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Recensions / Book Reviews

LYONS, Natasha

2013 *Where the Wind Blows Us: Practicing Critical Community Archaeology in the Canadian North*, Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 230 pages.

Full disclosure: I participated in one of the projects that the author drew upon in writing this book. Yet the first question that came to mind when I received a copy was, “What is critical community archaeology?”

The author, Natasha Lyons, received a Ph.D. in archaeology from the University of Calgary in 2007. Her graduate studies took place in a milieu of vigorous debate amongst archaeologists about the ethics, and indeed the legitimacy, of what in hindsight can be called “traditional” approaches to exploring the past, in which the focus is on the discovery of objects and their physical contexts in archaeological sites and on the use of analytical techniques drawn from various branches of science to explain archaeological phenomena. When knowledge held by descendant communities is used, archaeologists in most cases are the arbiters of this information, controlling how it is evaluated and incorporated into their research. Lyons argues that critical social theory, which seeks alternatives to superimposing one’s own perspectives onto the knowledge and experiences of others, can offer a more constructive approach to learning about the heritage of extant societies through the medium of their archaeological sites and artifacts. Returning to the title of this volume, the “critical” aspect of “critical community archaeology” is a reference to critiquing the archaeologist-centred approach to exploring the past, and “community” implies that the role of archaeologists, anthropologists, ethnographers, and others with academic labels and training can usefully be to augment and serve the curiosity and contributions that local and descendant communities bring to explorations of their heritage. In other words, critical community archaeology is about archaeology serving the needs of the community, rather than vice versa.

In this book, Lyons draws on research that she has undertaken on the cultural heritage of the Inuvialuit, as the Inuit of the western regions of Arctic Canada refer to themselves. Expressed as a linear narrative, theirs is a long history that extends from a “Time Immemorial” told in myths and legends, flows into a more recent period remembered mainly through oral histories of an age when people lived most of their lives on the land, relying on traditional and individual knowledge, and is followed by a tumultuous period marked by the arrival of foreigners and their colonial institutions, proselytizing religions, diseases, and residential schools. This sadly familiar trajectory took an important turn in the 1970s with the beginning of a grassroots process of negotiating a land claim with the Government of Canada that led to the signing of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) in 1984. The IFA has instilled in Inuvialuit a strong

pride in their culture, and has stimulated initiatives led or supported by Inuvialuit aimed at regaining control over the ownership and interpretation of their cultural heritage. As Lyons reads the current situation, the goal of these initiatives is to shift the control of the production of knowledge of Inuvialuit cultural heritage into “shared hands.” *Where the Winds Blow Us* presents us with two case studies couched in the tenets of critical theory as examples of how archaeologists and local communities can work together to that end.

The book is divided into three parts: critique, practice, and reflection. The author points out that these are the primary elements of critical theory. The critique section broadly surveys current discourse on imbalances between archaeologists and (for the most part) Aboriginal peoples in how the past is represented. Lyons then directs the critique to archaeological and historical studies in the Arctic, revealing what she sees as ‘injustices’ in one-sided representations of Inuvialuit that have arisen from these studies.

The section on “Practice” focuses on the “Inuvialuit Archaeology Partnership” that developed in the course of Lyon’s involvement with archaeological investigations in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region as a Parks Canada archaeologist, and subsequently as coordinator of a project through which Inuvialuit have explored their connections to a rich and diverse collection of ethnographic materials, obtained by Hudson’s Bay Company employee Roderick MacFarlane for the Smithsonian Institution, that were collected while he was based at Fort Anderson in the 1860s. Although most researchers from an academic background would make a distinction between archaeological items excavated from the ground and ethnological objects that went directly from the hands of people who made and used them to museums, to Inuvialuit they are inseparable parts of their heritage. The two projects had the same objective: to involve Inuvialuit elders in the process of interpreting their own histories, and to acknowledge the legitimacies of their interpretations. This was undertaken by recording elders’ thoughts, memories, and ideas while they were handling artifacts, and by using unstructured interviews aimed at encouraging rather than directing discussions. Rather than being asked what particular objects might have been used for, the elders were given licence to more broadly discuss the cultural context in which the objects might have been used. In many cases, the archaeological artifacts and museum objects brought back memories of personal experiences, and recollections of knowledge that they had learned from their elders that were not directly associated with the artifacts. In this sense, rather than being objects to study, the artifacts became touchstones that exposed a rich body of cultural information that went beyond the items at hand.

In the “Reflection” section, Lyons reflects and builds on the ideas presented in the earlier sections of the book. She first looks at ways that alternatives to archaeologist-centred approaches are enriching the discipline of archaeology on a broad level before shifting her gaze to Inuvialuit, and how (as reported in the “Practice” section) they obtain, regard, and use knowledge about their past. The traumas of the past, rather than weakening Inuvialuit cultural identity, have strengthened the resolve of many in the Inuvialuit community to re-connect with and reinforce their cultural heritage, and Lyons concludes that the critical community archaeology approach that she advocates

has been successful in bringing forth Inuvialuit perspectives on their cultural heritage and identity.

Where the Wind Blows Us is an important contribution to discussions on the purpose and relevance of archaeological research, especially in instances where there are clear links between physical objects surviving from the past and local communities. Although the author's main purpose in writing the book was to highlight the role of Inuvialuit in research processes and in generating knowledge about their own past, the book also offers the reader information about Inuvialuit cultural heritage that is interesting and informative in itself. Framing the Inuvialuit role and achievements in terms of critical theory will likely make this a difficult read for people who do not participate in the culture of academia; however, it is important for the messages that are contained in the book to be communicated to new generations of university-trained scholars. No doubt the book will also provide researchers who are more advanced in their careers with much to reflect upon as they consider the relevance of their own work.

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NAPPAALUK, Mitiarjuk

2014 *Sanaaq*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 248 pages.

Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk has gifted Canada and the Inuit world, of both past and present, with her beautiful story, her novel *Sanaaq*. She has allowed each of us a small look into the once everyday existence of the Inuit from her home territory in northern Quebec. The world is a better place for it.

Sanaaq was released in English on New Year's Day of 2014. In a prior book review, Martin (2014) mentioned that *Sanaaq* represents a non-traditional novel. Indeed, the novel is historically thought of in terms of structure and subject matter, but *Sanaaq* veers from the literary constraints of how a novel is produced. This novel was written over a 20-year timeframe and took another 20 years to be birthed into the English domain. Some will say it is an ethnographic study of the everyday life of the Inuit shortly before the arrival of the Qallunaat, as missionaries, businessmen, and medical staff. But what has to be remembered, as stressed by Trott (2014), is that *Sanaaq* is a novel that was originally completed in Inuktitut in 1974 and first published in syllabics in 1984, with a premier translation into French in 2002.¹ It thus took 40

¹ Bernard Saladin d'Anglure did the translation from Inuktitut to French.