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# Dog Sleds for Ski Doos: Inuit Identity on the Cusp of Change

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**Abstract:** This paper examines Inuit identity and the effects of contact with Western cultures. Alteration to tradition can be traced by establishing generational cohorts and examining their cultural differences. I stipulate that the present Inuit identity is molded from various received elements and in part from traditional *inummariq*. This paper argues that political yearnings have also changed Inuit identity by the introduction of a tertiary system of identification involving a pan-Inuit, a Canadian, and a cultural sub-group (*miut* group) affiliation. Finally, I believe that the creation of the semi-sovereign Nunavut Territory in 1999 introduced not only a regional form of identification (as opposed to other non-independent Inuit territories within established Canadian provinces and territories) but asserted Inuit autonomy over their land. I examine the success of the Nunavut Territory from a sociopolitical stance and assuming that Inuit wish to achieve success beyond gaining political autonomy.

**Keywords:** Inuit identity, *Inummariq*, Inuit *Nunangat*, Nunavut Territory, Inuit Autonomy

## Introduction

Inuit[1] in Arctic Canada lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle before World War II. In seasonal cycles, an animal-derived food source was harvested. Inuit hunted terrestrial game native to the Arctic, such as caribou, in *ilagit*, an extended family unit of approximately fifty individuals, that also functioned as a small hunting party. When pack ice formed, igloos were built close to the floe edge to breathing hole fish, while after thawing, they erected caribou hide tents. In the dead of winter—including the approximately forty days of night—social ties were strengthened by congregating and building a *qaggiq*, a sort of communal feasting place, around locations where cached leftover meat was stored from the previous season. This paleolithic peace was disrupted by the arrival of European whalers and later, Arctic fox traders, missionaries, and explorers. The close-knit world of Inuit hardly maintained any relationship with the Dene and Innu First Nations with whom they shared the southern parts of their Arctic hunting grounds.[2]

[1] Inuit means "the people;" due to its plural form the word does not take the English plural "s" and does not have a frontal definite article. The word "Inuit" is used both as an adjective and as a noun (https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/writing-tips-plus/inuk-inuit).

[2] Innu are formerly known as the Naskapi-Montagnais Nation, who are an Algonquian-speaking people whose hunting grounds are called Nitassinan, located on the eastern portion of the Québec-Labrador peninsula. Innu means 'people.' Dene, also known as Athapaskan, are from the Northwest Territories (part of which was given to Nunavut) and Alaska; altogether forming the Denendeh, meaning 'the land of the people.'

The transition from semi-nomadic to sedentary lifestyle, quite atypically, happened in the course of the 20th century. The hunter-gatherer existence of Inuit was first supplemented then overcome by participation in trapping, thus creating a ground initially for barter, then for selling pelts, which provided income to spend for the first time in the history of the people. Modern hunting tools and commodities that made both hunting and winter survival easier found their way into Inuit households. Elders acknowledged that the old way of life was passing as new tools and tastes were acquired, leaving behind age-old traditions (Damas, *Arctic* 50). Boats, rifles, and spear guns replaced the use of *kayak*, *unaaq* (ivory and stone harpoon) and *kakivak* (spears). The hardships from the constant moves were alleviated by the adoption of Western inventions and commodities, subsequently, the wandering Inuit lifestyle became obsolete.

The Hudson's Bay Company [HBC] gained major influence in the Arctic through introducing Inuit to the foundations of a trapping-based mixed economy by making staple goods available in exchange for fox pelts, meanwhile Ottawa provided government reliefs from the 1940s on in order to include the Arctic into the welfare state of Canada.[3] Attracted by the goods stored inside HBC trading posts, an increasing number of campers started to congregate around them. Although some Inuit secured jobs this way, by and large, they were not interfered with as a non-interventionist policy until after WWII in order to maintain the traditional way of life.[4] The Canadian government supported a policy of non-interference and encouraged Inuit to stay in their camps and live off the land following their traditions. Although the transactional nature of trapping was not traditional to Inuit, it involved hunting, therefore, Ottawa's preservationist policy was backed by all parties. Encouraging Inuit to trap and hunt, staying on the land and not close to trading posts was a government plan. This was achieved by endorsing a so-called "policy of dispersal;" however, this approach ended up being a failure.

