

LAUGRAND, Frédéric and Jarich OOSTEN, 2015 *Hunters, Predators and Prey: Inuit Perceptions of Animals*, New York, Berghahn, 408 pages

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Recensions / Book Reviews

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2015 *Hunters, Predators and Prey: Inuit Perceptions of Animals*, New York, Berghahn, 408 pages.

In *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Knud Rasmussen addressed the problematic association between animism and hunting: we humans derive our sustenance by separating beings not so unlike us from their souls (1976[1929]: 56, 58). Thus, while necessary to human survival, hunting carries existential risks to humans and nonhumans alike. In their outstanding new volume, *Hunters, Predators and Prey: Inuit Perceptions of Animals*, Frédéric Laugrand and Jarich Oosten engage with similar dilemmas facing hunters negotiating this symbol-laden world. As with their exhaustive and—to specialists—invaluable *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity* (2010), the authors draw on firsthand interviews, ethnographic accounts, and oral history collections, such as the Igloodik Research Centre's Oral History Project archive of translated interviews with elders from Canada's Central Arctic.

As in *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity*, there is a categorical, encyclopedic tone to both the presentation of topics and the discussion of them in *Hunters, Predators and Prey*. Despite its broad title, the book is more focused in its guiding theme than the earlier volume, and will probably be more accessible to a general academic readership. This is good news, considering its potential to contribute to the broader anthropology and sociology of human-animal relationships. Throughout the volume, the authors provide rich descriptions and interpretations of various nonhuman actors in the interplay between hunters and prey in the Eastern Arctic. Much of the focus is on animals important to the subsistence economies of Inuit; still, a good deal of attention is paid to those species playing less direct, but no less significant, roles.

The introductory chapters of *Hunters, Predators and Prey* provide thoughtful discussions of current theory on human-animal relationships, on nonhuman actors and their place in the (super)natural environment, and on the hunter's own unique subject-position. In subsequent sections, the authors explore the roles of individual species or species categories in depth. This exploration includes the characteristics and motivations of beings not traditionally considered part of the hunter-prey relationship: the always-significant raven and *qupirruit*—broadly, bugs. The book's core text may be the sections examining, in turn, "fellow hunters," a category encompassing dogs as well as bears; and an arguably over-broad category of prey animals that includes caribou, seals, and whales. Given the rich and varied sources used by the authors, contextualizing these traditions and myths was almost certainly a greater challenge than describing them. The authors have performed both tasks quite well.

Many discussions follow the presentation of taboos or teleological origin myths about various species. The great diversity of these beliefs across the North American Arctic is obscured somewhat by the authors' occasional overly general presentation of accounts, some of which read as though they apply to all Inuit, rather than to one particular group or another. Similarly, readers may require familiarity with the geographic focus of the primary sources (e.g., Boas along the southern and eastern Baffin Island coasts, or Rasmussen in the Aivilingmiut and Iglulingmiut territories) to discern where some of the discussed traditions were situated geographically. These are, however, minor oversights in what is otherwise a thoroughly thoughtful and carefully researched piece of work. The authors' engagement with theory is particularly good. The consideration of Inuit-animal relationships in terms of the multinatural perspectivism of Viveiros de Castro (1998) is particularly interesting and timely, given Betts et al.'s (2015) recent extension of the theory to Palaeo-Eskimo artistic representations of polar bears. Also timely, and deeply sophisticated, is the closing discussion of the ontology of humanity in a world of predators and prey.

Specialists in Northern anthropology will appreciate the volume's bibliography and helpful glossary of hunting-related Inuktitut terminology. On a more general level, the volume represents a valuable contribution to the wider literature on the extension of personhood beyond humanity in hunter-gatherer societies. The research will be useful to any scholar grappling with the question of how a hunter's cosmological perspective on prey animals influences the hunting process.

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