

INUVIALUIT RISING: THE EVOLUTION OF INUVIALUIT IDENTITY IN THE MODERN ERA

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ABSTRACT

The Inuvialuit of the western Canadian Arctic were recognized by the government of Canada as the traditional owners and formal stewards of their territory by the Inuvialuit Final Agreement of 1984. During the pursuit of this claim, its progenitors replaced the Western term 'Mackenzie Inuit' with the Inuvialuktun term 'Inuvialuit' as the collective identifier of the seven or eight traditional groups of the Mackenzie/Beaufort region. The relationships between these groups, and their notions of collectivity, have a rich and complex history. This paper traces the evolution of Inuvialuit social and cultural identity from precontact times through the modern era. The primary focus, however, is on the forces and influences that have helped to shape contemporary Inuvialuit culture, society, and identity in the twentieth century.

KEYWORDS: Inuvialuit, identity, community-based research, land claims, Mackenzie River

The Inuvialuit are the Inuit of the western Canadian Arctic. They have lived along the lower reaches of the Mackenzie River and adjacent coastlines bordering the Beaufort Sea for much longer than recorded in historical documents or oral history. Their ownership and stewardship of this territory was formally recognized by the government of Canada in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement of 1984. The term 'Inuvialuit' only came into widespread use during preparations for the land claim, when it became the collective signifier for the regional groups that historically occupied the lower delta/Beaufort region and who were documented by Europeans in the contact era. Inuvialuit means 'the real people' (Inuvialuit Regional Corporation n.d.). Since the signing of the claim, Inuvialuit have represented themselves to the outside world by their chosen name and as a distinct group with their own languages, cultures, lands and resources (Fig. 1). They have increasingly articulated their own specific histories and cultural patterns and have begun to share these with the outside world.

The present paper asks how Inuvialuit identities have evolved in the modern era. In particular, I am interested

in exploring the forces and influences that have helped to shape the Inuvialuit as a group and how these have changed over the course of contact history. Identity, as discussed below, is a sociopolitical and cultural concept that has been defined in many ways. I use both the singular 'identity' and plural 'identities' throughout this paper to suggest that, like individual identities, collective Inuvialuit identity is subject to multiple definitions and understandings, depending on context. Different identities may be constituted, used, reformulated, and shared by the Inuvialuit community at large, while others may be defined on a person-by-person basis. The term 'modern' refers to postcontact history and the origins and evolution of the modern world system, resulting from the configuration of European nationalism and imperialism and the global expansion of the capitalist system (Hall 2000; Voss 2008:13). The postcontact period began with the arrival of European explorers, starting with Alexander Mackenzie's descent of the river that would bear his name in 1789 (Mackenzie 1801). This paper, however, will focus on events of the twentieth century that have led towards and

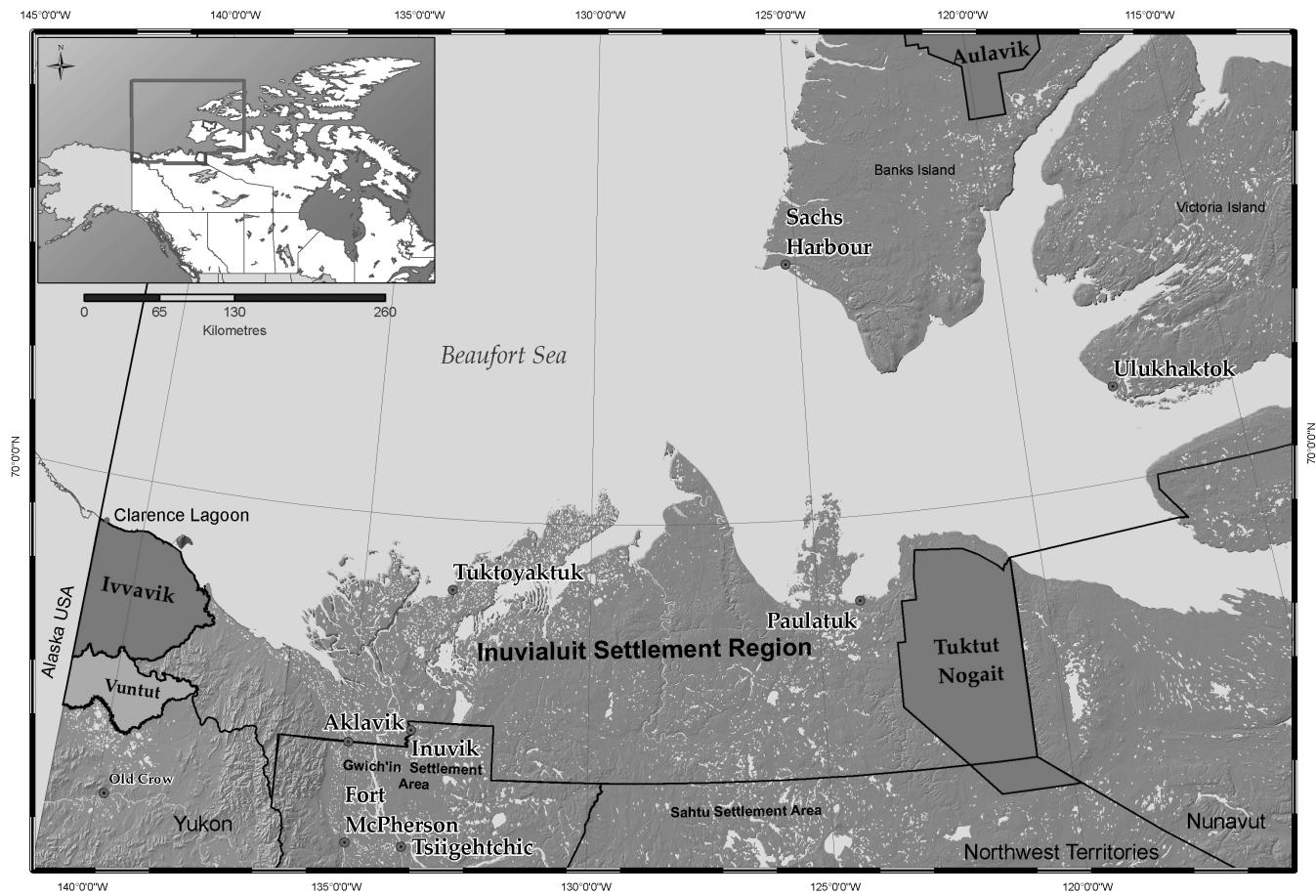


Figure 1. Map showing the communities of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region and national parks established by the claim.

helped constitute the present sociopolitical and cultural identity of the Inuvialuit.