Regardless of the non-interventionist stance of the government, the last generation of wayfaring Inuit—despite the efforts of HBC and the RCMP (The Royal Canadian Mounted Police) staff on the ground—did not want to disperse, instead, they wanted contact with Southerners and by the 1950s, an increasing number of permanent Inuit camps were being maintained near HBC posts. Eventually, the policy of dispersal was abandoned for the introduction of the Canadian welfare state. Inuit, for the first time, were regarded as Canadian citizens who needed healthcare, education, and a job opportunity.

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[3] David Damas, Arctic Migrants/Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 39.

[4] David Damas, Arctic Migrants/Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 42.

To deliver the welfare state to the North—which is half the size of Canada and was at the time home to only 7700 people— presented a challenge.[5] The solution eventually led to centralization and a tenfold population boost with about 75 000 Inuit living in Canada as of 2025. Hamlets were created around nearby trading posts already frequented by Inuit. Since most Inuit lands are located above the tree line, churches, schools, and healthcare facilities were built from materials shipped from the South. Additional relocations took place in the 1950s to avoid famine in game-scarce locations, but most settlements were initiated by independent migration to areas where an HBC trading post had already been built. The Inuit-operated Inuit Housing Committee, however, *was* found to pressure Inuit who still pursued a traditional lifestyle to move to the newly-built settlements.[6] Soon, instead of hunting, most families lived in settlements, but failed to secure jobs, which presented a whole new problem.

In reality the success of the welfare state was hindered by the difficulties finding Southern (i.e. Westerners South of the Inuit homeland) employees who were qualified and willing to take a post in the Arctic. The idea of travelling doctors and teachers was entertained, but eventually cast aside. For Inuit, who were primarily hunters, the problem was that they were not yet ready to make the leap from hunting to working 9 to 5; furthermore, language barriers and cultural differences plagued the welfare state project.[7] During this time, housing programs were introduced and individual dwellings built from wood transported to the tundra. The decreasing number of full-time hunters reveal that from the contact-traditional era on, Inuit have been losing the commitment and interest in subsistence hunting and fishing, which I believe is largely due to the introduction of Southern goods, such as guns, fishing boats and other commodities and the engagement in a South-induced mixed economy based on trapping (at least until its collapse), an activity that took time away from hunting. However, the new state of living does not please everyone and since the introduction of the welfare state, Inuit citizens have kept complaining. Lack of funds to buy equipment to hunt, lack of training in traditional hunting methods, lack of time to hunt due to wage work (in which—according to the numbers of 2020—only 40% of the population engages in), addiction to organized sports, and television were named as the main problems.[8] Based on my Arctic experience in the Inuit settlement of Nunavut in the

[5] David Damas, *Arctic Migrants/Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic*, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 117.
[6] David Damas, *Arctic Migrants/Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic*, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 194.
[7] David Damas, *Arctic Migrants/Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic*, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 44.
[8] Richard G. Condon, Peter Collings and George Wenzel, "The Best Part of Life: Subsistence Hunting, Ethnicity,

Canadian Arctic, I observed a considerable degree of unemployment, while truancy and high drop-out rates plagued my classes filled with young adults entranced by modern life. As of 2020, the unemployment rate has soared to 60 %, thus, only the minority of the Inuit settlement residents participate in the labor force. Both the data and the complaints from Inuit suggest that the manner in which Inuit identity is actualized has departed from the time of the Elders who lived on and off the land without needing anything in the form of compulsory education in hunting and commodities beyond what they had made.

## The South in the North: The Process of Cultural Change in the Inuit Homeland

European Norsemen have been postulated to have made contact with the *Tuniq* (Dorset) culture in 986 CE, which was prior to the appearance of the Thule, the forebears of the present-day Inuit, however, some, like Northern scholar and anthropologist Robert W. Park, disagree with this hypothesis. The European-*Tuniq* contact is posited based on identifying the sod-house-living sedentary *Tuniq* lifestyle with the Greenlandic *Skrælingja* whom the Norse met in the 10th century.[9] Park's stance is based on radiocarbon dating *Tuniq* sculptures that were suspected to have European influence.[10] In any event, the *Tuniit* had vanished by the 1100s CE, and made way for the caribou-hide-tent-dwelling nomadic Thule, who are the ancestors of present-day Inuit. In either of the scenarios (Norsemen met either *Tuniit*, or Thule, or both, or neither), as I see it, Norse culture did not influence the autochthonous inhabitants of the Arctic to a significant degree.

