

Culture

John S. MATTHIASSEN, *Living on the Land: Change Among the Inuit of Baffin Island*, Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1992, 172 pp.

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sharpening up old and new tools, people who have been too overwhelmed with other problems (disease, residential schools, dislocation, resource depletion, boom and bust industries, language loss) to be able to enjoy, celebrate, and rediscover what has always been theirs. Ordinary people doing ordinary things is made special by the fact that they have not done them for some two generations — and almost lost a part of themselves in the process.

Perhaps the most interesting question related to this issue would have been: when did the loss of control of the institutions regulating daily life make it more important to hunt than to receive *muktuk*? Since this is probably a question of cumulative impacts, it is difficult to know either how much had to be lost or how much has to be regained to restore what the authors call “identity”. It might be simpler to think of this issue in terms of regaining control of all the institutions which together form life in Aklavik. How important is it, for example, to control the school curriculum and to integrate it with various types of traditional instruction? This is far more than a question of language and videotapes of the hunt.

The book touches lightly on the history of commercial whaling in the area, the history of migration from their original Alaskan communities, current relations with Alaskan relatives, the role of the International Whaling Commission, the Inuvialuit Game Council, the local Hunters and Trappers Committees under the Inuvialuit (co-management) Agreement signed with Canada in 1984, which guaranteed subsistence rights, the use of a “bow-head management plan”, and the distribution of the *muktuk* to five other Mackenzie Delta communities. It even slyly hints that the practice of the hunt could lead to greater concern about protection of whale habitat (from inadequate regulation of oil and gas development activities in the Beaufort Sea) — a feature other authors found lacking in Inuvialuit leaders in the 1980s.

But the value of this unpretentious volume has little to do with these matters. It is useful because it combines a practical description of material culture rediscovered, a second section on subsistence food preference surveys, and brief but telling clips of how people perceive and feel about the events. It connects the rediscovery of ancient practices with modern technology and daily praxis. This may well be useful to the Inuvialuit as well as anthropologists interested in this area and these issues.

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John Matthiasson’s study of the Tununermiut of northern Baffin Island is based on fieldwork initially conducted in 1963, at which time he stayed thirteen months. This was followed up in 1973 when he made a much shorter visit in the summer. This was then the classic pattern for such fieldwork. He is able to describe the major changes that occurred between those visits. Unfortunately, however, he does not bring his discussion up to the present time, although it would have been quite simple to do so. With his earlier rapport, I believe that such a third visit would have provided important data on the processes that he can now only describe from the two vantage points. Whilst he does in the latter part of the book allude to political changes, they are not detailed here. What we have, therefore, is, as it were, an old photograph, somewhat frayed around the edges; such items do not lose their intrinsic interest, but they leave the reader with the tantalising question of what Pond Inlet and its people are like today. The bibliography contains nothing after 1976, and one item, from the *RCMP Quarterly*, says ‘pagination not available’. Has the publication since been classified ‘Restricted’? Another even more accessible item is similarly incomplete.

I do not wish to appear to carp. Many of us have been waiting for a long time for the account of the Tununermiut from Matthiasson. This book has charm, as well as historic interest. It tells us what Pond Inlet was like soon after the permanent settlement was formed in 1961. Perhaps more important, we get images of a caring field investigator which documents the personal equation in his fieldwork. But is this enough? Might not the Tununermiut of Pond Inlet deserve an analysis of their present situation which would surely provide some stark contrasts with the data collected in 1963-4 and 1973? All of us have obligations as anthropologists to the people who have so patiently put up with our often impertinent questioning.