DEFINING IDENTITY

Identity is a complex concept that has received considerable theoretical attention in the past several decades in the social sciences (e.g., Bentley 1987; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Jones 1997; Meskell 2001, 2002). Identity, as used here, refers to the affiliation an individual feels to particular groups, ideas, and/or standpoints. Individual identities encompass a complex and fluid mosaic of traits relating to place, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, history, and ethnicity. “These conceptions, communicated inwardly to oneself or outwardly to others, constitute identity” (Smoak 2006:5). Identity is defined by difference, in terms of with whom or what one aligns oneself. Identity politics flow from various forms of social differentiation that can cause significant challenges to and ruptures in the status quo (e.g., the women’s, black power, and American Indian movements; Sider 1994).

The concept of ethnogenesis refers to the creation of cultural identities. In contrast to a fixed or static notion of identity, ethnogenesis implies the fluidity of ethnic identities, which emerge, morph, and are eclipsed according to historical and political contingencies (Hill 1996; Smoak 2006; Voss 2008). A radical shift in social configurations is a frequent outcome of cultural contact, where both colonizer and colonized experience profound disruptions. Voss uses the term ‘colonial ethnogenesis’ to describe this situation and suggests that while

indigenous populations displaced by or entangled with colonial institutions are the most severely affected [parties], the colonists themselves are also irrevocably transformed by their own displacement and by their encounters with local indigenous people. (Voss 2008:2–3)

Voss develops the example of a primarily Mexican population of late eighteenth-century San Francisco who abandoned elements of their ethnic roots to elevate their social standing within the colonial *sistema de castas* (Voss 2008).

Contemporary identity theorists conceive both individual and collective identities as complex, fragmented, overlapping, and intersecting (McIlwraith 1996; Weaver 2001). As suggested above, identities are both negotiated and evolving according to circumstance. Negotiation requires a back and forth movement between “two positions, two places, two choices” (Derrida 2002:12). This fluidity implies that a person may assume a certain constellation of social identities (mother, wife, Canadian) in one social setting and an entirely different set (activist, Mohawk, lawyer) in another, even if they appear outwardly contradictory. The discussion that follows maps out the changing landscape and contingent and evolving nature of Inuvialuit collective identities through time.

IDENTITY POLITICS IN CANADIAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

In aboriginal communities in Canada (and elsewhere), the politics surrounding the construction and maintenance of cultural identities are heavily loaded due to the specter of land claims and legislation (most notably, the Indian Act) which requires “proof” of aboriginality and historicity. In this context, Lawrence (2003:22) has noted that contemporary conceptions of identity as fleeting and changeable, rather than as innate and essential, have the potential to damage individual and group claims to aboriginal rights. Perhaps for this reason, theorists have approached aboriginal identity through the development of a politics of difference, which entails “an ongoing struggle by communities to capture recognition for the distinctive cultural and political attributes of their ways of life” (see Schouls 2003:4). Following this doctrine, aboriginal groups have tended to define themselves in opposition to cultural ‘others,’ rather than in affinity with them.

Part of the process of building collective identities is through the right to self-definition (Schouls 2003:53). Identity construction by Canadian aboriginal communities has recently involved shedding the names given to them by colonizers in favor of self-chosen designations. This process acknowledges that colonizers’ designations are themselves cultural artifacts and have played an essential role in structuring the relationships of power between these groups (Campbell and Cameron 2006:147). For their part, indigenous peoples in the Canadian Arctic have actively pursued self-definition. Inuit of the eastern Canadian Arctic, for example, have represented themselves to the English world by the ancient Inuktitut term *Inuit*,

which identifies “real” or “genuine” people, *inutuinnaq*, since the 1970s (Campbell and Cameron 2006; Dorais 1997:87). *Inuvialuit*, by comparison, is an Inuvialuktun word that has only recently been used to identify, and in a sense unify, this group of people. Inuvialuit identity thus has an emergent property, as it evolves in proximity (or opposition) to, and in relationship with, other aboriginal groups; southern Canadian culture; external structural, political, and economic forces, etc.

Membership within aboriginal groups may be determined through a number of legal, social, and cultural means (see Campbell and Cameron 2006; Weaver 2001). Aboriginal people in Canada are of course defined by juridico-legal terms such as Indian, Inuit, and Métis. Like many other land claims, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement specifies a blood quantum for claimant status (e.g., claimants must have one-quarter Inuvialuit blood or be married to a beneficiary). More organic criteria for community membership are also generated and practiced within aboriginal communities themselves. Weaver (2001) suggests that cultural identity may be reflected in the values, beliefs and worldviews of indigenous people. Aikio (1990, cited in Campbell and Cameron 2006:147) proposes a set of flexible criteria for membership in an ethnic group, including “self-identification; ancestry; special cultural characteristics, such as a command of the language; or, existing social organization for interaction among members.” I will return to this set of criteria in relation to the shaping of present-day Inuvialuit identity below.

IDENTITY IN THE INUVIALUIT COMMUNITY

This paper will describe a loose chronology of events surrounding the construction and evolution of identity in the Inuvialuit community. This will involve examining the internal processes of identity-building and political action within the community, and tracing the nature and evolution of relationships between Inuvialuit and cultural others. I begin by briefly discussing aspects of “traditional” Inuvialuit identity, as suggested by the ethnographic record. I then turn to the contact period and its dramatic influences on Inuvialuit interaction with local and foreign cultural groups and the incorporation of the Inuvialuit socioeconomic structure into the world system (cf. Friesen 1996). Next, I examine the movement of Inuvialuit and other cultural groups into the delta, the florescence of delta communities, and the social changes promulgated by these changes. In closing, I discuss current axes of identity

development in the Inuvialuit community, including contemporary conceptions and the role of the land claim in renewing Inuvialuit cultural practices and identity.

