

MADE IN NUNAVUT: AN EXPERIMENT IN DECENTRALIZED GOVERNMENT. By JACK HICKS and GRAHAM WHITE. Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-7748-3104-8. xvi + 375 p., map, notes, index. Softbound. \$Cdn34.95; US\$37.95.

Made in Nunavut fills an important gap. Up to now little has been written about the process through which the new territory was formed, in the period from 1993 to 1999, and on the extent to which the hopes and aspirations for that territory have been realized in the years following its establishment. This is the subject matter of *Made in Nunavut*, with a particular focus on the decentralization of certain functions of the Nunavut government to various communities across the territory. It is a work well suited to students of political science, public administration, and northern studies, primarily at the university level, but for some at a college level as well: it provides an enormous information base. It is written in a non-technical manner, and in this sense is also suited to the general reader.

The authors describe this study as a work of two decades. Jack Hicks, we are told, “literally lived the Nunavut decentralization experience” (p. xi). From 1994 to 1996, he was Director of Research for the Nunavut Implementation Commission (NIC), which was the body charged with the administrative design of the first Nunavut government. Later he served as Director of the Evaluation and Statistics Division for the Government of Nunavut, a body that was decentralized to Pangnirtung: a move of which he is very critical (see note 127, p. 361). He thus brings to the study the knowledge of a direct participant.

Graham White is a professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto. He has studied and written extensively on the North, and he provided advice to northern governments throughout the two decades referred to.

Made In Nunavut is based on a review of available documentary material, supplemented by interviews that were given by some notable former officeholders: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) Ministers Ron Irwin and Jane Stewart, Premier Paul Okalik, Minister of Finance for the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) John Todd, and Interim Commissioner of Nunavut Jack Anawak. From his personal experience, Hicks provides additional knowledge far more extensive than could be attained simply from a documentary review.

Officials from various institutions, journalists, and academics were also interviewed and provided numerous unattributed remarks, the use of which gives rise to some concerns. One understands that officials may have informative comments on policies and their execution and that such assessments may be politically sensitive. However an “on the record” remark will usually be made with more careful consideration, and the reader may more easily assess both the experience, and the possible bias, that may underlie a remark. An unattributed remark may be made more loosely and does not allow the reader to similarly weigh it.

This difference is important, for despite its subtitle, *Made in Nunavut* is far from being simply a study of administrative planning and organizational design. Decentralization in Nunavut, in both its planning and its implementation phases, has occurred in a sometimes tempestuous political and administrative environment. In the period leading up to 1999, relations between the federal government, the GNWT, and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, as well as relations between these bodies, the NIC, and the Office of the Interim Commissioner, were often strained. Indeed, even within these institutions there were stresses and conflicts.

The establishment of a separate territory of Nunavut was a major accomplishment of Inuit organizations and political leaders from the 1970s to 1999. Although established by statute as a territorial public government, similar to those of the Northwest Territories and Yukon, at another level this establishment appeared to provide an unrivalled opportunity for the creation of innovative political and administrative structures.

As Hicks and White put it: “The creation of the GN [Government of Nunavut] in the 1990s was as close to fashioning a government on a blank piece of paper as anyone is likely to see...nowhere in Canada had there ever been an opportunity to, in effect, design a government of this scale or importance, virtually from scratch” (p. 4). Yet from this process emerged “a decidedly conventional government leavened with a few distinctive features: its departmental structure . . . a commitment to Inuktitut as a working language of government; and an attempt to imbue both public policy and government operations with traditional Inuit values...” (p. 5).

The authors consider one very definite element in the organizational set-up of the new government to be novel. This was the geographic decentralization of its structure and operations. They describe this “design feature” of the government as “ambitious and distinctive, perhaps unique” (p. 5).

“Decentralization” can be variously defined. The authors acknowledge that the organizational approach to the structuring of the Nunavut government could more aptly be described as “deconcentration,” that is, “the dispersal of government jobs outside the capital as opposed to the dispersal of policy-making authority” (p. 9). Within Nunavut, however, the dispersal of government jobs, rather than of policy or decision-making responsibility, has been described almost universally as “decentralization,” and in this regard, the authors’ usage follows the Nunavut practice.

Other Nunavut-specific terms include “decentralized communities,” meaning communities assigned a number of decentralized government positions, and “non-decentralized communities,” meaning those not so favoured.

