

## INUIT IDENTITY IN THE CANADIAN ARCTIC<sup>1</sup>



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**Contemporary Nunavut Inuit perceive their identity to be a combination of inherited substances as well as knowledge, skills, and values that one must learn in order to be considered authentically Inuit. Inuit understand the latter part of their identity as examples of *inuktitut*, which is learning how to act in the Inuit way. Equally important for the expression of Inuit identity is knowledge of *qallunaatit*, the way of “white people.” This is why Inuit identity is best understood as an ethnic identity that influences how Inuit perceive themselves, their culture, and their relations to non-Inuit. The dominant discourse of Inuit identity rests on a reified notion of culture as well as a logic that equates the boundary between Inuit culture and Qallunaat culture as primordial and permanent. As such, Inuit identity is experienced as a set of primordial ties to specific places and persons and as a way of life that must be protected from the incursion of non-Inuit culture. (Ethnic identity, Nunavut Inuit, Canadian Arctic)**

In *The Reinvention of Primitive Society*, Kuper (2005) claims that only descent criteria (i.e., parentage) matter in how indigenous peoples define their identity today, and accuses anthropologists of relying on “obsolete anthropological notions and on a romantic and false ethnographic vision” (Kuper 2005:218). According to Kuper, communities throughout the world have shifted the basis of their identity from cultural tests (e.g., speaking an indigenous language, possessing traditional knowledge and skills) to criteria based on “ties of blood to ancestral soil” (Kuper 2005:218). Kuper claims that the decline of cultural tests involves a concomitant rise in the importance of descent and territoriality as the criteria peoples use to define themselves and their political agendas.

This essay examines Kuper’s dichotomy in light of ethnographic research conducted with Inuit and non-Inuit residents of southern Baffin Island, Northwest Territories (now Nunavut Territory), Canada, in the mid- to late 1990s and early 2000s in the town of Iqaluit and in an adjacent hunting camp, known locally as the Kuyait outpost camp. Iqaluit, the capital of the Nunavut Territory, is the largest and fastest growing town on Baffin Island and has a diverse population that includes long-time residents who have grown up in the north as well as recent arrivals who came to take advantage of employment opportunities in the regional government or to start a business in a booming economy.<sup>2</sup> Iqaluit is also home to some important Inuit organizations (e.g., Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the Baffin Regional Inuit Association), government agencies (the Nunavut Implementation Commission), and an experienced cadre of Inuit leaders and intellectuals who have helped make the plight of contemporary Inuit visible on a global scale.

In the mid-1990s, the Kuyait outpost camp was one of about a dozen camps remaining in the southern half of Baffin Island. Inuit began to establish these camps in the 1970s in order to escape the pressures and problems of life in Iqaluit, a place that had

grown more complex and crowded in the 1950s and 1960s as Inuit left their semi-nomadic pattern to live permanently in town. Although many Inuit enjoyed the opportunities and attractions of life in Iqaluit (Honigmann and Honigmann 1965), others found conditions there intolerable (Brody 1975). To accommodate disgruntled Inuit families as well as to ease the ever rising demand for public housing (which always exceeded the available supply), the Government of the Northwest Territories began to issue loans and grants to Inuit families to build and then move into camps that consisted of one or two extended families. Although many Inuit found life at the camps too primitive for their taste (no electricity, no indoor plumbing, no access to stores, and no regular mail service) and too far from the nearest hospital (a day's journey by boat or snowmobile), others preferred them to living in town.

My wife and I lived at the Kuyait outpost camp for a seven-month period in 1994. The camp's population consisted of an elderly camp leader, Aksujuleak, one or more of his adult children, and my wife and me. Kuyait is approximately 150 miles southwest of Iqaluit, the nearest town, and is located near the mouth of Wiswell Inlet, at the foot of a large hill that protects the camp's structures from the sudden powerful storms that can sink a boat or flatten a home. The summit of the hill behind Kuyait provides a spectacular view of Frobisher Bay, the second largest bay in Baffin Island, and a realm of sea ice and coastline visited by walrus, seals, and polar bears—animals that constituted a major portion of the diet at camp. Research also included living with a family in the town of Iqaluit, where time was spent visiting Qallunaat ("white people") and Inuit. Qallunaat constitute nearly half the population of Iqaluit.

