NUTTALL, Mark, 1998, *Protecting the Arctic, Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Survival*, Amsterdam, Harwood Academic Publishers, 193 pages.

Edmund Searles

Volume 27, numéro 1-2, 2003

Architecture paléoesquimaude
Palaeoeskimo Architecture

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/010823ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/010823ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Inuksiutiit Katimajit Inc.

ISSN

0701-1008 (imprimé)

1708-5268 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Searles, E. (2003). Compte rendu de [NUTTALL, Mark, 1998, *Protecting the Arctic, Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Survival*, Amsterdam, Harwood Academic Publishers, 193 pages.] *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 27(1-2), 540–543.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/010823ar>

Northern Lights against POPS Combatting Toxic Threats in the Arctic is a timely and informative contribution to the contaminant literature. Its publication will hopefully result in further research being conducted by and published for northern Indigenous peoples. This will ensure that Indigenous peoples maintain control over the research and publication agenda on contaminant issues so critical to the north.

Joanna Kafarowski
Natural Resources and Environmental Studies program
University of Northern British Columbia
Prince George, British-Columbia
Canada, V2N 5N1
gypsy_four@hotmail.com

NUTTALL, Mark

1998 *Protecting the Arctic, Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Survival*,
Amsterdam, Harwood Academic Publishers, 193 pages.

Mark Nuttall's opening sentences of his book, *Protecting the Arctic*, identify internationalization as an important trend in the Arctic: "The global quest for natural resources, the expansion of capitalist markets and influence of transnational practices on the periphery has resulted in the internationalization of the circumpolar north" (p. 1). Ironically, in the wake of the United States' recent war on Iraq, it seems that internationalization is in peril. Some argue that a major consequence of that war was to "put the final nail in the coffin of the dream of global citizenship that began more than a half century ago with the founding of the United Nations" (Rieff 2003). The fate of internationalism is just the opposite in the Arctic, however, where multinational organizations, like the Arctic Council and the Northern Forum, have grown even stronger and more energetic in recent years. The Council's most recent report, published in February 2003, identifies a number of ongoing projects, including plans to eliminate pollution, promote biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources, and enhance economic and social well-being — all through international cooperation. It is these trends and their affects on Indigenous peoples and the Arctic environment that guides Nuttall's investigation.

Nuttall states that his objective is not to provide a detailed exegesis of any particular group or topic, but "to stimulate debate and lay the groundwork for future research and analysis" (p. 1). *Protecting the Arctic* is a collection of essays on overlapping topics (environmental protection, indigenous environmentalism, indigenous environmental knowledge, indigenous rights). His decision to write a survey was motivated by the proliferation of international organizations, agreements, and research projects that require a different set of analytical tools than those used in community-based ethnography. Nuttall, a seasoned anthropologist/ethnographer with research experience in Asia, Europe and North America, does a good job of mapping out the current state of affairs through the activities of these organizations, particularly how they have aligned themselves with an indigenous-initiated environmental activism.

Despite his claims that *Protecting the Arctic* is merely a vehicle for future research and analysis, Nuttall does analyze the activities of these organizations and he critiques certain core concepts used by them, including indigenous knowledge or traditional environmental knowledge (TEK). Definitions of TEK abound, and it is now referred to extensively in the arena of public policy, applied research and international agreements. Nuttall argues that TEK has both positive and negative consequences for indigenous peoples, particularly with respect to cultural survival. On the positive side, it has allowed indigenous peoples to become more involved in the process of scientific research and natural resource management. A common policy of many regulatory bodies is to consult with indigenous elders and other TEK experts when making key decisions, especially those concerning which resources need to be managed, and what strategies, if any, are necessary to ensure sustainable yields of those resources.

On the negative side, TEK has legitimized some forms of local knowledge at the expense of others. In the process of its codification and implementation, TEK has narrowed the range of "data" that counts as knowledge and rendered other forms obsolete or inconsequential. TEK virtually ignores those features of everyday life that provide much-needed cultural context for understanding how knowledge is produced and transmitted, things like myths, songs, jokes, stories, memories of specific places and events, emotions, interactions, etc. These are the building blocks of local knowledge (*i.e.* memoryscapes) that unites animals and humans, spirits and God, the past, present, and future in a complex and everchanging world shaped by forces that are "natural" and/or "supernatural." Equating TEK with a narrow body of knowledge (*i.e.* the reproductive capacities and migration patterns of specific species), makes it more of a weak replica of scientific knowledge than an adequate representation of how indigenous peoples actually relate to the environment.

One other concern of Nuttall is the way the Arctic continues to be imagined as an exotic and uninhabited place. Such words as frontier, wasteland, and wilderness belong to the lexicon used to describe the Arctic by settlers, journalists, adventurers, etc. And, like TEK, these popularized images have helped indigenous peoples in some ways and hurt them in others. The idea of the Arctic as the last true wilderness has facilitated a growing solidarity between powerful and well-funded environmentalist groups and Inuit-run non-governmental organizations. The World Wildlife Fund and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference are working together to draw international attention to the elevated levels of mercury, persistent organic pollutants (POPs — which includes pesticides and industrial chemicals) and other carcinogens found in the Arctic ecosystem, a collaboration that resulted in Canada's ratification of the Stockholm Convention in 2002, an international agreement that bans the production of 12 POPs.

