

McELROY, Ann, 2008 *Nunavut Generations: Change and Continuity in Canadian Inuit Communities*, Long Grove, Waveland Publishers, 200 pages.

Edmund Searles

Volume 34, numéro 2, 2010

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1004144ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1004144ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Inuksiitiit Katimajit Inc.

Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (imprimé)

1708-5268 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Searles, E. (2010). Compte rendu de [McELROY, Ann, 2008 *Nunavut Generations: Change and Continuity in Canadian Inuit Communities*, Long Grove, Waveland Publishers, 200 pages.] *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 34(2), 196-199.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1004144ar>

- BAKER, Mark
1996 *The Polysynthesis Parameter*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- FORTESCUE, Michael, Steven JACOBSON and Lawrence KAPLAN
1994 *Comparative Eskimo Dictionary with Aleut Cognates*, Fairbanks, Alaska
Native Language Center.
- SAPIR, Edward
1921 *Language*, London, Harvest Book.

André Bourcier
Yukon Native Language Centre
Yukon College
Box 2799
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 5K4, Canada
abourcier@yukoncollege.yk.ca

- McELROY, Ann
2008 *Nunavut Generations: Change and Continuity in Canadian Inuit
Communities*, Long Grove, Waveland Publishers, 200 pages.

During Ann McElroy's first visit to Iqaluit in 1967, a Montreal student asked her why she was doing an anthropological study here [in Iqaluit], "These aren't *real* Eskimos" (p. 15). By "real" he meant a person who hunts and lives off the land, "not someone who works for a paycheck" (p. 15). Curious to learn more about what town-based Inuit themselves thought of their identity, McElroy returned to Baffin Island two years later to complete a dissertation project on Inuit children. Although not all Inuit youth identified with the same adult gender roles, McElroy learned that many desired to find a balance between finding work in town and having time to hunt, fish, and travel with one's family on the land.

The desire to blend tradition with town-based opportunities is a recurring topic in McElroy's ethnography of southern Nunavut society and culture. McElroy finds the concept of "real" Inuit problematic because it locates such Inuit outside Arctic towns, the locus of her research. What is more authentically Inuit to McElroy is the ability "to integrate traditional values and modern lifestyles," (p. 16) including working for a paycheck. The ability to integrate different modes of living provides the foundation of an overarching theme of McElroy's work: Inuit in South Baffin are fully bicultural. While survival in an increasingly urban environment has required Inuit to adopt many of the customs and values of the Qallunaat ("white people"), Inuit continue to emphasise their identity as a distinct people whose traditions and values differ from those of the Qallunaat. The lengthy process of negotiation that led to the creation of Nunavut in 1999, a territory that McElroy refers to as an Indigenous homeland,

demonstrates just how committed Inuit are to maintaining cultural and political autonomy.

McElroy takes aim at another stereotype of Inuit: “historical critiques” of Inuit as “passive victims of change” (p. 10). Coinciding with this view is the image that Inuit experienced the transition from camp to town life as a forced relocation caused by “ecological destruction, coercive policies, and exploitation by intruders seeking profit and control” (p. 93). She contends that Inuit always have been and continue to be major agents of change in the Arctic. Inuit were eager to trade with the first Qallunaat traders and whaling crews to arrive in South Baffin, and they often offered to join the crews of strange-looking men. A number of Inuit at this time became cultural brokers, persons who facilitated exchanges between the two societies (Inuit and Qallunaat). These brokers became models of biculturalism, individuals at home among both Inuit and Qallunaat.

McElroy’s most recent research project, the results of which are detailed in several chapters of this book, is a study of Inuit memories of the transition from camp to town life. To support her claim that Inuit were agents of transformation rather than victims, she draws on the testimonies of Inuit elders who recall many different reasons for moving to town. According to McElroy, the government did coerce a number of different groups to move by threatening to withhold assistance during medical emergencies and food shortages. In other contexts, however, Inuit chose to relocate in order to be closer to family or to find work. Some remembered their relocation as a twist of fate; one Inuit elder told McElroy he got stuck in Pangnirtung for five years after running out of money there during a trip from Lake Harbour. Others remembered town as a safe haven during times of disaster. An outbreak of canine hepatitis that swept through camps in southern Baffin Island in 1962 forced many families in the region to move to town, including 88 people evacuated by plane to Pangnirtung (p. 97). Many of these newcomers decided to remain in Pangnirtung even after the epidemic ended.

McElroy is also sensitive to the stereotypes attached to Qallunaat, who are often portrayed as sinister bureaucrats who intentionally destroyed traditional camp life. McElroy provides a more nuanced view by arguing that it was the RCMP and fur traders who encouraged Inuit to stay away from the towns. The voluntary migration of so many Inuit to town surprised many of the Qallunaat who were hired to manage the settlements. Assuming these Inuit newcomers wanted to “modernise” like the Qallunaat, the government sponsored programs to help Inuit become more self-sufficient. Anthropologists and historians condemned such policies as instruments of control and cultural destruction. McElroy notes that despite the good intentions of many Qallunaat, many of them failed to consider that Inuit had their own ideas about how to transition from camp to town. She explains that many Qallunaat became disappointed with the perceived inability of Inuit to succeed in towns, which they measured by increased material wealth, a larger house, and other Qallunaat-centric symbols of elevated social status. Inuit, on the other hand, began to view such goals with scorn and disgust. The resulting clash of values created a culture (and class) gap

between Inuit and Qallunaat that McElroy acknowledges but fails to incorporate into her model of biculturalism.

