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**GÉRIN-LAJOIE, José, Alain CUERRIER, and Laura SIEGWART COLLIER, eds. 2016. "The Caribou Taste Different Now": Inuit Elders Observe Climate Change. Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College Media.**

Book Review by Frédéric Laugrand<sup>i</sup>

It is always pleasing to find a new book that provides views by Inuit Elders. In the last twenty years, Elders have contributed extensively to our understanding of Inuit societies and traditions. They are no more "hiding in the stem of a pipe," to borrow Akisu Joamie's words (Therrien and Laugrand 2001, 3). This book, edited by José Gérin-Lajoie, Alain Cuerrier, and Laura Siegwart Collier, fits very well into the rich collections produced in the 1990s by Nunavut Arctic College (see their series *Interviewing Inuit Elders, Inuit Perspectives on the 20th Century*, etc.). The title is very appropriate and inspiring. From an Inuit perspective, taste clearly reveals the real nature of things; that is, any substantial change is usually expressed by a change of taste. In this book, not only caribou meat but also fish (71–72) and berries (269) are now said to taste different, an indication that the Arctic environment has been transformed. The statement that "the caribou taste different now" refers to the major environmental changes affecting humans, animals, and the land. But these changes are not related solely to climate change. Some changes observed by Elders are due to noise from helicopters (e.g., fewer berries, according to Martha Nukik in Qamanittuaq, 85) and new activities with the opening of mining sites (e.g., more fish dying, according to Mary Anogak from Kangiqsujuaq, 244). In a word, change is due to humans growing in number and becoming more widespread.

The editors of the book also conducted interviews in 8 Canadian Arctic communities with 145 Elders, two-thirds of whom were women and one-third men. In Nunavut, there were 18 interviewees from Kugluktuk, 24 from Qamanittuaq, 19 from Pangnirtuuq, and 15 from Mittimatalik. In Nunavik, there were 19 Elders from Umiujaq, 18 from Kangiqsujuaq, and 9 from Kangiqsualujjuaq. In Nunatsiavut, there were 23 from Nain. The editors should be praised for such a broad cross-community study that goes beyond the classical borders of Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut. It is also nice to have more women than men, since women's voices have been much less recorded than men's. However, the book does not really offer a comparative study, and the few full-page diagrams in the appendix do not tell us very much. Also, we are not told how the editors went about selecting the

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communities and the Elders, and why some communities with many Elders were passed over. It is also a real pity that we do not have more details about each community, or more substantial and personal information for each of the Elders involved in the project.

The editors say they joined forces to understand how environmental changes across the Canadian Arctic are affecting tundra vegetation, focusing especially on the ecology of tundra berry plants, and they say they conducted both field research and community-based monitoring after establishing partnerships with knowledge holders. They conducted oral interviews and mapping consultations, and clearly communicated with many people, and even created thematic posters (7–8). As an anthropologist, however, I see one weakness in this book: we have no access at all to the questions that the interviewers put to the Elders. The interviewers mention that a similar questionnaire was used for all interviews (11), but they should have inserted a copy of the questionnaire in an appendix. This is a serious weakness, since the lack of such information obscures the context in which the knowledge was produced. Elders and readers alike need to know the questions to gain insight into the interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee and the content of the answers. Hence, although the editors mention creation and validation of posters (300), presumably while working on the project, the reader is given no further information. While this book is similar to previous Arctic College publications in the way it carefully preserves the personal nature of Inuit knowledge on various topics (i.e., Elders are quoted and clearly identified by their real names), it is nonetheless different in the way it includes only short quotations without contextual information. Brief introductions present each community but the perspective is far too broad. Let us hope that future studies on Inuit perspectives of climate change can provide more context and understanding of these communities.

Another critique I would address to the editors is a linguistic one. All the interviews across Canada's Arctic were transcribed in the South Baffin dialect of Inuktitut. Martha Flaherty explains this decision in an opening note (3–4), saying the book is intended primarily for students in the Baffin Region. The interviews from other regions were thus translated in real time from the respective dialects into English through a local interpreter and then translated into the South Baffin dialect. She rightly states that such a practice should be avoided as much as possible, and I can only concur; there is indeed a risk of altering what the Elders say and thereby losing the subtleties of the various Inuit dialects. Another option would have been to provide original transcriptions of the various interview excerpts in Inuktitut with an English translation, thus adding more value to the Elders' quotations in Inuktitut.

All this being said, this book is a valuable and excellent contribution to our understanding of Inuit knowledge. It will certainly interest many

people and be worth reading for insight into how contemporary Inuit Elders view the many changes affecting their lands and the animals that enable them to live. Part 1 of the book offers a brief cross-community summary of the environmental changes (16–22). Part 2 is more substantial and offers individual community summaries for the three main regions (Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut) and many quotations from Elders.