Visitors from Europe, particularly since the 17th century on, brought their culture to the North when they first came as whalers, then fur traders followed in the late 18th century, until those businesses collapsed. Ethnographer Knud Rasmussen describes the relationship between Inuit and the Westerners, or *Qallunaat* as that of a barter. Upon meeting an Inuit couple in Naujaat, the wife explains that "she [Takornâq] had moved down [from Igloolik] to Repulse Bay [today's Naujaat] with her husband, Padloq, expressly in order to be near white men and all the wealth which one could obtain by bartering with them."[11] As for the nature of the relationship with *Qallunaat*, once proximity has been established, she expounds further:

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and Economic Adaptation among Young Adult Inuit Males," *Arctic*, vol. 48, no. 1 (1995), 32.

[9] Hans Christian Gulløv, "The Nature of Contact between Native Greenlanders and Norse," *Journal of the North Atlantic*, vol. 1 (2008), 16.

[10] Robert W. Park, "Contact between the Norse Vikings and the Dorset Culture in Arctic Canada," *Antiquity* vol. 82, no. 315 (2008), 196–97.

[11] Knud Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos, Vol. VII, No. 1 of Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24*. Translated by William Worster and W. E. Calvert. (Gyldendal: 1929), 21.

> It is quite a common thing among us to change wives. And when a man lends his wife to another, he always lies with the other man's wife. But with white men it was different; none of them had their wives with them to lend in exchange. So, they gave presents instead, and thus it was that many men in our tribe looked on it as only another kind of exchange.[12]

The influence of Europe continued between the 1830s and 1990s in the form of Christian missions that functioned as hospitals, churches, and eventually schools. The start of the 1940s saw not only the creation of hamlets, but—due to the resulting sedentism—the end of the Inuit nomads. Sedentism, primarily in the form of permanent settlements allowed for *Qallunaat* or visitor/settler cultures to build more churches and strengthen already existing parishes. Rather than hunting across a land without borders, the polar nomads had first become denizens, people living in Canada on the path of the long road to realize their full potential as voting citizens of Canada.

The primary influence on Inuit identity has been contact with other cultures, not only European, but First Nations, such as the Innu and Dene Nations who lived in their proximity. I stress that in many cases change is welcomed by subsistence cultures, such as Inuit of the contact-traditional era, who wanted to thrive, hence Southern hunting methods were preferred to less comfortable means of hunting. Inuit culture has irrevocably changed in just a few decades: ski-doos have replaced dog sleds and traditional *qaggiq* song and dance festivities have become obsolete as the internet has grabbed the attention of younger generations. The Inuit Homeland boasts the youngest median age (57% of Nunavummiut were younger than 24 in 2011) and this trend has accelerated.[13] Incidentally, the reason why ski-doos are preferred over dog sleds evidences not only the choice of a more convenient method of travelling but the love for Canada's national sport:

> The young men [in Ulukhaktok] were increasingly enamoured of the more powerful, liquid-cooled engines that begun appearing in the early 1990s…they could go faster and pull a heavier load [than dogs]…they could travel further and still get back to town in time for dinner and *Hockey Night in Canada.*" [14]

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[12] Knud Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos, Vol. VII, No. 1 of Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921–24*. Translated by William Worster and W. E. Calvert. (Gyldendal: 1929), 25.

[13] Data based on Nunavummiut are Nunavut residents via itk.ca.

[14] Peter Collings, *Becoming Inummarik, Men's lives in an Inuit Community, (Montréal:* McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 359.

Due to such rapid replacement of traditions, the successive generation ends up with only fragmented information about the lives of their ancestors.[15] I assert that the swift embracement of cultural loans and the neglect of traditions erodes traditional Inuit culture and changes identity, severely widening the gap between generations.

Inuit identity is not uniform in any one generation as several related linguistic and ethnic sub-groups, also known as "miut" groups exist within Inuit culture. Traditional *inummariq* identity, the concept of the "real Inuk" is referenced in connection with traditional knowledge, such as hunting and other land and sea skills. I suggest that the list of attributes may also be extended to include the acceptance of Southern customs and tools that are a result of contact, such as metal harpoons, hunting rifles, Peterhead boats, ATVs, ski-doos, and ice hockey that have become internalized by Inuit culture as part of the 21st-century Inuit identity.

