



Book Review

Stern, P.R. 2010. *The Daily Life of the Inuit*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press.

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The Inuit are an indigenous Arctic people in the tundra of Alaska, northern Canada, Greenland, and the Bering and Chukchi sea coasts of Russia. This huge span of territory covers half of the earth north of the Arctic Circle and makes the Inuit the most widely dispersed indigenous population in the world (xxii). *The Daily Life of the Inuit* is an attempt at the first serious study of contemporary Inuit culture from the post-WWII era to the present. This ambitious goal is not easily obtained due to the many different language dialects, regional cultural differences, various colonial and religious influences, and current governmental structures of this widely dispersed group of people. In fact, Inuit is not even a culturally acceptable term in much of Alaska because Alaska Natives believe that Inuit refers only to the Canadian and Greenlandic peoples (Kaplan, 2002). Specifically, the Yup'ik Eskimos of Alaska do not consider themselves to be culturally related to the Inuit and I would argue that

their occasional inclusion in Stern's book is problematic. Although indicating that Alaska Natives of the North Slope (Inupiaq) are "culturally distinct from Inuit in Canada and Greenland" (xxi) Stern does not present a clear case for their inclusion in the text. Because the subject matter is so wide-ranging, Stern is forced to use vague language such as "in some parts of the Inuit north" (p. 16) leaving the reader wondering why such a broad ethnography was undertaken. This surface-level ethnography may be used with caution in introductory anthropology classes because the text oversimplifies many cultural features and may lead to stereotyping of an incredibly diverse people.

The book is laid out in a traditional ethnographic fashion, covering such typical topics as family life, language, economics, politics, and health and medicine. This text favors Canada, the geographic region that Stern has researched throughout her career. The text does not flow well making some

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chapters hard to read with their odd section juxtapositions. For instance, in the chapter on community life, the section on forced relocation of Inuit populations immediately precedes the section on calendars and time reckoning (p. 63). Additionally, many of the sections within these chapters are small with little to no anthropological interpretation, analysis, or concluding thoughts from Stern. It reads as a report of facts, which many in the field would argue is not the case in modern anthropological inquiry (Rosaldo, 1993). Most troubling is Stern's tendency to put some words in quotations, seemingly indicating that some Inuit ideas cannot possibly be true. For example, in a discussion of a third gender Stern states that genitals were "observed" to split at birth (p. 12), clearly showing her doubt of oral tradition.

Her treatment of Inuit subsistence struggles is very well done. Because traditional subsistence crosscuts diet, politics, economics, religion, and health, she has successfully incorporated adequate discussion of this issue throughout the text. As various legislation has passed to restrict or ban traditional hunting activities on seals and whales, Inuit are more restricted to diets based on non-traditional, or "market foods." Not only does this affect health but forming hunting parties and whaling crews and sharing in the kill are important social activities. Restrictions have also been placed on the technology allowed for subsistence hunting. Stern states that The International Whaling Commission (IWC) defines "indigenous" whalers as those using traditional darting and killing technologies instead of modern efficient, and more humane, methods (p. 79). Stern rightly points out that these darting technologies have themselves been adapted from 19th century commercial whalers (Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, 2007). Further restrictions on the sale of seal and whale

products have also adversely affected Inuit economic activities, leaving them little choice but to try to find wage labor in small villages with little to no opportunities. In this discussion, Stern argues that externally imposed definitions of subsistence harvesting restrict the Inuit interpretation of what constitutes authentic Inuit culture (p. 50). Stern also asserts that a diet based solely on traditional Inuit foods does not result in any vitamin or micronutrient deficiencies (164), however, some research has often indicated otherwise. Studies have shown that traditional foods do not contain sufficient vitamin C (Fediuk et al., 2002), calcium, and vitamin A (Kuhnlein et al., 1996).

Overall, this text provides a very rough outline of the daily life of the Inuit. I would liked to have seen more anthropological discussion of ecological issues and the use of indigenous knowledge in conservation policies, especially in Inuit-governed regions like Nunavut, Canada and Greenland. However, it may not be possible to adequately address each issue with anthropological analyses in a single book because of the wide variety of cultural groups and vast geographic distribution of the Inuit.

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