

WRIGHT, Shelley, 2014 *Our Ice is Vanishing / Sikuvut Nunguliqtuq: A History of Inuit, Newcomers, and Climate Change*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 420 pages

Christina Williamson

Volume 40, numéro 1, 2016

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1040154ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1040154ar>

[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

Williamson, C. (2016). Compte rendu de [WRIGHT, Shelley, 2014 *Our Ice is Vanishing / Sikuvut Nunguliqtuq: A History of Inuit, Newcomers, and Climate Change*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 420 pages]. *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 40(1), 233–234. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1040154ar>

WRIGHT, Shelley

2014 *Our Ice is Vanishing / Sikuvut Nunguliqtuq: A History of Inuit, Newcomers, and Climate Change*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 420 pages.

Beautifully written in a lively, conversational tone, *Our Ice is Vanishing* combines history, human geography, and environmental science into one ambitious book. Shelley Wright argues that Inuit are witnesses to the melting sea ice and are sharing an important message about the global consequences of climate change. Wright's book is a warning to Qallunaat (non-Inuit) that they need to stop and listen to Inuit—particularly elders with their highly specialized local knowledges of the Arctic—before it is too late.

Though not explicitly laid out in this way, the book has three major sections. The first section is characterized by journeys, starting with the migrations of the Dorset, Thule, and Inuit in the North to the 19th-century journeys of British explorers. To counterbalance the European explorers, Wright refreshingly includes a chapter on the travels and explorations of the legendary hero Kiviuiq and *angakkuq* (shaman) Qidtlarssuaq (also known as Qillaq). The second section is more politically-oriented and discusses issues surrounding Canadian and Inuit sovereignty, the High Arctic relocations, residential schools, and the creation of Nunavut. The final section is a discussion on climate change and a case study on *nanuq* (polar bear) that convincingly pulls together the threads of historical, economic, political, and climatic change.

The book is beautifully printed with many full-page photographs and maps. Coupled with its almost exclusive use of secondary research, the book is intended for a broad audience. It may find use as an undergraduate textbook, albeit a slightly expensive one. Unfortunately, there are a few small errors on the maps. These errors include the location of Igloodik (incorrectly mapped onto Baffin Island) and the location of Winter Harbour on Melville Island, where Sir William Edward Parry and his crew wintered in 1819. Roald Amundsen's name is misspelled and his 1903-1906 Northwest Passage journey is incorrectly mapped.

Wright's legal studies perspective comes into play in some critical ways in the book. She does little to problematize the Euro-Canadian legal structures that have been imposed on Inuit and their land in her otherwise excellent discussions of Canadian sovereignty and Inuit self-governance in the Arctic. While Wright notes that it is imperfect, she argues that the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act signals an end to colonialism in the North and is a harbinger of modernity (pp. 195, 214, 215). Engaging with works like that of Jackie Price on Inuit governance would have given Wright's discussion greater nuance. Price (2008) emphasizes the colonial elements in the governance structures of Nunavut in contrast to Wright's concern about Inuit contending with modernity.

In her discussion of *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*, a traditional knowledge system, Wright argues that it is invaluable to Qallunaat trying to understand the Arctic and its people. However, her attempt to show the agency and validity of Inuit

knowledge replicates the colonial binaries that she tries to dismantle because she frames *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit's* value in terms of its use to Qallunaat instead of acknowledging its value in and of itself. Wright tries to resolve this tension by shifting the conversation to climate change, most specifically in the form of vanishing sea ice. However, because her conceptual framework maintains the foil of Inuit knowledge to Western knowledge, it gives the idea that Inuit are vanishing along with the sea ice. The loss of sea ice is a significant human rights issue, but Inuit did not vanish with the advent of the snowmobile, the shift to year-round settlements, or any other change of the 20th century. This is largely because a central element of Inuit culture and *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* is adaptability, which includes embracing useful technologies and new environments.

This issue could be resolved by acknowledging that Inuit do not necessarily orient their world towards Euro-Canadian worldviews. Scholars focused on knowledge, land, and the North such as Julie Cruikshank (2005) have demonstrated that traditional knowledge is autonomous from Western ontology. Inuit leaders like Terry Audla have argued that this autonomy does not mean that *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* cannot coexist in partnership with Western knowledge. However, it is imperative that Westerners cooperate with *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, not coopt it. To do so requires having the humility to acknowledge the fallibility of our own knowledge systems, and genuinely listening and learning from *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* and other traditional knowledge systems, not subsuming them into Western frameworks of knowledge.

Wright's book prompts us to ask questions about the relationship between history, the environment, and the ways that different people conceive the world. The scholarship surrounding the North and its people is particularly rich in this regard. The ongoing climate change debates highlight the importance of respecting, acknowledging, and listening to the knowledge and perspectives of Inuit. Wright is a voice pushing the conversation in that direction, but it is time for the world to take a step further than what Wright suggests and for all of us to begin to listen with humility.

References

CRUIKSHANK, Julie

2005 *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters and Social Imagination*, Vancouver, UBC Press.

PRICE, Jackie

2008 Living Inuit Governance in Nunavut, in L. Simpson (ed.), *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, Winnipeg, Arbeiter Ring Press: 127-138.

Christina Williamson

Institute for Comparative Studies in Literature, Art and Culture

Carleton University

201Z St. Patrick's Building

1125 Colonel By Drive

Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 5B6, Canada

ChristinaWilliamson@cmail.carleton.ca