be able to flourish inside a modern industrial state which is a charter member of the G-7 industrial powers? (p. 13)

Can Inuit best re-build, maintain, strengthen, and expand their society and culture through their new political and legal arrangements? ... [M]any sceptics will fear that by ‘opting in’ to the political systems and culture of the contemporary industrial world, especially in a country like Canada which has become notorious for its failed resource management policies.... Inuit have already taken a decisive step in abandoning the strength and core values of their culture. (p. 14)

These important questions are not fully answered in the collection, of course, though the two chapters written by the editors take us a good distance in that direction. Jack

Hicks and Graham White, in much the longest chapter (accurately, if awkwardly, entitled “Nunavut: Inuit Self-Government Through a Land Claim and Public Government?”), provide an information-rich, textured, and hard-headed analysis of the genesis and prospects of Nunavut that should be required reading for every newcomer to Nunavut and every high school student there. Their lively responses to the various critics of Nunavut are particularly interesting and useful in advancing the debate, not least because Hicks and White acknowledge problems as well as successes. In a separate chapter, co-editor Peter Jull reflects on Nunavut as evidence of northern (and Canadian) resilience and renewal. Jull draws telling anecdotes from decades of direct experience in northern communities, illuminating the particular form of democracy evolving in Nunavut, its sources and obstacles, to help us understand the conditions that made it possible.

Zebedee Nungak writes about what Nunavut means for the Inuit of Nunavik (northern Quebec): “It was difficult to be an involuntary bystander, knowing that we could have been taking part in these celebrations had Parliament not passed that despicable Act 87 years ago that placed our own particular stretch of tundra into a jurisdictional purgatory called Quebec” (p. 142). With some acerbity, with grace and good will, Nungak connects the decolonization of Nunavut with the struggles of indigenous peoples around the world, recognizes the separate jurisdictional interests of Nunavut and Nunavik, and concludes, “Pigatsi pivugut” (You attain, therefore we attain): “We are strengthened, encouraged and inspired by your attainment” (p. 142).

From John Amagoalik, there is a very brief but powerful statement of what Inuit have achieved with Nunavut—final refutation of the perception that the North was a wasteland where nobody lived and of the prediction, repeated over many decades, that Inuit were doomed to disappear as a people.

If those same journalists and social scientists were to come to the Arctic today, I suspect they would write quite different stories. They would understand by now that the Arctic is not a wasteland. That it is a unique ecosystem with a wide variety of flora and fauna. They would discover that a stubborn culture still thrives. They would discover that our language is doing just fine.... They would see that we have signed the largest and most comprehensive land treaty in history. They would find that we are changing the map of Canada. They would see that we have changed the attitude of Canadians about our proper place in this country. They would also see that we definitely qualify as human beings. (p. 138–139)

There are also helpful reflections on how Nunavut was achieved: how did 23,000 Inuit gain effective and democratic political jurisdiction over 20% of Canada, negotiate around federal claims policy against “ethnic governments,” resolve controversies over land and sea ice, and maintain remarkable internal cohesion? In the first analytical

“insider account” of the long political struggle for Nunavut that has yet appeared, Jose Kusugak explains the goals and the strategy that led to the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement and the establishment of Nunavut as a separate territory. He emphasizes patience, focus, determination, and flexibility in explaining the reasons for particular tradeoffs and outcomes.

The collection is enriched by several articles that treat subjects of direct relevance to the cultural future of Inuit. Drawing upon decades of research, experience, and reflection, George Wenzel eloquently explains the importance of subsistence production and programs for hunter support. In a neatly complementary discussion, Helle Høgh discusses the special case of bowhead whale hunting and its regulation in a way that allows us to see the new consciousness of Nunavutmiut emerging. Laila Sørensen on Inuit broadcasting, Ludger Müller-Wille on Nunavut place names, and Kenn Harper on Inuit writing systems usefully broaden the discussion of Nunavut’s future.