Once fox pelt trade collapsed after the Second World War, Inuit found themselves living under a different set of circumstances and having their needs changed in the new and permanent settlements. Furthermore, reliance on the newly-available government benefits resulted in a diminished proclivity to hunt. These changes made it obvious that Inuit needed a representational body in national politics. The constitutional formation of Nunavut, the semi-autonomous Inuit territory in 1999, and the later acquisition of additional Inuit lands along with government funds showcase that Inuit have adjusted exceptionally well to a new living situation in a multicultural society, while focusing on the retainment of their cultural integrity, which is one of the prime directives of the Canadian multicultural ethos.

The rapid introduction of modern amenities has altered the way Inuit society functions. Fox trapping changed the originally purely hunting society leading to money playing a role in Inuit life allowing for more Southern influence to enter Inuit culture, such as tea and other staple foods, household utensils, rifles and items needed in the gradually modernized daily life. Inuit resourcefulness in adapting to Arctic life is echoed in their adaptability "to new and ostensibly disruptive technological, economic, and social inputs" arriving from the South.[16] Archival footages from the early contact era display the extreme hardships Inuit had to endure to sustain life, therefore, it is not surprising that technology is appreciated.

Overall, Southern goods and the extension of the welfare state to the North positively impacted the Inuit population and heralded a safer age with a longer lifespan and more comfortable living, but the price of this is the diminishing awareness of tradition. Many

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[15] Peter Collings, *Becoming Inummarik, Men's lives in an Inuit Community, (Montréal:* McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 367.

[16] George W. Wenzel, "Inuit and Modern Hunter-Gatherer Subsistence," *Études/Inuit/Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2013: 181–200), 182.

of the old practices, such as *erinaliutiq*, the use of a shaman's magic words to heal, have long been discontinued due to their perceived uselessness in the face of modern medicine. New mores entered the Inuit homeland along with Southern institutions. Prior to the Moravian missionaries' introduction of writing in the late-18th century, oral dissemination of traditional knowledge was the de facto method of recordkeeping and it so remained for another 150 years throughout most of the North well into the twentieth century, as ethnographer Diamond Jenness recounts:

> [s]torytelling is one of the most favorite past-times whenever three or four natives are gathered together, especially in the long evenings of winter. The old tales and traditions are repeated again and again…until they become almost as familiar to the young men of twenty as they are to the old men of fifty or sixty. [17]

Before paper and pen, songs, myths, epic- and folk tales taught the young; but they also show how culture functions. Listening to the traditional songs performed by a people is the most authentic way of learning about a culture.[18] The personal stories inherent in Inuit songs are markers of identity and inform other generational cohorts as well as outsiders.[19] I argue that this kind of knowledge, or in Inuktut, *quajimajatuqangit* informs us about traditional identity. Orally sharing stories, also referred to as *unikkausivut*, once was the primary method of disseminating knowledge from generation to generation. Today, however, few people know the classic songs called *pisiit*.

I argue that knowing the traditional way although often expressed as desired, has subsided as members of different generations negotiate the defining elements of Inuit identity: what one generation values as essential, a subsequent generation might find redundant, such as land skills. Habitus, or socialized norms, govern thinking and collective practices, but habitus can be varied as people experience identity differently depending on the context within which identity manifests.[20] This is the reason, for example, why Inuit resist Southern culture in one context, such as education, since a high school diploma is not deemed as useful in the North. This trend is evidenced by poor school attendance and academic achievement. On the other hand, Inuit prefer Southern commodities and

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[17] Diamond, Jennes, *Eskimo Folk-lore Part A, Myths and Traditions from Northern Alaska, the Mackenzie Delta and Coronation Gulf* (The King's Printer: 1 924),1.

[18] Gregory Ypunging, *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and about Indigenous Peoples,* (Brush Education: 2018), 1.

[19] Rita Nandori, "Imagined Homeland: *Inummariit* as the Basis for the Concept of Inuit Nationhood," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2020) 157.