While each chapter presents an interesting new facet of culture contact in southern Nunavut, the chapters fall short of achieving a cohesive portrait. The second chapter ("Early Encounters"), for instance, provides a detailed summary of contact between Inuit and Qallunaat in southern Baffin up to the modern settlement era. Aside from a brief reference to the role of Inuit cultural brokers, it is unclear how this chapter ties in with the main arguments of the other chapters or with the book's emphasis on continuity and change in the Arctic. Another problem lies in McElroy's claim that biculturalism accounts for the ongoing vitality of Inuit culture. Whether Inuit consider themselves bicultural is a question that looms large throughout the book, especially in light of the way many of McElroy's Inuit interviewees refer to Qallunaat culture as antithetical to Inuit values. Such a significant dichotomy between the categories of Inuit and Qallunaat begs the question of just how "bicultural" Inuit imagine themselves to be. McElroy provides evidence that town-based Inuit see themselves as having to learn the customs of two (Inuit and Qallunaat) distinct worlds; she argues that "[s]howing flexibility in behavioral styles, Inuit learned to behave one way in a restaurant and another way at a hunting camp" (p. 132). It is unclear whether Inuit believe these two cultures constitute their identity beyond what they do in practice.

McElroy also does not consider the many meanings of "Inuit culture," a catch-all phrase Inuit use to refer to class, ethnicity, and even race. She recounts an interview with an Inuit student who wondered why Qallunaat living in her community lived in large, modern houses with toilets and bathtubs while Inuit lived in much smaller houses without plumbing. The student went on to say "My teacher says if we work hard we could have a bigger house and lots of money when we grow up. But my mother says that Eskimos will never get good jobs if the whites are still here" (p. 122). In describing the origin of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (now Inuit Tapariit Kanatami), McElroy writes that membership in the organisation was restricted to "persons of the Inuit race" over 18 years of age (p. 154). These and numerous other examples suggest that the concept of "Inuit" refers to more than a collection of cultural traits that Inuit learn to master and values they learn to cherish. As with the concept "Qallunaat," "Inuit" is a highly charged symbol, freighted with meaning that is constantly being adapted to fit ever-changing power relations and expectations in an urbanising Arctic.

As a final note, *Nunavut Generations* has a great deal to offer students of Inuit studies and is a suitable ethnography for a broad range of courses, including introductory anthropology and peoples and cultures of the Circumpolar North. In addition to being clearly written, McElroy's text exposes the trials and tribulations of anthropological research. The fieldwork stories interspersed throughout the text are both poignant and inspirational. As is the case with the recent history of Nunavut, so it is true of cultural anthropology in general: both are journeys fraught with unanticipated challenges and unexpected opportunities.

Edmund Searles
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Bucknell University
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania 17837, USA
esearles@bucknell.edu

Visiting Researcher (2010-11)
Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology
Uppsala University
Uppsala, Sweden
edmund.searles@antro.uu.se

WEETALUKTUK, Joby et Robert BRYANT

2008 *Le monde de Tivi Etok. La vie et l'art d'un aîné inuit*, Montréal, Les Éditions MultiMondes /Institut culturel Avataq, 220 pages.

Dans l'histoire de l'art inuit, Tivi Etok occupe une place à part. Cet artiste du Nunavik fut reconnu dans les années 1970 pour sa production au style original, en périphérie du marché de l'art inuit qui s'organisait de plus en plus depuis la fin des années 1940 avec pour centre Cape Dorset. Pour mémoire, rappelons que James Houston, artiste et administrateur gouvernemental en poste dans ce village de la Terre de Baffin, aujourd'hui partie du Nunavut, avait poussé à la création d'un marché, d'abord de sculptures sur pierre à savon de petite taille, destinées aux étrangers, et un peu plus tard de lithogravures. L'une des motivations premières de l'entrepreneur Houston était la lutte contre les conditions économiques déplorables des Inuit. L'organisation du marché en coopératives a certainement structuré un mode régional de fonctionnement et de prise en charge, où les coopératives, élargissant leur emprise depuis l'art à tous les domaines, allaient jusqu'à faire concurrence aux magasins de la Baie d'Hudson (Potter 1999).

Avec Ulukhaktok (Holman), Baker Lake et Pangnirtung, Puvirnituq, au Nunavik, est l'un des quatre autres centres artistiques de cette mouvance née à Cape Dorset. Tivi Etok y fit un séjour. Ayant toujours été attiré par le dessin, enfant, il utilisait les étendues de sable lisse pour dessiner animaux de toutes sortes, scènes de chasse et villages imaginaires, mêlant le visible et l'invisible. Tôt encouragé par l'appréciation des autres, il se rend à Puvirnituq suivre un cours, ayant entendu dire qu'on pouvait gagner sa vie en dessinant. Son œuvre, qui s'était déjà affirmée, y fut reconnue et appréciée. Son talent unique y fut célébré par ses pairs. Sa notoriété s'étendit dès lors au sud du 55° parallèle, où le marché de l'art s'enticha de lui. Il possède son propre atelier. Avec la volonté de contrôler sa destinée, dès 1975, Etok publie ce qui est reconnu comme le premier catalogue d'un artiste inuit, en solo: *Whispering in My Ears*