The information presented in this paper is derived from a number of sources. It is drawn primarily from interviews and conversations with Inuvialuit elders, leaders, educators, and community members over the past several years during my involvement with them as an archaeologist and anthropologist interested in documenting insiders' understandings of Inuvialuit history and culture (Lyons 2006, 2007a, 2007b). This research has entailed working with twenty-five elders from Aklavik and Inuvik, Northwest Territories, to collect partial life histories and to document their views on a number of subjects related to Inuvialuit history, cultural heritage, and material culture. These elders primarily speak two Inuvialuktun dialects, Uummarmiut and Sigitun. Uummarmiut is the language that developed amongst Inupiat (called Nunatama below) who migrated in a series of historic waves to the delta and intermarried with Inuvialuit; Sigitun is the language of the original inhabitants of Inuvialuit territory (Freeman et al. 1992:11–16; Lowe 1991; Nagy 1994:1–3, 2006:72). A third Inuvialuktun dialect, called Kangiryuarmiut or Inuinnaqtun, is spoken by the easternmost community of the Inuvialuit, Ulukhaktok. Interviews and discussions with younger community members focused in part on Inuvialuit conceptions of Inuvialuit history, including the events of the land-claim era.

This paper also draws on the few published accounts of elders' oral histories (e.g., Alunik 1998; Alunik et al. 2003; Nagy 1994, 2002; Nuligak 1966), as well as the rich historic and ethnographic record of Inuvialuit life from the time of contact forward. While the ideas and opinions of specific Inuvialuit are presented below (these individuals are named and/or referenced by their initials throughout the following paper; interview details are provided in Appendix I), it should be noted that my emphasis is on questions of collective Inuvialuit identity, rather than individual experiences of identity, as it relates to ethnicity, gender, class, age, and religious or economic affiliation.

CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES: THE TRADITIONAL INUVIALUIT

Based on ethnographic and archaeological evidence, Inuvialuit local groups had been evolving for at least several centuries at the time of contact with Europeans.

Betts (this volume) suggests that the ethnogenesis of local Inuvialuit groups occurred between the arrival of Thule people in the western Canadian Arctic ca. AD 1250 and sustained contact with European-derived peoples in the nineteenth century. At the time of contact, Inuvialuit lived in seven, or possibly eight, named groups stretching from Herschel Island in the west to Darnley Bay in the east (Alunik et al. 2003:14–17). These groups named themselves to ethnographers as the Qikiqtaryungmiut, Kuukpangmiut, Kitigaaryungmiut, Nuvugarmiut, Avvarmiut, Igluuyaryungmiut, and Immaryungmiut (refer to Betts Fig. 2, this volume), appellations drawn primarily from place and economic focus (Betts 2007:4–5).

Autonomous and independent, these regional groups may not have felt a strong collective sentiment, but written and oral history does suggest that they distinguished themselves from neighboring Inuit and Dene groups (Nagy 1994:2–3; Stefansson 1919:23–24). Inuvialuit interaction was both relatively frequent and amicable with Inupiat of the Alaska North Slope, although raiding did occur between the two groups on occasion (Stefansson 1919:155). By contrast, Mackenzie peoples seem to have had little interaction with Copper Inuit to the east, at least in the immediate precontact period (Stefansson 1913:121, 159, 161, 1919:25). Inuvialuit were traditional enemies of the upriver Gwich'in, their interactions primarily consisting of intermittent hostilities and raiding for women (CC, TC; also Smith 1984:348; Stefansson 1919:24). Stories about these historical hostilities are remembered by Inuvialuit elders, as exemplified by Elizabeth Aviugana's recollections:

We used to go down, when I was really young... right across from Bar C, [at] that...little point they call Nunariak in Eskimo....[You] used to see graves. Must be Indian, because I heard Eskimos and Indians used to fight, kill each other. [O]ne time I found shell case, and it's got beadwork on it. (EA)

Rasmussen was also told of the traditional hostilities between Inuvialuit and Gwich'in in which the Inuvialuit "were notorious for their treachery and the Indians were afraid of them, especially because they stole their women; this is said to be the reason why so many Eskimos are half-Indians" (Ostermann 1942:51; also see Fred Inglangasuk in Nagy 1994:110).

Early historically recorded events—such as the down-river journey of Alexander Mackenzie in 1789 (Mackenzie 1801), and the explorations of the Mackenzie region by

Franklin in 1826 (Franklin 1828), seeking the Northwest Passage—did little to immediately disrupt the cultural patterns and traditional lifeways of Inuvialuit and other western arctic peoples. However, these explorations began a relationship between Native peoples and newcomers structured around difference, one that produced an us-vs.-them mentality. The newcomers applied new names to the waterways and landmarks in their paths, as observed in the “official” documentation. Evidence is seen in the work of Hudson’s Bay trader Roderick MacFarlane, whose explorations of the (newly named) Anderson River caused him to open the short-lived Fort Anderson between 1861 and 1866 to service the local Inuvialuit (MacFarlane 1890–91; Morrison 2006:352–353).

Newcomers similarly named Native northerners in often arbitrary ways. Well-known examples include the generalized use of the terms ‘Eskimo,’ an Algonkian word meaning ‘eaters of raw meat,’ and ‘Indian,’ a misnomer of Columbus. European fascination with North America’s Native peoples caused them to represent northern peoples in visual and print media in spectacularly misrepresentative and erroneous ways (e.g., Geller 2004; King and Lidchi 1998; Moser 2001), a process that also served to homogenize the differences between specific Inuit groups and First Nations peoples. The dichotomy constructed between aboriginal North American and Europeans at contact would structure and permeate the relationships between these groups in coming centuries.

NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITIES: EARLY CONTACT

The earliest sustained contact in the western Arctic occurred at trade locations such as Fort McPherson and Herschel Island. Fort McPherson was established in 1840 as a Hudson’s Bay trading post by John Bell, first called the Peel’s River Post and later named after Chief Factor Murdoch McPherson (Coates 1979:13; Cruikshank 1974). Fort McPherson was the most northerly post of the Hudson’s Bay Company to this time, and it jumpstarted a brisk trade in furs with local Gwich’in and downstream Inuvialuit. Inuvialuit began venturing upriver to trade in increasing numbers, despite skirmishes with Gwich’in and the risk of traveling in their rivals’ territory (McGhee 1988:2–4). As trade picked up and the Yukon became more populated with European-derived traders and miners, the RCMP felt the need to have a presence in the area and built posts at both McPherson and Herschel Island in the year 1903 (Coates 1979:76). The increasing interaction

of Inuvialuit with these cultural “others” in this period of early sustained contact would lead them to the ongoing construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries with these groups. This process was accompanied by the ongoing homogenization of the identities of Mackenzie regional groups by Western outsiders.

By the mid-to-late nineteenth century, Euro-American whalers had discovered the rich waters of the western Arctic and began to frequent the Beaufort Sea hunting bowhead whales. By 1889, whaling captains began basing their winter headquarters at Herschel Island, which quickly became a mecca for Inuit and Dene peoples whose services as hunters, guides, and seamstresses fed the rising industry (Bockstoce 1986:275; McGhee 1988:10). The social dynamics at Herschel Island were unprecedented in the western Arctic. This was the first time that different Inuit and Dene groups had lived in such close proximity for extended lengths of time, let alone with nonaboriginal newcomers. Whaling crews were mainly of Alaska and Siberian origin, while Gwich’in (also known in the literature as the Kutchin, Loucheux, and Rat Indians) and inland Alaska Inuit (known as Nunatagmiut or Nunatarmiut) were the primary provisioners of meat for the whalers, who preferred terrestrial game to fish and marine mammals (Bockstoce 1986:275). Inuvialuit found their principal role in the newfound industry as fur traders, in return receiving a seemingly boundless array of manufactured goods (Alunik et al. 2003:83–84).

The whaling year had a distinct on- and off-season that dramatically altered the traditional annual cycle of regional peoples. For the whalers, summer was characterized by the dogged pursuit of whales, and winter by a cycle of social festivities (Hadley 1915). For their provisioners, the year was now marked by the constant pursuit of game and production of derivative resources for trade, effectively extinguishing the traditionally slumberous winter season. In its heyday, Herschel was a “shantytown of Native houses, shacks, frame huts and storerooms” that housed “several hundred people—as many as a thousand during the peak year of 1894–95” (Alunik et al. 2003:81). Whalers of American, Polynesian, and African descent over-wintered onshore with local women, shocking the Anglican missionary Charles Whittaker with the range of colors of their children (Alunik et al. 2003:82). The whalers would later depart, leaving prominent traces in the local gene pool that persist to the present (CC, TC; also Inuvialuit Regional Corporation n.d.; Slobodin 1966:13).

Although the nature and extent of interaction between different Inuit and Dene groups during this period are unknown, it is clear these interrelations were generally increasing and intensifying. Stefansson (1919:15, 172–73, 195) mentions that marriages were occasionally arranged between Anderson River people and Hare Indians, and that both interaction and intermarriage between Mackenzie Delta Inuit and Point Barrow Inupiat had some historical depth. Present-day Inuvialuit say that some of the oldtimers used to speak Gwich'in and suggest that this began with increased interaction between the different local groups at places such as McPherson and Herschel. Cathy and Topsy Cockney's grandfather Nuligak, for instance, married a Métis woman named Margaret who had "French blood" (Nuligak 1966:139).¹ Dora Malegana remembered that the "Indian trail" to Herschel Island passed through Itqiliqpik (Whale Bay) on the Yukon North Slope, and that Inuvialuit in this area had close relations with Gwich'in from Old Crow (Nagy 1994:108–110).

Identity negotiation was a perpetual process between different groups during this period. The need to identify both individuals and groups of peoples, and to communicate between them, led to the use of personal nicknames, a lingua franca, and a variety of group identifiers (cf. Alunik et al. 2003:82; Williamson 1988:250). The language that developed amongst these groups was basically a pidgin form of English, mixed with Hawaiian, French, Inuit, and other words (Bockstoe 1986:194). Among Inuit groups, Nunatarmiut became the most prevalent dialect, primarily because of the close working relationship of this group with the whalers (cf. Stefansson 1919:195). Different groups came to be represented by simplified collective identifiers. The different Mackenzie peoples were called by the term Kogmullicks, an Anglicized version of the Inupiaq term for easterners. Alaska Inuit were called Nunatarmiut, shortened to Nunatama, an Inuvialuktun term for westerner (Nagy 1994:1).² Athapaskans, including the Gwich'in, were collectively called *Itqilik* (plural *Itqilit*), an Inuit word for 'Indian'.³ Siberian Inuit were

'Masinkers,' Polynesians 'Kanakas,' and so on (Alunik et al. 2003: 80, 82). Nuligak (1966:191) called non-Inuit or white men *tanit* (sing. *tanik*), a parallel term to *qalunaat* in the eastern Arctic (although *qalunaat* also shows up in western Arctic literature).

The whaling industry caused profound changes to aboriginal cultures of the North Slope and delta regions, but perhaps most particularly to the Inuvialuit, who played host to the trade at Herschel Island. Beyond substantive effects on the gene pool, Inuvialuit culture was irreversibly impacted by assaults on language, culture, and community health. Linguistically, the use of pidgin English and Inupiaq had significant impacts on local Inuvialuktun dialects (see Lowe 1983:xv, 1991). Inuvialuit were also busy adopting many of the incoming technologies, behaviors, and ideas of Westerners, as well as those of the "American-oriented Alaskan Eskimos" (McGhee 1988:5; and see Stefansson 1919:195). Disease, in the form of measles, influenza, and syphilis, took an extremely heavy toll on Inuvialuit during this period, with estimates of up to 90% mortality⁴ (McGhee 1988:5). In-migration of Nunatarmiut that began before whaling intensified with the resource declines in their country (Burch 1998:373–374; Freeman et al. 1992:13), and in turn caused some resistance on the part of Inuvialuit residents. Some Inuvialuit found the newcomers arrogant and made efforts to disguise the whereabouts of the Bluenose caribou herd (Alunik et al. 2003:92; Nuligak 1966). By the early twentieth century, however, intermarriage had become common, and in time, the newcomers would be considered Inuvialuit (Alunik et al. 2003:92).