[20] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge University Press, 1972), 78.

values in other contexts, such as using modern hunting methods and playing hockey. This dichotomous nature of habitus is the reason why most Inuit appreciate tradition but insist on the need for progress in the Arctic, such as the building of more homes and not igloos, which belong in the nomadic past.

As foreign influences have been gradually penetrating Inuit culture, the internalization of identity varies in each subsequent generation. The Elders' generation—Inuit who lived on the land as children during early contact times in the first half of the twentieth century—remains closest to what is referred to as a traditional way of life. This cohort is passing—as they most have become octogenarians by 2025—and so is traditional knowledge. The fact that Inuit values must be displayed in public on the walls of public offices, such as the Igloolik Housing Association, the Nunavut government website and advocacy groups, such as Representative for Children and Youth proves that Southern writing must be used in a traditionally oral culture to try and salvage old values. The transitional generation, who can be called hamlet folk, since they are hamlet-born and attended residential school but were raised by nomads, carry their parents' values with them and remain stuck in the past. Finally, the current generation of adults, the young generation, who were born in the newly created Inuit *Nunangat* (starting with the creation of Nunavut in 1999) reaped the benefits of public education, governments funds, aids and benefits, socialized healthcare, and comfortable houses, is the first generation raised by parents who have never practiced a purely nomadic lifestyle.[21] The three generations of Inuit *Nunangat* each embody different stances to Inuit identity, which is observable in how Inuit have negotiated Southern influences such as religion, economy, technology, education and media into the body of Inuit knowledge. Thus, the manner in which Inuit conceptualize traditional identity, the so-called *inummariq*, is complex and interwoven in everyday life, business, and art.

Global migrations have changed how identity is experienced and interpreted, especially in so-called settler societies that are home to people who do not share a primary or secondary identity. Canadian multiculturalism emerged in the 1970s and proclaimed that a multiethnic and multilingual society can become a unified nation through sharing the same land. The idea of nation, thus, is a group of people linked by land and not by descent. Furthermore, the common cause of building a modern nation unites the many cultures within the Canadian mosaic; a nation, thus, is an imagined political community.[22] Inuit, therefore, are Canadian by law and Inuit by heritage, maintaining a distinct cultural identity. Canada's current political philosophy aims at creating a kaleidoscopic picture of many cultures within

[21] Inuit *Nunangat* refers to the Inuit Homeland.
[22] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso Books, 2016), 1.

one nation resulting in a multitude of sub-identities within one unifying Canadian identity built on markers based around all-Canadian symbols.[23] Mainly due to the distant location of their homeland, most Inuit live autonomously in Inuit *Nunangat*, while as Canadians they are entitled to the benefits of the Canadian welfare state; subsequently, this duality has created a composite identity. Sedentism and the delivery of national policies related to education, healthcare, and housing, adversely effected those Inuit whose attachment to a semi-nomadic life was believed to be crucial to the formation of their cultural identity, but in a mere four decades the Inuit population had gone through a tenfold rise. Canada today is a multicultural nation with equal rights to all; she is home to many distinct ethnicities of Indigenous, settler, and immigrant backgrounds forming a nation based on a common cause.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), a non-governmental organization founded in 1977, has been acting on behalf of the Inuit in the United States, Canada, Denmark, and Russia, indicating a joint origin and a sense of belonging across borders. The organization proclaims the necessity for unification as "Inuit…must speak with a united voice on issues of common concern and combine their energies and talents towards protecting and promoting their way of life and to strengthen the unity among all Inuit throughout the circumpolar region."[24] Although the Inuit homeland is primarily located in Canada, the loose linguistic and cultural kinship among Inuit *miut* groups, Kalaallit, Iñupiat, Yup'ik and Chukchi is utilized to achieve cultural cohesion. Besides fortifying the relationship of international Inuit, the nature of connections to the rest of Canada are of great importance to Inuit culture and economy. The church used to be a force of Southern values, but since its foundation in 1971, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the premier Inuit Organization of Canada, has become the main intermediary between Canadian Inuit and the government of Canada.

