

**Joe Karetak, Frank Tester & Shirley Tagalik, eds. *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: What Inuit Have Always Known to Be True*. Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2017. 268 pp. ISBN: 9781552669914.**

<https://fernwoodpublishing.ca/book/inuit-qaujimajatuqangit>

This collection presents essays by nine Nunavut elders on topics related to Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit—what Inuit have known for a very long time. Right off the bat, co-editors Joe Karetak and Frank Tester problematize the connotations of ‘traditional’ knowledge, emphasizing that instead of belonging to a now-fading past, the lessons that the elders have to share are profoundly relevant for contemporary life. The resulting book is a rich archive of experiences, reflections, and clear teachings for the future, which are relevant not only to contemporary Inuit, but—as the editors emphasize—for non-Inuit as well.

Most striking about this volume is its consistent emphasis on family life and childrearing—or inunnguiniq, making a human being. Readers may already have some sense of the depth of Inuit knowledge as it pertains to living in Arctic environments, for instance when it comes to the harvesting of wildlife, the navigation of sea ice, etc. But the stories told in this book (by male and female elders alike) emphasize that the development of able human beings—who can manage the challenges provided not only by the land but also by life in contemporary communities—begins in early childhood, and the teachings around this are rich and complex. Mark Kalluak (himself a writer and editor who dedicated his life to the preservation of Inuit language and culture) notes that when children are scolded, “they become sad and lose interest” in things (47). A child’s feelings, he suggests, are central to their ability to learn. Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak explains, meanwhile, that children should neither be coddled as if they were eggs nor hardened into rocks (143). Atuat Akittiq notes that evidence of a child who is inuttiavaungittuq—who often displays a bad attitude—is that “little things will get him or her upset. The child won’t care if the tension inside of them spills out on everyone around them” (112). Maturity, resourcefulness, a commitment to helping others: these things spring from a bedrock of emotional wellbeing that benefits not only the child themselves but also the community around them.

Many elders note with concern the changes in the ways that children are being raised—and the introductory chapter by Frank Tester provides the sobering context for these cultural shifts, as it describes the impacts of tuberculosis epidemics, paternalistic government relocation policies, and the residential school system. The elders’ essays extend this critique with their emphasis on the vast pedagogical differences—and the interruption in traditional childrearing—represented by the contemporary school system. “It was like the parents gave up their right to control their children when they sent them to school,” says Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak. While some note the potential for Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit to be integrated into the schools and other Nunavut institutions, elders like Atuat Akittiq also question the dominance of Eurowestern structures and their often token inclusions of Inuit ways of doing things: referencing the justice system, she points out, “We are invited to sit in a court case, but everything is already arranged. They’ve already planned the case even before we are invited.... No other power is given to us” (123-124). The many challenges facing contemporary Inuit youth render the task of passing along Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit even more pressing—and elders like Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak apply these

teachings to their own pedagogical practice, centering adaptability and a concern for emotional intelligence: “I often try to live in my children’s and grandchildren’s way a little bit... just so they are comfortable with me....” Karetak says. “We can still make a human being in such a way that it will not seem too much—or too different—by collaborating with today’s ways of learning” (119-120). Near the end of the book, Joe Karetak’s gripping tale of having survived with his son after being swept out to sea during a seal hunt—reminding his son to stay calm, carefully parcelling out his own remaining energy, and using his mind to combat hypothermia, even as he was required to save the rescue pilot who managed to crash his helicopter through the thin ice—provides a illustration of the nuance, adaptability, and ongoing relevance of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit.

Co-editor Shirley Tagalik relates that the elders’ “most sincere wish is that the book will provide Inuit with access to their own process of healing by reconnecting them with the unique knowledge and perspectives of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit” (xv). This idea seems to be in tension, however, with the book’s production, which appears in some ways to prioritize accessibility to a broader (non-Inuit) readership—most notably through the fact that the elders’ essays have been translated into English. It may be that this eases the complexity of publishing contributions written (or dictated) in multiple dialects of Inuktitut—perhaps English is being used as a textual lingua franca for the Inuit readers whom the elders wished to reach? Perhaps the Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun originals, whether written or recorded, will be made available in another venue? But the editors—and the epilogue written by Cree academic Margo Greenwood—emphasize the significance of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit to non-Inuit, as well. This rings true, and yet the shift in audience changes the nature of the conversation somewhat, given the worry that the elders are said to have felt “about how the book might be used” (xi). Norman Attangalaaq provides context, explaining that “when we are asked about Inuit laws it is extremely awkward to answer instantly, knowing that Inuit have been chastised and made to feel embarrassed about rituals or practices...” (107). While the book most certainly does provide an invaluable resource for non-Inuit seeking to better understand Inuit ways, one hopes that its publication does not compare to the story that Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak tells about her brand new embroidered white kamiik (boots), which she was required to give away to a visiting stranger for a pittance.

Southern audiences can remain grateful in any case for the existence of this volume, which both educates readers and also provides guidelines for ways in which we might become more adept educators ourselves—by situating learning within relationships, emotional landscapes, and hands-on experience; by embracing the adaptability of tradition; and by choosing our words with extreme care. The example that the elders have provided in this volume is indeed the most generous gift.

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