A few points will here illustrate the richness of the Elders' perspectives. First, the Elders hold views and recount experiences that express very different perspectives. Any general conclusion is thus difficult to make. In some communities, for instance, Elders have observed an increasing presence of insects (Janet Ikuutaq from Qamanittuaq observes that there are more mosquitoes and flies than before, 92). In other areas, such as Umiujaq (Viola Napartuk, 200) or Pangnirtuuq (Taukie Qappik, 169), Elders have observed fewer insects (mosquitoes and black flies). Even within the same community, the Elders' views can be contrasting. In Qamanittuaq, John Nukik and Lucie Kownak disagree one says that mosquitoes are increasing, and the other says that they are decreasing (92). In Kangiqsualujuaq, Eva Annanack states that berries are disappearing, in contrast to Tivi Etok, who observes that berries have been increasing every year (216). These views must be presented in all their diversity, as they show us the variety of Inuit traditions, and I am happy that the editors presented them this way. At the same time, if they had provided more detailed information about each Elder and his or her statements, some of the differences in their beliefs and observations might have been explained and made more understandable.

In this time of climate change, Elders often refer to animals as increasingly in competition with Inuit. This is quite obvious with polar bears, with whom they share seals as prey, or with wolves, with whom they compete for caribou meat. We learn in this book that it is also true with Canada geese, with whom Inuit, and especially women, compete for berries, as Pauloosie Veeve (157) and Mary Battie, both from Pangnirtuuq (169), state. Verona Ittulak from Nain points out the decline of cod, Arctic char, and capelin fish (275), but the quotation does not indicate who is really responsible. Shall we guess seals or Qallunnaat, or both?

The book also offers rich examples of how Inuit perfectly and deeply know the animals that have provided them with food for so many years. For Elders, animals are moving out on the land all the time, looking for food and good habitats. This applies to polar bears or beluga, for instance. According to Lukasi Nappaaluk from Kangiqsujuaq (243), belugas are moving closer to shore or travelling along the coast, depending on ice conditions in Hudson Strait. For other animals, Inuit evoke the existence of connections. Thus, Norman Attungala from Qamanittuaq explains that caribou with new fur foretell the departure of mosquitoes and the coming of black flies (94). In this book, Ruth Sangoya from Mittimatalik elegantly attacks the way

Qallunaat look at the problem of polar bears, stating that these animals are not declining at all; on the contrary, she argues, they are becoming more numerous (134), a view shared by Christine Baikie from Nain (275) and many Inuit hunters.

In many cases, the Elders say that certain animals, as well as plants and berries, are now more and more abundant. Some state that they are starting to encounter a lot of new animals, especially birds and black bears (Mark Tertuluk and Lukasi Nappaaluk, both from Kangiqsujuaq, 243) and muskox (John Nukik from Qamanittuaq, 92). Many Elders say they are seeing new plants or increased growth of plants (Susie Morgan from Kanqisualujuaq, 216). In Pangnirtuuq, the editors explain, “Elders have observed greater abundance of shrubs, such as willows and dwarf birch” (151); certain species are becoming more abundant, too, such as Arctic cotton grass and American dune grass, and they are even seeing new flowering plants (e.g., dandelions) and grasses. Interestingly, among the Elders from Baffin coastal communities that have turned to evangelism and Pentecostalism, most interpret this new abundance as a sign of the beginning of a new religious era. This is quite clear with the abundance of berries, for instance, which is often presented on evangelical blogs as a true sign that a religious transformation is at work. So when the editors point out, “There was little consensus among Elders from Pond Inlet regarding vegetation change” (119), this might be explained by religious factors, as this community is still strongly rooted in Anglicanism. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are expanding there but are still not dominant.

These interviews with Elders reveal another interesting point: their beliefs about animals are being transformed by their diet. Thus, Irene Taviniq Kaluraq and Hattie Attutuvaa, both from Qamanittuaq, point out that birds and siksiit (Arctic ground squirrels) are eating meat that they didn’t eat in the past (92). Verona Ittulak from Nain states that black bears, gulls, and crows are eating from the dump (279). These remarks require further context and discussion, which is beyond the scope of this review. Of similar interest is what Inuit observe about the wind. Joshua Sala from Umiujaq, for instance, states that winds are now much stronger than in the past (208), when shamans—this detail is not in the book—used to cut them with their knives or their hooks (Laugrand and Oosten 2010, 145). Another challenging contrast exists between some Elders, who say the earth is warming up (67) and receiving less snow, and those who feel the North is getting colder, as noticed jokingly by Winnie and Jacob Ikinilik from Qamanittuaq (100) and Moses Novalinga from Umiujaq (210).

To conclude, *“The Caribou Taste Different Now”: Inuit Elders Observe Climate Change* is very pleasant to read and well illustrated. Statements by the Elders always appear in both Inuktitut and English. Sheila Watt-Cloutier rightly praises the book as “absolutely invaluable,” and it benefits from a

short foreword by Mary Simon. In my view, however, no easy conclusions can be made from so many statements from Elders. The changes discussed are broad and refer not only to climate change but also to actions by the growing human population in the North. I will leave the final word to Jaco Ishulutaq from Pangnirtuuq whose comments illustrate the power of Inuit knowledge and offer readers, including Qallunaat, much to think about: “As Inuit, our way of thinking has a lot to do with our environment. For people in the North, you know how the seasons work and your body has to be in sync with the land all the time. It’s true that your mind and body are not so much in sync with the land anymore” (185).

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