To represent such newly minted Arctic citizens, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami [ITK] presents itself as a representative body of all Inuit. ITK maintains an ongoing dialogue with the Canadian government on issues of importance, such as land claims and welfare.[25] The current president of ITK reflects hopefully:

> We wanted to share this [Inuit *Nunangat*] with Canada. We pushed for it just as much as any other entity, and we didn't have to. We could've made this into our Inuit lands, and we could've cordoned it off and tried to keep people out, but we see ourselves as Canadians. This land is ours, but also something we want to show the world as long as we do it in a way that's

[23] Hockey, snow sports, outdoorsmanship, poutine, and so on.
[24] ICC, "Aims and Objectives," itk.ca.
[25] ITK, "Aims and Objectives," itk.ca.

> respectful. I hope Canadians get excited about that, too—are appreciative of the fact that Inuit want to be Canadians. We want to share our land, we want to have this relationship.[26]

The significance of Natan Obed's words rests in the expression of a composite Inuit-Canadian identity. If the notion of Canada is internalized, then Inuit become not only Canadian citizens legally but culturally as well. Such a change to a nomadic sub-group-based identity is significant and is possibly present is all layers of Inuit culture. In the spirit of fostering Inuit cultural identity along with an all-Canadian one, the inclusion of Inuit knowledge is now regarded as a must in Northern school curricula and is part of, for example, British Columbia's K-12 and Dogwood graduation requirement.[27] The Indigenous addition is especially important for hamlet-born generations who are not taught land skills by their Elders in their camp, as was the traditional way. An enriched curriculum can not only lead to deeper connection to one's cultural identity, but to more Inuit professionals trained as doctors, teachers, police in the homeland and, thus, to financial independence from Ottawa.

Regarding the relationship of language and culture, interviewees in Igloolik and Quaqtaq viewed Inuktut as an essential part of their identity, while English (French in Nunavik) serve as a tool for achieving professional goals in life.[28] Inuktut, on the other hand, is spoken in the home, at cultural functions, and social gatherings. As a result of inclusive public education, culturally enriched programs and language classes primarily in the elementary grades have been introduced in order to raise general Inuktut literacy level. Based on the latest census, nearly 70 percent of Inuit speak Inuktut; about 50 percent of those under fourteen years of age speak it as their primary language of communication. Currently, Inuktut is spoken in 61 percent of Nunavummiut families, a drop from the 76 percent of a similar survey conducted in 1991.[29] Albeit this drop in Inuktut use is apparent, such numbers seem less disappointing in the context of autochthonous language retention in Canada, in which case Inuktut is the most well-preserved language.[30]

Although cultural identity is linked to native language fluency, identity remains intact even in case of compromised fluency. As Obed argues, "the fact that I don't have fluency

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[26] Aaron Kylie, "The Inuit Future," https://canadiangeographic.ca/articles/the-inuit-future/.

[27] K-12 refers to public education from kindergarten to grade 12 and the Dogwood Diploma stands for the B.C. Certificate of Education (Adult Education Diploma).

[28] Louis-Jacques Dorais, "Language, Culture and Identity: Some Inuit Examples," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies,* vol. 15, no. 2 (1995), 295, 302.

[29] Ian Martin, "Inuit Language Loss," https://assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/TD-316-4(3)-EN-Written-Submissions-on-Bill-37-Ed-Act-and-LangProt-Act.pdf.

[30] Daniel Chartier, "The Social and Cultural Context of Inuit Literary History," in *Native America: Indigenous Self-representation in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico,* ed. Jeanette den Toonder, Kim van Dam and Fjaere van der Stok (Peter Lang, 2016), 32.

in Inuktitut is only one small part of who I really am", while Jesse Mike, a colleague of Obed remarks that Inuit identity should not be exclusively based on language skills.[31] Obed also observes that:

> There's so many young Inuit now that are not completely fluent in Inuktitut, that have grown up with one parent who's not Inuk and one parent who has grown up outside of [Inuit culture]. [There is an opinion] that if you don't have [adequate] Inuktitut [language skills], [then] somehow you can't be an advocate for [the Inuit and] you are not ever going to be a good one [if you try].[32]

Inuit identity, therefore, might be regarded as an amalgam of cultural skills, one of which is Inuktut fluency.