Inuvialuit also resisted certain Western influences. For instance, Anglican minister Isaac Stringer did not have a single convert during his lengthy tenure amongst the Inuvialuit (Marsh 1967). Conversion would begin ca. 1907, with elements of the new religion strongly resembling those of traditional Inuvialuit culture (Alunik et al. 2003:103). Ishmael Alunik tells lively stories of Inuvialuit shamans eluding capture and playing games with the Herschel Island constabulary (Alunik et al. 2003:97,

1. Métayer, Nuligak's translator, echoes Whittaker's statement (Alunik et al. 2003:82) that one of the major products of the whaling era was a preponderance of mixed-race children, such as Margaret, in the delta. Metayer called Margaret a Métis, but she had no Dene ancestry; she was the child of an Inuvialuit mother and a whaling father of European ancestry.
2. "Nunatarmiut" was originally used to refer to inland Inuit from northern Alaska (known today as Nunamiut) but during the whaling era came to be used universally for all manner of Alaska Inuit (Stefansson 1919:10–11, 24).
3. This is a derogatory term given to Athapaskans by Inuit meaning 'eaters of lice' that likens their hunting habits to those of dogs (Petrone 1988:30).
4. Cathy Cockney (pers. comm. 2006, for complete text see Lyons 2007b) provides a critique of these figures.

101–102). Socially, Native northerners and whalers largely lived peaceably alongside one another at Herschel Island, and there was a preponderance of relationships between whalers and local women. The character of these interactions would change, however, in the 1894–95 season, when many whalers started to bring their families north for the long winters; it appears that social gatherings became somewhat more socially bifurcated at this time (cf. Bockstoce 1986:282–286).

The identities negotiated in the whaling era informed the relationships that were to continue developing, although in a rather asymmetrical fashion, in coming decades. Identities would become especially polarized between the indigenous delta inhabitants and the newcomers as contact progressed and the outsiders took a leading role in the emerging delta economy. This transition dramatically affected the social dynamics in the new delta centers.

POLARIZING IDENTITIES: THE MOVE INTO THE DELTA

The bowhead industry collapsed circa 1910, leaving environmental devastation across the Yukon North Slope. Caribou populations that had sustained the whalers experienced a sharp decline that resulted in human migrations into the Mackenzie Delta (Alunik et al. 2003:91–92; Usher 1971a). Delta towns, particularly Aklavik, rose in ascendancy as fur trade posts during this period, as the focus turned away from coastal to delta resources. Many Inuvialuit and Gwich'in families continued a land-based lifestyle, albeit tailored to the needs of the fur industry. Left with the environmental aftershocks of the whalers' retreat, many Alaska Inupiat migrated to Aklavik, which quickly became a large and vital center, housing dozens of trading posts by 1920 (Freeman et al. 1992:12; Usher 1971a:83, 86). In the first two decades of the new center's existence, most aboriginal trappers came in seasonally to cash in their furs, buy supplies, gamble, and socialize. Peak seasons for fur trading often coincided with social and religious events such as Easter and Christmas (DA, LC, VA; also see Honigmann and Honigmann 1970:47–48; Nagy 1994:35–36). Contemporary Aklavik elders talk about the unique qualities of the nascent community, as Inuvialuit, Inupiat, Gwich'in, and other peoples lived side by side with respect and under strong leadership (BA; also see Aquilina 1981:139).

However, the continued arrival of nonaboriginal southerners to Aklavik would continually shift both local demographics and attendant social relations. By the 1930s

and '40s, southern-style hospitals, residential schools, an RCMP detachment, and government administration had been constructed by southerners, who also administered these services (Aquilina 1981:143). Increasingly, trapping families moved into town to join the wage-labor market and to send their children to school. By the early 1950s, the now-crowded spit of Aklavik reached its population peak at nearly 1,500 people (Campbell 1987:22). The building of Inuvik in the mid-1950s was meant to alleviate this crowding and create a showpiece of Arctic modernization. Instead, Inuvik created segregated settlement patterns and social services that served to polarize aboriginal and nonaboriginal populations (e.g., Smith 1971). Ishmael Alunik recalls the inequalities his people experienced in their new lives in town:

Us Native people were treated different from the white man that we helped on our own land. We shared with them. We taught them how to survive on the land and hunt and trap. But we were not good enough to go into their hotel in Aklavik or get the same benefits as they got when they first moved to Inuvik. (Alunik et al. 2003:158)

Nevertheless, the ever-increasing proximity of these formerly distinct populations led to an increased rate of interactions and intermarriage among local aboriginal groups as well as with nonaboriginal southerners. Some of these partnerships were socially sanctioned, while others were not (Hamilton 1994:133–37). Inuvialuit and Inupiat, of course, had a long history of commerce and intermarriage by this point. Contemporary Inuvialuit also suggest that it was in this period that Gwich'in intermarriage with Inuvialuit and Inupiat started to increase; these unions became more common and socially accepted as the decades progressed (TC, CC, ACG). Florence Carpenter (née Ross), a young Gwich'in woman, met her future husband, Frank Carpenter, in Aklavik in the early 1950s (LC). Frank was a member of a very successful family of trappers from Banks Island who had capitalized on the white fox trade in that region. Annually, his family would travel to Aklavik on their schooner the *North Star* to trade their furs, resupply, and socialize. Florence and Frank, despite their different cultural backgrounds, fell in love and asked their parents to support their union. Both sets of parents condoned the marriage, though Florence's family worried that they would never see her again when she went to live on Banks Island (which turned out to be untrue). Their son Les tells many stories of their happy life

together (Figs. 2, 3) and Florence's fluency in Gwich'in, Inuvialuktun, and English language and culture.

Southerners also married into northern aboriginal communities, but there was a much greater stigma attached to these unions from the white community. By contrast, Annie C. Gordon recalls that southerners were generally welcomed into the delta aboriginal community through marriage. RCMP and navy men were forbidden to consort with local women (though these unions did happen on occasion). Southern traders, in comparison, married readily into the aboriginal communities of the delta and came to make their lives in the north. Several of these men are well remembered, having left their names in delta families, such as the Grubens, Hansens, Cournoyeas, Semmlers, Days, Areys, and Gordons (TC, CC, ACG, DCG; Nagy 1994:37).