The Inuit premier of Nunavut, Paul Okalik, was influential in convincing Canada to sign the Kyoto Protocol (*The Economist* 2002), a decision that was vehemently opposed by several provincial premiers, including Alberta's Ralph Klein. But the image of the Arctic as a wasteland has also made it easier for the world to ignore for decades toxic waste leaking from abandoned military installations and tons of untreated sewage generated by increasingly condensed towns and settlements. One hundred thousand hectares of the Kola Peninsula are almost completely devoid of living plants, the result

of years of industrial activity in Murmansk, the largest city north of the Arctic Circle. Tourism in the Arctic is another rapidly growing industry that relies on images of wilderness and adventure for its survival. But it is often these very images, complete with picture perfect portrayals of Indigenous culture and customs, that Indigenous people often find out-of-date and even demeaning.

Although published five years ago, Nuttall's book is still current since the many issues it raises about international cooperation, sustainable development, and environmental protection are far from being resolved. If anything, they are likely to get much more complicated. The latest news to reach the headlines in southern newspapers is not global warming or persistent pollutants but the signing of multimillion dollar deals between indigenous-owned and multinational corporations — international cooperation of a slightly different nature. This is the story of the original ecologist turned global capitalist/savvy industrialist, a transformation that reached a new zenith when the Aboriginal Petroleum Group (APG), a body representing Aboriginal people of the NWT, signed a deal with TransCanada Corp, one of Canada's largest pipeline builders (Jang 2003). The deal grants APG one-third ownership of a \$5 billion Arctic pipeline project designed to transport trillions of cubic feet of natural gas from the Mackenzie Delta to facilities in Alberta. APG is positioning itself to become a major player in the world of oil and gas exploration and development in Canada, a status that will make it competitive when bidding on pipeline and offshore drilling projects in other parts of North America and beyond.

As a survey of the latest trends in public policy, Indigenous activism, and environmentalism in the Arctic, *Protecting the Arctic* is a must read and a useful text for those teaching or wanting to learn more about Indigenous politics, the political economy of the Arctic, transnational trends, and international relations. But I also found this book disappointing. Nuttall's ethnography, *Arctic Homeland* (Nuttall 1992) is an exemplary work, blending sophisticated social theory, symbolic anthropology and rich ethnographic description. But there is too little of this in *Protecting the Arctic* (at least one of the social theorists he does cite, *i.e.* the work of Anthony Giddens, is not listed in the bibliography). By avoiding breadth, I found myself longing for depth. What do POPs and the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy mean to ordinary Inuit? What are children learning in schools or from their parents about the environment and traditional knowledge, and what impacts is this knowledge having, if any, on how Indigenous peoples think and feel the world? Nuttall also relies heavily on published texts and reports, such as Kawagley's *A Yupiaq World View* (1995) without examining how these texts relate to the context of the author's life or the influence of this text, if any, on local perspectives and everyday experience in the Arctic. These are especially urgent questions given that more and more young people in the north are training to work in mines, on oil rigs, and on pipeline projects — what is the state of their environmental knowledge and ecospirituality?

Protecting the Arctic is also in need of a revised edition or even a second installment (the original version is still in print but chronically out of stock), as the Arctic continues to be a site of contradiction and confusion. Whereas some Inuit are using all their clout and political capital to protect the environment from global

warming and toxic pesticides, others are making deals behind closed doors to fund massive projects that are likely to lead to greater global warming and an even greater demand for industrial chemicals whose byproducts are likely to end up in the Arctic food chain. If approved by energy boards and other regulators, these projects will create thousands of much needed jobs in a region plagued by high unemployment and uneven economic growth — a Faustian bargain if there ever was one. Revenue from these megaprojects will most likely be pumped back into local communities via funding for educational and social programs designed to raise cultural awareness and preserve traditional environmental knowledge. Imagine, using more gas to fuel one's car or heat one's home will not only contribute to global warming, it will also, while supplies last, benefit the cultural survival of the Arctic's Indigenous peoples!

References

THE ECONOMIST

2002 Warming up: The Inuit launch new campaigns, *The Economist* (print edition), August 29, 2002.

JANG, Brent

2003 Aboriginal leaders sign landmark deal with Transcanada, *Globe and Mail*, June 19, 2003.

KAWAGLEY, Angayukaq Oscar

1995 *A Yupiaq Worldview: A Pathway to Ecology and Spirit*, Prospect Heights, Waveland Press.

NUTTALL, Mark

1992 *Arctic Homeland: Kinship, Community, and Development in Northwest Greenland*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

RIEFF, David

2003 Goodbye, New World Order, *Mother Jones*, 28(4): 36-41.

Edmund Searles
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Bucknell University
Lewisburg, PA, USA
esearles@mail.bucknell.edu

RHOLEM, Karim

2001 *Uvattinnit. Le Peuple du Grand Nord. The People of the Far North*, Montréal, Stanké, 84 pages.

Ce petit ouvrage de Karim Rholem, jeune photographe d'origine marocaine, présente trente-cinq clichés photographiques d'Inuit du Nord canadien. Pris seuls ou en famille, les individus représentés proviennent de plusieurs communautés du Nunavut,