Present-day Inuit identity rests on the interplay between tradition and incoming influences. Although settlement mixed *miut* groups to an extent, linguistic and cultural differences prevail. *Miut* groups can differ greatly; linguistically, North and South Qikiqtaaluk, Innuinaqtun, Nattilik, Aivilik, Paalliq, and Nunatsiavut are separate dialects; within them hamlets stand for yet another level of cultural differentiation, and within settlements like Igloolik, lies a historic distinction based on religious affiliation. Inuit identity can manifest multiple associations, such as pan-Inuit, territorial, and cultural sub-group identifications.[33] While the Inuit Circumpolar Council represents Inuit across the globe, the Inuit Tapiriit (formerly Tapirisat) Kanatami speaks for Inuit living in Canada. Additionally, several territorial boards and corporations stand for Inuit from Nunavut or other parts of Inuit *Nunangat,* land claims that were achieved on the uniform Inuit identity ticket. Ethnic—but not necessarily pan-Inuit— representation is important for all Inuit superseding other forms of representation.

As far as intellectual culture is concerned, Inuit generally tend to be locally focused.[34] In Greenland, however; there is a cultural preference for Danish authors, especially among the young despite the tendency that many intellectuals, such as Kalaallit poet and activist Aqqaluk Lynge support the pan-Inuit concept.[35] The difficulty of literary dissemination

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[31] Samia Madwar, "Becoming Natan Obed," www.thewalrus.ca/becoming-natan-obed.

[32] Natan Obed, "I am Inuk," www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/i-am-inuk-natan-obed-on-his-complicated-childhood-challenging-questions-and-the-future-of-the-inuit-1.5083529.

[33] Rita Nandori, "Nunangat and Beyond: Acculturation and the Retainment of Inuit Identity in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 41:1 (2022), 108.

[34] Daniel Chartier, "The Social and Cultural Context of Inuit Literary History," in *Native America: Indigenous Self-representation in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico,* ed. Jeanette den Toonder, Kim van Dam and Fjaere van der Stok (Peter Lang, 2016), 61.

[35] Daniel Chartier, "The Social and Cultural Context of Inuit Literary History," in *Native America: Indigenous Self-representation in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico,* ed. Jeanette den Toonder, Kim van Dam and Fjaere van der

within Inuit culture is best exemplified by the virtually unknown status of *Sanaaq*, the first Inuit novel, most likely because it was written in French. The fact that many Inuit use English, French, Danish or possibly Russian as their means of expression is just one part of the problem; dialectal differences also challenge dissemination, which must then be multilingual and cross-dialectal.

## Nunavut: The Crux of Inuit Cultural Identity

Nunavut was first conceived in 1971 by the then-representative body of Inuit, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. The reason behind the creation of a fully Inuit territory was twofold. Firstly, there was the lack of any land treaty between Inuit and the government of Canada, which meant that Inuit Aboriginal title could still be claimed; and secondly, the Inuit of the Northwest Territories maintained an absolute demographic majority. Additionally, it was theorized that a sovereign Inuit territory would allow Inuit to set their own social, political, and economic goals; Nunavut, thus aimed to function as a culturally Inuit territory that reflects Inuit values and perspectives.[36]

While advocating for the separation of the western part of the Northwest Territories, activists described Inuit as a united people, a claim that wholly disregarded the existence of *miut* groups. The geopolitical boundaries for Nunavut were drawn according to the spatiality of historical Inuit land use and cultural practices.[37] Prior to settlement, however; the term "Inuit" was used verbatim i.e. "person," or "people," rather than as a form of ethnic identification.[38] Such an approach to identity did not allow for loyalty on a pan-Inuit scale and permitted *miut* groups to operate on an individual level when representing their economic and cultural needs; however, it did not prove advantageous when claiming a unified Inuit territory.[39] I suggest that the formation of a distinctly collective Inuit identity can be attributed to the plan to achieve representation for most Inuit by speaking for all the *miut* groups within Nunavut, the most populous Inuit territory. More than two decades later, in 1993, Inuit and the Canadian government signed the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and after years of further talks, the Nunavut Territory was created

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Stok (Peter Lang, 2016), 58.

[36] André Légaré, "Canada's Experiment with Aboriginal Self-Determination in Nunavut: From Vision to Illusion," *International Journal of Minority and Group Rights*, vol. 15, (2008), 336.

[37] Légaré, "Nunavut," 74.

[38] Louis-Jacques Dorais, "Inuit Identity in Canada," *Folk*, vol. 30, (1088), 24.