Appropriately, the last chapter is written by Odd Terje Brantenberg, a Norwegian scholar who understands Canadian development very well. Brantenberg situates Nunavut in the global struggle to ensure the thriving of small indigenous societies, and especially “to use the nation state as a building block for ensuring that all cultural groups have a space within its borders” (p. 208). He notes that the Canadian case contradicts the mooted advantage of cultural homogeneity often attributed to the Nordic countries. While recognizing the Canadian achievement of multicultural prosperity, he does not ignore the stresses of diversity and the costs of North American economic integration. Here his analysis converges with that of Amagoalik and Jull, and all together illuminate the beginning of a path of political development based upon compromise and negotiated consent, rather than conquest.

The analytical integrity of this volume is remarkable, especially considering that the editors reside in three different locations (Iqaluit, Denmark, and Australia) and the contributors write from Europe, Australia, and various parts of Canada. Recognizing this, it seems churlish to complain about small typographical errors, of which there are certainly too many. (Not trying, I found twelve.) These do not impede comprehension, however, and are somewhat compensated by other useful features of the book: a good chart-form chronology of the history of Nunavut, two maps, and a fine bibliography.

For the editors’ next book about Nunavut (why not a series?) may I suggest a few more topics: primary, secondary, and post-secondary education; the evolving public administration and especially the serious efforts underway to craft a bureaucracy suitable to the cultures of Nunavut; experiments and achievements in the use of the Internet for cultural communication, land use planning and administrative coordination; and evolving relations between citizens, the Nunavut Government, and the many and various regulatory boards set into motion by the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement. There are not so many experiments in

all the world of advancing democracy and peaceful change, and there is much to learn from this one.

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JOURNAL OF OCCURRENCES AT THE FORKS OF THE LEWES AND PELLY RIVERS MAY 1848 TO SEPTEMBER 1852. Edited by LLEWELLYN R. JOHNSON and DOMINIQUE LEGROS. Whitehorse: Heritage Branch, Government of the Yukon, 2000. Occasional Papers in Yukon History, No. 2. ISBN 1-55018-976-X. xiv + 153 p., maps, b&w illus., notes, index. Softbound. No charge.

The Hudson’s Bay Company began to expand its activities into the Yukon River basin in the summer of 1840, when Robert Campbell first sighted the waters of the Pelly River from Pelly Banks. A post was established there in the winter of 1842–43, and in 1848 Campbell and James Stewart founded the post of Fort Selkirk at the confluence of the Pelly and the Lewes (as the upper Yukon River was then known). Over the next four years, Campbell and Stewart would make a valiant attempt to capture the trade and harvest the furs of the Upper Yukon drainage. But the dice were loaded against them. The Company was badly overextended in terms of the route by which the Fort Selkirk trade goods, supplies, and furs had to travel, to the point that Campbell and Stewart received no supplies or trade goods for several years in a row. This was in part due to the incompetence of P.C. Pambrun, the clerk who for most of the period was in charge of the posts at Frances Lake and Pelly Banks, key points on the supply line. And, worst of all, Campbell and Stewart had to contend with the hostility of the Chilkat Indians, traditional middlemen between the Pacific coast and the Indians of the upper and middle Yukon basins. In only four years, this combination of factors would force the Hudson’s Bay Company to cut its losses and retreat from the Upper Yukon basin.

The Fort Selkirk post journals kept by Campbell and Stewart over the four-year period, preserved in the National Archives of Canada, have now been edited by Llewellyn Johnson and Dominique Legros. The journals cover the daily activities of the post (or posts, since Fort Selkirk was moved a short distance in the spring of 1851) with only a few gaps. On some days, the entry is frustratingly laconic, e.g., “Heavy rain.” or “No news.” At the other extreme is the entry for Sunday, 22 August 1852, when some visiting Chilkats went on the rampage and looted the post, and Campbell and the few servants at the post at the time barely escaped with their lives. Here Stewart’s detailed description is one of high drama. It was largely because of this incident (in combination with a continuing series of annual losses from the post’s trade) that Chief Factor James Anderson, in charge of the Mackenzie