

Climate, Culture, Change: Inuit and Western Dialogues with a Warming North.

The effects of climate change on Canada's North are gaining worldwide attention. Stories on the opening of Northwest Passage to commercial shipping, the moving of the tree line northward and the increasingly perilous plight of the polar bear abound in the mass media. In *Climate, Culture, Change* Timothy Leduc problematizes such narratives in the growth-oriented and ethnocentric form in which they generally filter down to the majority of people in the Canadian South. Furthermore, he argues that the present climate crisis requires research and political action, particularly for Westerners, to allow themselves to be informed by the "intercultural inspiration of a heartfelt global conscience"(214).

Much of this green intercultural inspiration is based upon a comparative analysis informed by concepts of Gaia and *Sedna* (see below). For the former, Leduc draws heavily on the eco-theologian, Anne Primavesi, and her reflections on the sacred qualities of Gaia—the ancient European name for Mother Earth. In terms of the latter area, he takes inspiration from indigenous philosopher, Jaypeetee Arnakak, including the ethnographic-style research in dialogue with Arnakak and other Inuit living in territory claimed by Canada. Both strands are in turn supplemented by textual research.

Through these two concepts and further integrating of northern indigenous knowledge, Leduc's readers learn that *Sila*, often translated into English merely as "weather", in fact holds deep cultural significance for the Inuit. Leduc's unfolding of the term demonstrates how, when *Sila* is purged of its colonial renderings, it can be brought forward to denote wisdom in the broadest sense of the term. As such, *Sila* is not an anthropomorphic god but rather "a spiritual reference that is meant to contextualize the physicality of human relations within broader ecological processes like the weather" (27).

Sila is one of many Inuit terms that Leduc chooses to unfold rather than translate in this monograph. In the end, this strategy is effective in fostering insight into *Inuit Qaujimatugangit* (IQ). According to Leduc's analysis, IQ is a form of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) that is best understood, not in the technical sense of TEK common in environmental management context, but rather as an entire paradigm or worldview of Inuit knowledge and life built upon a spiritual veneration of "nature as the source

and end of life”(Aranakak quoted on p. 233). Within IQ, *ilira* denotes the presence of a certain type of fear associated with worst of Western conformist colonialism. In its modern form, this *ilira* first appeared on the horizon for the Inuit with arrival of Western missionaries in the North. In an eerie and telling confluence, this moment, as Leduc emphasizes, is also the time when Inuit began to notice the present changes in *Sila*'s northern climate. Currently, the term is also used to describe the fear associated with hungry polar bears overrunning human communities in the North, as the bears come inland due to the absence of sea ice upon which they depend to hunt seals. This new incarnation of *ilira* makes walking in these communities dangerous, as reinforced through increasingly common stories of people being attacked, killed and even eaten by polar bears.

Leduc's readers will also learn about *Sedna*, sometimes referred to as the sea goddess of the Inuit, who is both creature and creator and the source of much animal life in the North. According to IQ, to be an agent of creation, *Sedna* had to sacrifice her fingers. She retains control over the animals but cannot tend her own hair due to a lack of digits. If humans transgress the natural order, for instance by not adequately respecting their prey, *Sedna*'s hair will become soiled and unruly and she will hold back the animals. On the ground and ice, for a culture dependant on the animals for life, the absence of animals means want, hunger and even death. The shaman must restore the natural order. He does so by entering a mythical realm and journeying to bottom of the sea where *Sedna* lives. There, the shaman makes amends by tending to her hair and she, in turn, releases the animals. Bringing this narrative forward across cultures through an informative synthesis, Leduc writes of Gaia's smoggy hair as requiring tending and cleaning by a global populace acting in solidarity, just as at the regional level *Sedna*'s hair also requires such care.

Leduc's analysis of the Canadian political scene up until the time of the Conference of the Parties meetings in Copenhagen (2009) paints the Harper government as failing to foster a global conscience that would clean Gaia and *Sedna*'s hair. Although not specifically analysing the platforms of the Green Party or the NDP, he locates the most tenable option between two "distinct" (181) choices as being found in Liberal leader Stephan Dion's *Green Shift* plan which was part of the Liberal Party of Canada's platform during the 2008 general election. Yet, as Leduc notes, even this ecologically problematic option, based on liberal economic assumptions related to the

importance of growth, was rejected by the Canadian electorate. In its place, according to Leduc, Harper's Conservatives offered a new version of a growth-based frontier economy. This new version of the frontier economy includes an active support of the tar sands as ethical oil and their promise of development, a military presence and deep water ports for the North that are geared towards more firmly establishing Canadian sovereignty in the region. The programming also previews the use of Northwest Passage for more frequent international shipping, including the movement of toxic wastes and products through a fragile arctic ecosystem.

Based upon a hope to change such trends, the present volume had as its origin in a PhD dissertation for York University's Environmental Studies program. Perhaps as a result of this origin, the resultant book is well-referenced but it also diverts from its main argument at points. Nonetheless, these diversions are often interesting and do not serve in any substantive way to weaken the cogent lesson of *Climate, Change, Culture* that regional and global conscience need to work in ecological harmony. Such harmony is necessary if we are to respond adequately to an anthropogenic-based climate crisis that has the growing potential to maim and suffocate, not only the Inuit culture in the North, but also cause environmental degradation that will be experienced by all cultures around the world. Leduc suggests that something akin to what others have called an apocalyptic imagination, combined with a deeper sense of interconnectivity, can help awaken Westerners from a slumber built upon hyper-individualism, overconsumption and political misinformation. This "awakening" is necessary to move towards a more conscientious and sustainable relationship with the socio-cultural and ecological worlds in which we are all embedded. In the terms of this volume, *Gaia, Sila* and *Sedna* would certainly benefit from some help from a critical mass of greener Western moral actors. Leduc's notion of intercultural dialogue seems an appropriate place to begin such a transformative process. For that reason alone, *Climate, Culture and Change* is important reading for minds that can, in turn, influence the hearts and actions of Western populations and their political representatives in our dangerous times.