Contrary to Kuper's (2005) claims, Inuit living on Baffin Island do not consider blood and soil to be the determining elements of their identity. Rather, Inuit of Iqaluit and adjacent outpost camps refer to a wide range of criteria—some based on measures of parentage, some based on tests of knowledge, skills, and values—to identify who is or is not Inuit. Five assumptions inform the discourse Inuit use to define what it means to be Inuit: (1) Inuit possess a unique way of living and learning about the world that must be incorporated into daily life if Inuit culture and identity are to survive; (2) Inuit inherit some of their identity through soul substance attached to Inuit names and through biological substance generated through human procreation; (3) Inuit identity requires particular places that nourish one's Inuit identity (e.g., outpost camps), while other places drain it away (e.g., Iqaluit); (4) Inuit are ethnically (and racially) distinct from Qallunaat; and (5) the articulation of Inuit identity entails a positive affirmation of Inuit culture and a simultaneous repudiation of Qallunaat culture. Although not all Inuit agree with the validity and veracity of all of these assumptions, each was present during my years of research in the Canadian Arctic.

Most Inuit are not deeply concerned with the comprehensiveness or coherence (or even consistency) of their claims about the differences between Inuit and Qallunaat. Rather, the two serve as reference points by which Inuit make sense of their everyday world, which has gone through great changes in the past 60 years. In addition, Inuit often make use of a reified concept of culture that is particularly noticeable in the official documents and publications produced by Inuit organizations (Searles 2006). The

different ways of imagining identity create paradoxes and puzzles that are considered in this essay.

### INUIT IDENTITY: BACKGROUND

Inuit identity is a type of ethnic identity forged in the structural relations between Inuit and Qallunaat, a relationship characterized, until recently, as one in which Qallunaat possessed most of the governmental authority and monetary wealth in the Canadian Arctic (Briggs 1997; Kennedy 1982; Kishigami 2004; Omura 2002; Paine 1977; Tanner 1993). A dominant trend in the ethnographies of the period examines the ways in which cultural beliefs and practices inform a collective sense of Inuit identity. These include subsistence hunting and food sharing (Bodenhorn 2000; Condon et al. 1995; Freeman et al. 1998; Searles 2002a; Wenzel 1991), naming and the experience of kin ties (Bodenhorn 1997; Feinup-Riordan 2001; Nuttall 1992), language use and storytelling (Cruikshank 1998; Dorais and Sammons 2002; Hensel 1996; Kaplan 2001; Kulchyski 2006), and the transmission of traditional values and the experience of specific cognitive states (Briggs 1997, 2001; Stairs 1992). Recent studies of cultural and ethnic identity in Alaska, Greenland, and Canada have tended to focus on the capacity of these identities to adapt to modernity, maintain continuity with the past, and resist colonialism, emphasizing how cultural identity has enabled individuals and groups to adapt a traditional way of life and values to an increasingly nontraditional (or even anti-traditional) world (Brody 2001; Clifford 2004; Cruikshank 1998; Dorais 1997; Dybbroe 1996; Feinup-Riordan 2000; Hensel 1996; Kennedy 1982; Nuttall 1992; Therrien 1999). Anthropologists continue to insist that the values and customs enshrined in traditions by which contemporary Canadian Inuit and Alaskan Eskimo identities are forged are conceptual tools, practical skills, and timeless wisdom that allow traditions to survive, and even thrive, in the modern world (Briggs 1997; Dorais 2005; Graburn 2006; Omura 2002; Stairs 1992; Therrien 1999).