The great influx of different cultural groups into the delta center of Aklavik, and later Inuvik, did not erode aboriginal identities as Canadian policy-makers of the time had predicted. Instead, government policies which treated aboriginal and nonaboriginal people separately heightened the difference between these groups, which in turn served to maintain and even perpetuate aboriginal difference. In the first decade of Inuvik's existence, for instance, the utilidor system serviced Euro-Canadian government workers on one side of town, while aboriginal people lived in the slum-like conditions (Ervin 1968:11) of a tent town called Happy Valley on the other.⁵ Within the wage economy, Euro-Canadians occupied the higher paying jobs and indigenous people the lower (Wolfarth 1965:53–56).

Honigmann and Honigmann (1970:13–17) posit the emergence of a frontier culture among the delta's aboriginal peoples in the early to mid-twentieth century. Frontier culture was characterized by the continuation of a land-based lifestyle, coupled with a general ambivalence towards certain middle-class southern Canadian values, such as church-sanctioned marriage and moderate drinking. The growing solidarity among aboriginal groups was fostered partly by the shared experience of social segregation in Inuvik and partly by the residential school experience, which brought young people from a wide region together and created lasting friendships (LC; Honigmann and Honigmann 1970: 39). These experiences diminished traditional disputes and differences amongst regional



Figure 2. Florence and Frank Carpenter, April 1956, Sachs Harbour.



Figure 3. Florence Carpenter with her young son Leslie, July 1960, Sachs Harbour.

5. Happy Valley became a place where Inuvialuit and other indigenous people of the delta gathered and socialized and was hence named (Bridget Larocque pers. comm. May 2009).

Inuit and Dene groups,⁶ as well as accentuated the difference between them and Euro-Canadian society. The emergence of a pan-aboriginal identity thwarted government assimilation efforts and bound the aboriginal residents of the delta—particularly those in “urban” Inuvik—together in ways that would help rally them to action in the coming decade.

REJUVENATION OF IDENTITY: PURSUIT OF THE INUVIALUIT LAND CLAIM

The 1960s and ’70s brought an array of new influences to the indigenous peoples of the delta, who were living an increasingly sedentary and centralized existence. As trapping families moved into town on a full-time basis, many experienced an acute loss of their traditional autonomy and independence (Lubart 1969:39). Trapping continued as an economic mainstay into the 1960s, but the crowded network of registered traplines in the delta precluded many families from making a full-time living (Freeman et al. 1992:34; Usher 1971b:181–82). Younger generations were quickly losing their languages and bush savvy in the government day school atmosphere of enforced English. Inuvialuit in their forties and fifties today talk about the shame in their culture, language, and aboriginal identity brought to them by the residential school experience, of their overall loss of cultural pride and confidence in who they were and where they came from (TC, CC, BA, GK). These are the generations born in hospitals throughout the delta who never lived a full-time, land-based lifestyle.

It was their parents’ generation who responded to the wider social movements and political agitations of the 1960s by forming the Committee for Original Peoples’ Entitlement (COPE) in 1969. COPE was originated by Nellie Cournoyea and Agnes Semmler, an Inuvialuk and Gwich’in Métis who worked cooperatively towards a better future for all aboriginal people of the delta region (Hamilton 1994:137). Their committee worked on behalf of the delta Inuvialuit, Métis, and Dene, seeking greater sovereignty on aboriginal lands, control over their lives, and continuation of their traditions (Alunik et al. 2003:182; Freeman et al. 1992:37). Justice Thomas Berger’s Commission (1977), which would ultimately halt the Mackenzie Pipeline, put credence behind the land claim pursuits of COPE and other grassroots movements.

6. Although there has been much intermarriage between the different groups residing in the delta from the fur-trade period forward, the term Métis is little used in the literature or in the local vernacular. However, there is a Métis Association in the delta that has been periodically active (Hamilton 1994:133–37).

Over time, the various COPE members divided to pursue claims independent of each other, leaving COPE to represent the 2,500 delta Inuvialuit (Dahl 1988:79; Morrison 1998:266).

The term Inuvialuit was adopted by the progenitors of COPE in pursuit of the land claim. An Inuvialuktun term proffered by elders, ‘Inuvialuit’ came to be used by COPE as a collective signifier for the Inuit of the Mackenzie Delta/Beaufort region (and see Nagy 1994:3). Danny C. Gordon defines Inuvialuit as “what we are, ‘the real people’; [the term] ‘Eskimo’ was invented by the whites coming in.” This self-definition was part of a larger movement towards cultural reclamation. It was a term, however, that had not previously been used as an ethnic signifier. Dahl (1988:79) contends that the term ‘Inuvialuit’ was used to represent a series of regional groups that were not formerly united by a collective sentiment; in particular, the communities of Sachs Harbour and Ulukhaktok (Holman), whose residents are related to Inuinnaqtun, a central Arctic dialect (Lowe 1983:xv). Contemporary Inuvialuit feel that there was a certain collective sentiment amongst delta/Beaufort Inuit peoples in traditional times, but agree that they lived in distinct regional groups and used different dialects (BA). The historical record documents that Mackenzie regional groups occasionally feuded and initiated hostilities against one another (Alunik et al. 2003:15–16; Stefansson 1919:24, 171).

However one views the term Inuvialuit, it is clear that its adoption was part of a general rejuvenation of Inuvialuit culture. COPE provided a vehicle for the (re)formation and crystallization of a distinctive Inuvialuit identity, and kickstarted traditional use and linguistic research in pursuit of the land claim (e.g., Farquharson 1976; Lowe 1983, 1984a, 1984b; Usher 1976). Nellie Cournoyea, chair and CEO of the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, feels that Inuvialuit “suffered from a pan-Inuit approach to culture in the north in the past,” referring particularly to cultural studies and the development of educational materials in the post-World War II era (cited in Lyons 2007b:231). Preparation for the land claim focused Inuvialuit on their own distinctive histories, cultural attributes, and languages, a focus that has continued to flourish within the structures of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (1984). One outcome of this process has been an expanded interest in the

histories of traditional Inuvialuit regional groups through archaeological, ethnographic, and oral history documentation (e.g., Betts 2004, 2005; Friesen 1996, 1998, 2004; Hart 1994, 1997, 2001; Lyons 2004, 2007a, 2007b; Nagy 1994; Parks Canada 2000; Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre n.d.). This work has fallen partly to the Inuvialuit Social Development Program, under the auspices of the Inuvialuit Cultural Resources Centre, and partly to independent scholars from the south who work to varying degrees with the Inuvialuit.

