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Book Review

Timothy Leduc, *Climate, Culture, Change: Inuit and Western Dialogues with a Warming North* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2011), 288 pp., $29.95 (pbk), ISBN: 978-0-7766-0750-4.

Anyone who has ever spent time in the arctic can attest to a kind of transformative experience; standing on a frozen lake or sea ice under the northern lights or dancing to the beat of Dene or Inuit drums, one tends to see both the world and oneself differently. The land and the people seem alive and connected to one another in ways that make sense at a very fundamental level.

This cultural and ecological landscape is reportedly under great threat. Three years after Inuit leader Sheila Watt-Cloutier was nominated for a Nobel Peace prize for her efforts to bring the local experience of climate change to a global stage, the impacts of climate change in the arctic appear to be growing: '…not since the 19th-century clearance of America's forests has the world seen such a spectacular environmental change' (*The Economist* 2012). Some critics disagree, but for most reasonable observers the climate change debate seems to be over. Even Canada's Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, seems to have changed from a skeptic to one who argues 'the menace of climate change [is] one of the most important public policy challenges of our time' (Harper 2007). Yet for those who perceive a lack of transparency in Harper's decision-making (Popiak 2012) there is wide gap between the rhetoric and reality of Canadian climate change policy.

There are alternative sources of guidance to be found. In *Climate, Culture, Change: Inuit and Western Dialogues with a Warming North*, environmental studies scholar Timothy Leduc attempts to find a way through the climate change 'crisis' through a study of Inuit culture and beliefs. The book, which was shortlisted for the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences' '2012 Canada Prize in the Social Sciences', focuses on the disconnects between the views of IQ holders, scientists, and policy makers on issues of environmental change. He discusses the need for an intercultural response inclusive of both Inuit and Western worldviews. In addition to highlighting the value of Inuit knowledge (Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit—IQ) in managing the uncertainties posed by climate change, Leduc uses a postcolonial critique of mainstream debates on climate change to argue that the political and economic forces underlying the mainstream discourse may be endangering IQ and other alternative knowledge systems. Written with the goal of reconnecting readers with each other and the earth, the book is a refreshing alternative to the well-established discourse on vulnerability and adaptation that underlies the majority of climate change policy in Canada and elsewhere.

The work is grounded in Leduc's experiences working with several Inuit communities, especially that of Igluliargu (Chesterfield Inlet) during his doctoral research. It

draws on interviews with Inuit elders as well as his own observations and interpretations of boardroom scuttles between governments, scientists, and Inuit leaders. The book offers insights into Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, particularly that of Inuit philosopher Jaypeetee Arnkak. The spiritual teachings of Sila or the shaman's knowledge of Silatuniq are featured in the book as one way of addressing the 'globalizing tendencies of Western climate research and politics into a diversity of regionally accessible cultural views, practices and passions' (p. 228). The recollections and reflections of elders about the power of Sila will be compelling for those interested in an alternative to scientific characterizations of northern ecosystems and the neo-liberal discourse of the northern frontier. While scientists and governments seek to control, manage, and exploit the arctic and its resources, the principles of Silatuniq are yet another reminder that there are limits to nature and our control over it, particularly in the context of a changing climate. Leduc speaks to the legacy of colonialism in the north, continued threats to Inuit culture, and a hope for protecting and nurturing IQ against climate change and other homogenizing forces of globalization. The loss of IQ, according to Leduc, will not only matter to the Inuit but will inevitably lead to a diminished 'global conscience' and capacity to cope with our changing environment.

Although many are aware of research on arctic climate change, this book is unique and valuable in its focus on the Inuit experience and their spiritual understandings related to it. Inuit observations are, for the most part, compatible with climate change science. There are conflicts, however, between the ways some draw on it for the management of polar bears. Some environmentalists and scientists as well, concerned about melting sea ice, have recommended limiting the Inuit harvest of polar bears. Consequently, many now associate efforts to 'save the polar bear' with taking action on climate change. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to separate science from sentiment. Leduc draws on a critique of the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) by pointing out that 'the activist, ideological way that research has been used by the IPCC, has put scientists in the position of being authors of policy—a position that distorts the role of science in society' (Saunders 2009: A22). For their part, some Inuit leaders have been frustrated by climate change 'rhetoric, hype and alarmist claims' (Smith 2009) and have argued for a longer term view of both the ecological issues and the socio-economic context of northern livelihoods.

The book attempts to raise awareness about a critical issue facing Inuit culture—climate change—but is this the most critical issue facing Inuit communities? Traditional stories from the Inuit are evocative, and indigenous rights and interests have, in the past, been an all-too-convenient tool for environmentalists seeking to heighten the soap box, or legitimize what might otherwise be considered solely an environmentalist's position (Dove 2009). Those taking up Leduc's call to arms for more intercultural dialogue and interdisciplinary research should recognize the host of other socio-economic and cultural issues facing those living in the Canadian and circumpolar north. In addition to the effects of climate change, many Inuit communities are facing health problems, housing shortages, unemployment, and food insecurity in ways more commonly found in developing nations. Ideally, Leduc's call for intercultural dialogue may lead us toward a more holistic approach to issues of northern and global sustainability.

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