One unresolved question that emerged in the literature on Inuit identity is whether that identity is derived through genealogical ties or through other factors, such as the practice of tradition or the acquisition of traditional knowledge. In terms of North American Inuit identity, two views stand opposed. On one side is the claim that identity rests heavily, if not entirely, on kin group identity (genealogy, or blood) and its territory. This is supported by Burch's (1988) research on the social organization and culture of the northwest Alaskan Eskimos, whose carefully defined boundaries separate demarcated kin groups. In this context, one's identity is conferred at birth and is composed largely of biological ties connected to a specific territory or home range (Burch 1988). Opposed to Burch's view are Guemple (1972) and Bodenhorn (2000, 2004) who argue that biology has little if any influence on how Inuit imagine how they relate to others, to a specific geographical location, or how they develop a personal identity. Guemple says kinship relations as "a source of personal identity and a device for securing succession, do not exist in Qiqqtamiut [Belcher Island Inuit of the Hudson Bay Region] society" (Guemple 1988:132). According to him, Inuit develop a social identity through living with other Inuit (who may or may not be related by blood), through co-operation

as defined by traditional rules, and through regular contact with members of that group (Guemple 1972, summarized in Nuttall 2000). Bodenhorn (2000) provides a similar model of relatedness and identity for Inupiat Eskimos living along the northern coast of Alaska. There, one becomes Inupiat not by birth but through a relatedness that involves numerous obligations and responsibilities (Bodenhorn 2000). For example, one informant claimed that “it is possible to turn a *tanik* (white person) into an Inupiaq (a real Inuit person) by letting him work with you” (Bodenhorn 2004:4).

The rules of relatedness that structure group formation for Inuit living in southern Baffin fall between these two extremes. Baffin Island Inuit consider their Inuit identity to originate, in part, from soul substance inherited from their namesakes and from their parents’ biological substance (see also Jolles and Oozeva 2002; Kishigami 2004; Pullar 1992). They also consider that having this matrix of biological and soul substance sets them apart from Qallunaat, a category of persons with its own set of attitudes, customs, and values. In some contexts, Inuit also imagine that their cultural identity can be increased or decreased depending on their upbringing, living conditions, and life circumstances. Last, Inuit identity is also a physical property of geographical location. Whereas spending time at an outpost camp makes one more Inuit (a claim made by some Inuit), spending time in a multiethnic town like Iqaluit can have the opposite effect. Some Inuit say that even the most traditional Inuit person or family can become Qallunaat if the right social conditions are in place (Rasing 1994; Active 2000).

#### DESCENT CRITERIA OF INUIT IDENTITY

The Utkuhikhalingmiut (a central Arctic Inuit group) create kinship ties by birth, by betrothal or marriage, by adoption, and by naming (Briggs 1970:36). This corresponds accurately to contemporary life in Nunavut. These four means of creating kin ties also serve as an important dimension of Inuit identity, as it is ascribed to individuals, in part, through the inheritance of substances passed from generation to generation. Moreover, it is through the creation of new kin that the substance of Inuit identity is generated and regenerated.

One of the most widely recognized transmitters of Inuit identity substance is the soul name. A belief among many Inuit throughout the North American Arctic and Greenland is that souls are embedded in Inuit names, such that to confer a name upon a newborn is equivalent to giving that baby a soul (Alia 2007). Through *atiit* (names) individuals begin to acquire the substance that constitutes Inuit identity. One receives *atiit* from biological relatives (usually grandparents), distantly related kin, and even from people who share no known genealogical ties. Generally, one receives a name from someone who has recently died, because Inuit believe that the dead live again in that name and in the body of another. But this is not a reincarnation because it is not the person who is reincarnated, but rather “the spiritual element that is the name—the name-soul—that joins the child, remaining with him and protecting him throughout his life” (Bennett and Rowley 2004:3).

The name-soul gives a child an Inuit ethnic identity, a family or community identity, and a personal identity. A name can transmit all those substances attached to the soul,

like memories and distinctive personality traits (Guemple 1994; Kublu and Oosten 1999; Searles 2007). I once observed the name-soul cosmology at work with an Inuit family in 1994, when a child's fear of submersing his head in water was linked directly to the fact that his namesake had drowned in a kayaking accident (Searles 2002b). An individual can inherit multiple names, as many as ten or more, and therefore name-souls, some of which become more prominent during various phases of the life course (Kublu and Oosten 1999).