DISCUSSION: THE EVOLUTION OF INUVIALUIT IDENTITIES IN THE MODERN ERA

This paper has contemplated different processes that have influenced the evolution of Inuvialuit identities from the contact period forward and the ongoing process of Inuvialuit ethnogenesis. It has traced Inuvialuit negotiation with other northern indigenous groups, whalers, traders, government, and southern Canadian culture. While outside observers have often suggested that Inuvialuit culture and identity were threatened and even extinguished in the early twentieth century by disease and acculturation (e.g., Alunik et al. 2003:77, 89, 110; McGhee 1988:5; Stefansson 1919:195), Inuvialuit themselves hold considerably different perspectives. They have perpetually asserted their ability to survive, renew, and redefine themselves. This process has included the rejuvenation of the term Inuvialuit to unify communities of the Beaufort coast and delta region (cf. Dahl 1988; Lowe 1983) and today has turned towards the process of Inuvialuit cultural renewal. In contemporary terms, Inuvialuit identity is being actively constructed and negotiated on cultural, political, and economic fronts, at both the personal and collective level. This fluid process of ethnogenesis involves the continuity of certain elements of Inuvialuit culture with the emergence of others to suit new and changing circumstances (cf. Voss 2008).

Personal negotiation of Inuvialuit identities appears to be a fluid and evolving process. Young Inuvialuit are born into a much more socially complex world than their grandparents' and even parents' generations. They are required to negotiate identities in relation to other youth in the delta but also in relation to the pervasive cultural forces of the south. At the age of majority, young people of mixed heritage (e.g., Gwich'in and Inuvialuit backgrounds) must make a choice between land claims. By various accounts, young people make this choice based on the perceived strength of each claim, and, perhaps more significantly, on

which culture they feel more affinity with (BA, CC, TC). A certain contingent of elders has faced a similar situation concerning self-definition. Elderly Inupiat who immigrated to Canada during the twentieth century may claim under both the Inuvialuit Final Agreement and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act; their children, while often maintaining family contacts in Alaska, are Inuvialuit claimants. Members of this elder Inupiaq generation often have a fluid sense of ethnic identity, asserting their Inupiaq identity in one social context and their Inuvialuit in another (e.g., DCG). Elders such as Ida Inglangasuk and Danny C. Gordon of Aklavik do not see a conflict in this position, instead using these different identities interchangeably depending on social circumstance.

Inuvialuit identities are also constructed by generational experiences. This can be seen in how different age sets view the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. Many present-day elders, for instance, were somewhat ambivalent about the claim during the days of COPE and even at its signing in 1984. Today they explain that during the late 1960s and 1970s, when the land claim was being pursued, the majority of Inuvialuit were still focused on land-based activities and had little knowledge of or even interest in this larger political scene. Some elders believe that the biggest motivating factor for the claim was the COPE members themselves, rather than the momentum of the broader populace (anonymous). Today, elders such as Annie and Danny C. Gordon (Fig. 4) feel that the claim has been of benefit to their people over the long run but note that there is a steep and ongoing learning curve amongst their leaders in the economic and political arenas.

Inuvialuit in the middle generations hold much stronger sentiments about the land claim that relate directly to the negative cultural experiences of their younger years. Many Inuvialuit of this generation feel that they lost their respect and self-sufficiency with the introduction of the welfare state and the residential school experience (GK, CC, BA). Cathy Cockney claims that pride and identity in being Inuvialuit have blossomed since the signing of the land claim. Like other members of his generation, Billy Archie did not learn about his own culture and language at school and was made to feel culturally and socially inferior to the southerners who taught him. He describes what he calls an Inuvialuit cultural revival that has flourished in his middle years. Billy states: “[Inuvialuit] have to know their history and their present circumstances in order to know the future, where they’re going. Culture is their backbone.” To this cohort, the claim has raised cultural

awareness and generated opportunities for Inuvialuit to (re)learn traditional stories, games, and skills on the land and to teach them to youth (JK).

Nearly thirty years after the signing of the claim, Inuvialuit community members define themselves along a number of formal and informal lines. The Inuvialuit Final Agreement created one set of legal criteria for membership. This includes a blood quantum, which requires one-quarter Inuvialuit ancestry (or access through intermarriage). More organic criteria for community identification revolve around special cultural characteristics and language (Aikio 1990). For instance, Inuvialuit distinguish themselves by their common pursuit of certain land- and sea-based activities and practices related to these, such as the hunting of beluga whales and the consumption of muktuk (Alunik et al. 2003:202–3, Freeman et al. 1992). Inuvialuit (and other Inuit) also define themselves

by their methods of sharing country food (cf. Bodenhorst 2003; Usher 2002).

Command of one or more of the Inuvialuktun dialects is also, at least theoretically, a defining characteristic of Inuvialuit identity. Language revitalization is a critical component of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. However, because of early sustained contact between Inuvialuit and Westerners, and the legacy of residential schools, Inuvialuktun dialects are threatened and little spoken by younger generations. Recognizing the importance of language to Inuvialuit cultural vitality, the focus of the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre is currently trained on language reclamation (C. Cockney, pers comm. April 2006). Another interesting issue is the inclusion of the northern Copper Inuit group the Ulukhaktokmiut within the Inuvialuit land claim in the easternmost community of Ulukhaktok (also known as Holman; Fig. 1). This group speaks Inuinnaqtun, a language of the central



Figure 4. Inuvialuit elders Annie and Danny C. Gordon at home in Aklavik, 2005.

Arctic, and is closely associated with present-day residents of Coppermine and Cambridge Bay. This community was included in the Inuvialuit claim due to a combination of their geographical position and the western arctic heritage of some families who identify themselves as Inuvialuit (Condon et al. 1996:xix).