Certain figures and institutions fare better than others, in the way the tale is told. In some cases there is additional information, which the authors may not have had, that would have provided a more rounded picture. For example, the apparent antagonism of some GNWT politicians to the

NIC, extending to personal slights, is described; but there were also cases in which territorial ministers were insulted by NIC Commissioners, and such instances are generally not mentioned. The book does record that the chief commissioner of the NIC wrote to Minister Irwin, describing the GNWT as a “so-called government” and referring to Minister Todd “who loathes NIC because we will not do his bidding” (p. 67).

This particular letter was sparked by the GNWT’s refusal in 1997 to nominate two commissioners for appointment to the NIC. It should be noted that the appointment of commissioners to the NIC was dealt with in Section 55 of the Nunavut Act, which required that three commissioners be appointed from a list of candidates to be supplied by the premier of the Northwest Territories. The Nunavut Act did not authorize the DIAND minister to recommend such appointments except from the premier’s list, and this point seems to have been lost in the discussion of the matter.

The book emphasizes, in many places, the GNWT’s focus on financial issues in relation to the establishment of Nunavut. Certainly this led to some antagonism between GNWT and federal officials and, in the political swirl, probably furthered the distance between the GNWT and other players. Hicks and White correctly note that the 1995 Martin budget reduced the federal financial transfer to the territorial government (p. 118). However, their use of terms like “pay the tab” and “pony up” to characterize the GNWT’s expectation that the federal government should cover certain costs is demeaning. Description of the extent of federal cutbacks (approximately \$55 million a year through the 1995 budget) would have provided a better context for the reader. Federal cutbacks and federal-territorial financial disputes in relation to social housing, devolution, and health care were also part of the context in which federal financial responsibility under the Nunavut Political Accord was discussed.

Have the expectations arising from the establishment of a new territory and the decentralization process been met? Given that the Government of Nunavut has displayed some serious problems in administrative performance since 1999, to what extent is the attempt at extensive decentralization responsible for these?

Notably among the reports that have critiqued the administrative performance of the Nunavut government since 1999 are *Qanukkanniq? The GN Report Card* (NSC, 2009) and various reports of the auditor general. The more relevant of these are discussed, and the authors do not accept, as a general conclusion, that decentralization is responsible for the many administrative problems that the Nunavut government has faced. In their view, problems that might be attributed to decentralization in fact reflect a broader capacity problem. In a general sense, this conclusion is probably correct, and the broader capacity problem itself can be attributed to a number of causes, among them the difficulties inherent in establishing a new government and federal failure to follow through on the Inuit employment undertakings in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement

(NLCA). Article 23 of the NLCA provides for measures intended to achieve representative Inuit employment within the Government of Nunavut and in federal departments within the territory. Meeting the objective of Article 23 will be critical for decentralization to meet its goal of providing significant Inuit employment benefits in the decentralized communities.

The authors’ conclusion is that “Ultimately, the success of this effort will be measured in large part by both how efficient and appropriate a government the GN evolves into and by how much the decentralized communities themselves feel about the economic and social impacts” (p. 327). Another way of expressing this would be to say that the success of the effort depends on how effective the Nunavut government is in overcoming its capacity problems and, as part of this process, in training and recruiting local Inuit to fill the decentralized positions.

REFERENCE

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UTKUIKŠALINGMIUT UQAUHIITIGUT UQAUHLIURUT. DICTIONARY OF UTKUIKŠALINGMIUT INUKTITUT POSTBASE SUFFIXES. By JEAN L. BRIGGS, ALANA JOHNS and CONOR COOK. Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2015. ISBN 978-1-897568-32-3. xi + 725 p. In English and Inuktitut. Softbound. Cdn\$64.95.

Utkuhikšalingmiut is a Canadian Arctic dialect spoken by three Inuit groups who used to inhabit the lower reaches of the Back River, in the southeastern part of the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut. Its speakers now live in the communities of Taloyoak, Gjoa Haven, and Baker Lake. Together with Nattilingmiut and Arviligřuarmit, Utkuhikšalingmiut belongs to a larger dialectal group that is characterized by, among other traits, the phonemic distinctions that it makes between /j/ and /ř/ and between /h/ and /š/ (see below). These shared traits explain why general descriptions of the Inuit language (e.g., Dorais, 2010:34) often consider this group as forming only one dialect, Natsilingmiutut (or Nattilingmiutut), subdivided into three subdialects, one of which is Utkuhikšalingmiut.

The Natsilingmiutut (sub)dialects are among the very few forms of the Inuit language that, until recently, had not been the object of thorough lexical compilation. The book under review is therefore particularly welcome, as is Miriam Aglukark’s draft Nattilingmiut dictionary (Aglukark,