An interesting feature about the practice of naming in Nunavut is that unlike the idiom of sharing blood or other biogenetic substances, which tends to make the ethnic boundary separating Inuit and non-Inuit like a racialized identity, name-souls have the capacity to transcend this boundary. One two-year-old girl of white parents in Iqaluit in 2001, who had no Inuit kin, was named Aksujuleak, a name that belonged to an elderly Inuit man who died a year prior to her birth. The adult children of Aksujuleak were close friends and neighbors of the parents, and they called the little girl "*ataata*" (father) and gave her the same love and affection they gave their father.<sup>3</sup>

Marriage is another way in which new kin (and new substance) are created. Marriage implicates newlyweds and their families into a set of rules that structure relations and provide guidelines for social interaction. These guidelines provide an array of norms by which the Inuitness of actions and ideas are evaluated for how well they conform to the rules and obligations of relatedness and what it means to be Inuit. Such notions include the importance of never refusing a relative's request for support or financial aid (Wenzel 1995, 2000).

Considering the flexibility of Inuit kinship (or its seeming nonexistence) and the relative absence of clans or other sharply defined descent groups (Guemple 1988; cf. Jolles and Oozeva 2002), one would expect a similar flexibility in how children of mixed marriages would be allowed to claim an Inuit or white identity if they so desired. The Inuit I interviewed in 1994 and 1996 had conflicting views about the identity of children of Inuit-Qallunaat parentage. I knew a family in which the mother was a white woman born and raised in Saskatchewan and the father was an Inuit man born in Iqaluit and raised there and in adjacent hunting camps. Everyone in the community identified their children as Inuit. They all had been given many name-souls, and their Inuit relatives referred to them with kinship terms and personal names that belonged to their deceased relatives.

On the other hand, I heard a story about an Inuit man who suffered discrimination because his mother was Inuit and his father was white. Students at his high school in Iqaluit called him "half-breed" and bullied him. But several elderly Inuit I interviewed, including this man's maternal uncle, had no doubts about his Inuit identity. He reminded them, one man told me, of his namesake, a famous Inuit hunter and community leader who died in the early 1960s.

Inuit throughout the North American Arctic have very high rates of adoption, particularly when compared to the adoption rates of non-Inuit (Alia 2007), and adoption is another means of creating kin and thereby creating the substance of Inuit identity. The Inuit I knew who were adopted at birth had all been adopted from one Inuit family into

another, which did not alter the adoptee's ethnicity as having at least one Inuit parent confers Inuit identity.

At the outpost camp, an older (adopted) son of Aksujuleak often referred to his little brother (also adopted) as the "Frenchman," a reference to the fact that his brother's biological father was from Quebec. But none of the Inuit and Qallunaat I knew in Iqaluit and in the outpost camps ever questioned the "Frenchman's" ethnicity as anything other than Inuit. The older brother often used this term to deride his brother, who he thought was less helpful with chores around the camp. Resentment might also have motivated his choice of reference, for the father favored the younger son with gifts of tobacco and ammunition, which he seldom gave to the older one, despite the fact that the latter was more responsible with performing everyday chores.

The link between parentage and native status has become complicated by the legalization of identity that occurred with the passage of the Nunavut Land Claims Settlement Agreement. Those Inuit with no cultural identity are entitled, it seems, to claim beneficiary status under one of the four regional land-claims settlements.<sup>4</sup> Kishigami (2004) suggests that a growing number of individuals with Inuit ancestry but no strong ties to Inuit culture or to Arctic communities are referring to themselves not as Inuit but as Canadians of Inuit descent—a process of prying apart cultural and ethnic identity. It is entirely possible that one of the criteria listed in the Agreement, "Inuk [an Inuit individual] as determined in accordance with Inuit customs and usages," could include a set of rules about parentage, although nowhere in the document are such rules specified or alluded to (Tungavik Federation of Nunavut 1993).