Present-day development of Inuvialuit culture unites continuity with renewal. There is a rather emergent sense to cultural programming in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region that is partly related to the short historical duration of a collective Inuvialuit identity. For instance, Cathy Cockney has been involved for more than a decade in the revival of drum dancing in the communities of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, and emphasizes how this knowledge had to be retaught. Paulatuuq's Moonlight Dancers largely learned to drum dance by way of old videos. Esther Wolki comments, "It's funny; we realized a couple years ago that we've been doing some of the movements backwards. We mirrored what we saw on tape, so when the dancers used their left hands, we would use our right." Her involvement with this activity makes Wolki "feel happy that I am passing down traditional dance and song to the little kids" (Ho 2007:24–25). For their part, Topsy Cockney and the Inuvialuit Communications Society have worked hard to bring culturally appropriate television programming in both English and Inuvialuktun to the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. Programming includes Tamapta (All of Our People), a program about traditional Inuvialuit culture in Inuvialuktun, and Suaangan (To Have Strength), a program about contemporary Inuvialuit issues in English.

The rapid movement towards the creation of a distinct Inuvialuit identity has had several clear outcomes in this community. At a collective level, cultural boundaries between Inuvialuit and other aboriginal groups are more defined than they have perhaps ever been. This is seen most clearly in cultural and educational programming and in the economic and political arenas. Although the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit live side by side in several delta communities, their cultural and language research and programs are conducted independently of one another due to their administration under distinct claims. In the same vein, leaders such as Nellie Cournoyea have created an increasingly clear and resonant Inuvialuit voice in both territorial and national politics. The shift is observed by Stern (2006:106), who suggests that two and a half decades ago Native northerners were virtually "non-

participants in the activities of the Canadian nation." Today, the Inuvialuit, in particular, are in Cournoyea's words "trying to get in" to Canada, denoting their pursuit of full rights as Canadian citizens (Nemeth 1995:34). Inuvialuit are strong proponents of the pipeline and are working hard to develop the human and environmental resources of their territory. This work has included the development of a large spectrum of home-grown companies, foreign investments, and the aggressive pursuit of a stake in the oil and gas industry. Inuvialuit Regional Corporation views the prospective pipeline as an opportunity to develop the skills and prospects of their people; Inuvialuit beneficiaries similarly see the pipeline as a route to increased opportunities for employment, education, and training (Salokangas 2005; Stern 2006).

Inuvialuit are not alone in their drive towards self-definition and governance, sharing this goal with Inuit groups across the circumpolar North. Notions of a pan-Inuit identity emerged in the 1970s with the initiation of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC). This body was created to pursue discussion on common political and economic issues related to conservation and protection, subsistence rights, and the perpetuation of Inuit culture (Petersen 1984). Events like the Northern Games have solidified ties amongst Inuit around the circumpolar North and helped to publicize their distinct cultural traditions. In the political arena, movements towards sovereignty and self-definition have occurred at different time frames in Greenland, Siberia, Scandinavia, Alaska, and the Canadian North (Aikio 1990; Anderson 2000; Balzer 1999; Chance 1990; Cruikshank and Argounova 2000; Dahl 1988; Minority Rights Group 1994). Different Inuit and Native Siberian groups have commonly faced persecution in socioeconomic and political arenas, and their cultures and languages have been threatened by their envelopment by larger nation states. Yet in almost routine fashion, these minorities have asserted their identities by rejecting the assimilationist agendas of national governments and agitating for the establishment of land claims, home rule, or similar types of governance.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has traced the evolution of a collective Inuvialuit identity through the course of the twentieth century. Recent Inuvialuit history has involved an ongoing negotiation of self in opposition to cultural others

who have entered their territory and asserted claims to it. In the face of this onslaught, Inuvialuit have perpetually sought to define, assert, and renew their identity. Today, Inuvialuit identity is perhaps more concrete, multifaceted, and evolving than ever before.

In the present environment of cultural renewal, Inuvialuit are increasingly representing themselves as a distinctive collectivity to the outside world. They are producing works in print, video, art, and other media. They are also spearheading complex political, social and economic agendas and initiatives. Through these activities, Inuvialuit join other circumpolar peoples in their quest to define their difference from other Inuit and northern indigenous groups and from the broader Euro-Canadian populace. Inuvialuit today are asserting their right to articulate and share their distinctive histories, culture, and languages in ways and on terms of their own choosing.

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APPENDIX I. LIST OF INUVIALUIT COLLABORATORS REFERENCED IN THIS PAPER

The following Inuvialuit have been part of wider ongoing research efforts to document knowledge of traditional life and the impacts and changes to it brought by contact with westerners and the events that followed. They are listed below in alphabetical order, first by initials, second by their full name, and then by their place of residence and date of interview. Several of these individuals have been interviewed on numerous occasions; the interview date recorded is the one pertinent to issues and events discussed in this paper. Recordings and transcripts of interviews with these and other individuals involved in this research in the Inuvialuit community are on file with the author and with the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada.

Initials	Name	Place of residence	Date of interview
ACG	Annie C. Gordon*	Aklavik, NT	28 March 2007
BA	Billy Archie	Aklavik, NT	29 March 2007
CC	Cathy Cockney	Inuvik, NT	30 March 2007
DA	Donald Aviugana*	Aklavik, NT	17 June 2005
DCG	Danny C. Gordon*	Aklavik, NT	28 March 2007
EA	Elizabeth Aviugana*	Aklavik, NT	22 June 2005
GK	Gerry Kisoun	Inuvik, NT	11 April 2006
II	Ida Inglangasuk	Aklavik, NT	23 July 2005
JK	Jerry Kisoun	Inuvik, NT	11 April 2006
LC	Les Carpenter	Whitehorse, YK	19 Sept. 2007
NC	Nellie Cournoyea*	Inuvik, NT	1 May 2006
TC	Topsy Cockney	Inuvik, NT	30 March 2007
VA	Victor Allen*	Inuvik, NT	21 July 2005

* These individuals are considered Inuvialuit elders, while the other collaborators listed are Inuvialuit leaders and community members.