[39] Robert G. Williamson, *Eskimo Underground: Socio-cultural Change in the Canadian Central Arctic* (Almqvist and Wiksell, 1974), 31.

from the eastern part of the Northwest Territories on 1 April 1999. Nunavut has been labelled by the Canadian government as the most advanced model of Indigenous self-determination, while Inuit leaders declared that control over their people and land would solve the social issues that heavily afflicted the region.

Upon its creation, the Nunavut Territory had become the biggest political unit of Canada, boasting a strategic location that consists of an extensive marine area which includes the Hudson Bay, the Northwest Passages, most of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, and the North Pole. Nunavut's area is so large, that if it functioned as an independent country, it would rank as the world's 12th largest. However, Nunavut's nine month-long arctic winter, pack ice frozen over some summers, and permafrost that allows for no trees to grow and makes building hard and agriculture inviable. Traditionally, lichens, plants, and arctic game (both land and marine) served as a source of sustenance. Presently, only about 36 thousand Nunavummiut live in 28 communities, 85 percent of whom identify as Inuit. [40] With no road infrastructure linking the settlements to one another or the territory itself to the rest of Canada, goods are flown in by plane or sealifted once a year and can cost two to three times more than in the South.

Nunavut's general statement of purpose was issued in the *Bathurst Mandate* in the form of principles and priorities developed in 1999 by the government of Nunavut in order to addresses issues relating principally to health, housing, and economy. In the case of health, especially mental health, the main problem remains that many young Inuit report a feeling of boredom due to the lack of intellectual stimulation and the largescale discontinuation of hunting. This leads to problems with drugs and crime, while suicide rates and smoking and nutrition-related diseases are on the rise. Most Nunavummiut live in social housing that is said to be overcrowded, although it must be noted that according to Statistics Canada, four people per home qualifies as overcrowding.[41] Many complain about the long wait; however, the average two to three years, in fact, represent a comparatively shorter time than in the South.[42] Most government employees and other professionals come from the South due to the low number of Inuit recruits, and most development is carried out using funds from Ottawa. Interestingly, Johnny Kusugak, the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut argues that to mitigate this problem, Southern workers in Nunavut should learn to speak Inuktitut, meanwhile communities complain

[40] André Légaré, "Canada's Experiment with Aboriginal Self-Determination in Nunavut: From Vision to Illusion," *International Journal of Minority and Group Rights*, vol. 15, (2008), 367.

[41] I too lived in three different typical Inuit houses that were excellently built and furnished and above the means of an average teacher in well-off British Columbia.

[42] Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami "Backgrounder," 6 https://www.itk.ca/what-we-do/.

about the declining level of education.[43] Many Nunavummiut remain dissatisfied with the way Nunavut is run; some even believe that Yellowknife (the previous territorial capital before the creation of Nunavut from the eastern of Northwest territories) provided better services than Iqaluit (*Nunatsiaq News* Editorial, 2).[44]

## Conclusion

Current Inuit identity has a composite nature having incorporated Southern and generally Western elements into the traditional *inummariq* identity through the past one hundred years of contact with *Qallunaat*. Since the contact-traditional era, components of intellectual and material culture have been gradually left behind. Politically, Inuit have gained pan-Inuit representation through the Inuit Circumpolar Council, and on a Canadian scale from the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. Although Nunavut embodies a unified Inuit identity, in fact, several cultural sub-groups, so-called miut-groups exist with their own distinct identity. Nunavut's fiscal dependency on the federal government along with the territory's socio-economic problems has not improved to a sufficient degree. In fact, I reiterate André Legaré's opinion that the only success of the "Nunavut Project" has been the assertion of Inuit collective identity ("Canada's Experiment" 367) through sovereignty and land management.[45] However, I assume that political autonomy cannot be an end in itself: a majority Inuit territory with its own government has not yet solved the most pressing problems of the region, whether it is called Northwest Territories or Nunavut.

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[43] Greg Younger-Lewis, "Jobs Top Priority for New Languages Commissioner," *Nunatsiaq News*, March 25, (2005:5).
[44] *Nunatsiaq News*, "Editorial," March 25, 2.
[45] André Légaré, "Canada's Experiment with Aboriginal Self-Determination in Nunavut: From Vision to Illusion," *International Journal of Minority and Group Rights*, vol. 15, (2008: 335-67), 367.

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