Although descent is not included as a criterion for defining legal status according to Nunavut's settlement, it is not ruled out. Asked if parentage matters, an enrollment committee member in Nunavut said that, indeed, parentage did matter. Her committee recently rejected an application because the applicant could not prove to the satisfaction of the committee that she had the proper "bloodlines." Other factors may have worked against the applicant, such as the fact that she lived outside of Nunavut for a long time and that she had not maintained regular contact with family members living in the community she was seeking to be enrolled in. Research on recent decisions made by enrollment committees should identify any patterns on ethnic identity emerging from those decisions.

Contemporary Baffin Island Inuit believe their identity is conferred partly through spiritual substance transmitted by name-souls. The inheritance of name-souls is significant for identity because the names are thought to endow individuals with memories and personality traits that belonged to the name giver. The inheritance of biogenetic substance is significant for identity because it allows individuals to conceive of their Inuit identity as something based on descent or ancestry, a situation that has precedent in some but not all parts of the North American Arctic.

## TRAITS AND TESTS OF INUIT IDENTITY

Inuit also pay a great deal of attention to the ways in which Inuit identity is constructed in everyday activities. The concept of *inuktitut* illustrates this principle concisely:

Inuit use [*inuktitut*] to mean how they speak; it also refers to the way in which they do things. A person can talk, hunt, walk, eat, sleep, raise children, dance, and even smile inuktitut. Everything the Inuit do is revealed in their manner of doing it. A distinctive identity is bound up as much in the details of everyday behavior as in the use of language. (Brody 1987:151)

“Inuktitut” stresses the importance of knowledge, action, and ability in the articulation of Inuit identity and establishes a set of cultural tests through which Inuit define what it means to be Inuit. Equally important to understanding what constitutes inuktitut is the concept of *qallunaatit* (the way of a white person), a concept that Brody curiously ignores. For as much as one can eat, breathe, and sleep in the way of an *inuk* (an Inuit person), one can also eat, breathe, and sleep in the way of a white person (*qallunaaq*). Both Inuit and Qallunaat sometimes remark about how some Inuit person is acting Qallunaat, or is on the way to becoming a qallunaaq, but Inuit may also say that some Qallunaat are better at being Inuit than many Inuit.

The concepts of inuktitut and qallunaatit provide the foundation of a dominant discourse of identity that is reinforced in many private and public contexts and builds on the notion that identity is an attribute that is achieved rather than ascribed. What is less clear, however, is what Inuit think about the location of the boundary that distinguishes the categories of inuktitut and qallunaatit. For some, the boundary between Inuit and Qallunaat is based solely on ethnic or racial criteria. For others, the boundary is situated in attitudes, beliefs, and values. Following his election to the presidency of Nunavut Tunngavik, Inc., an Inuit corporation established to oversee the distribution of funds transferred to Inuit by way of the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Settlement, Josie Kusugak declared that “Inuit have always had a way of taking what they wanted from western culture without becoming Qallunaatized” (Gregoire 1994). Kusugak seems to be saying that although Inuit society has changed over time (and will continue to change), this change has not caused the loss of Inuit culture and identity; Inuit and Qallunaat still belong to two distinct worlds.

In one of the publications of the Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association, *The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture* (Pauktuutiit 2006), the authors distinguish between the old ways and values and the ways of the broader Qallunaat-dominated society. Pauktuutiit’s definition of culture makes heavy use of the dichotomy of modernity and tradition, and emphasizes that “Inuit can thus become torn between values of the broader society and those of Inuit traditional values” (Pauktuutiit 2006:33). Also significant about the model of culture and interethnic relations expressed in *The Inuit Way* is that Qallunaat traditions and values are timeless and fixed.

An example of how the dominant discourses about Inuit and Qallunaat identities settled into the everyday language of ordinary Inuit is Rasing’s (1994) research in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Iglulik, a town devoted to the preservation of traditional

Inuit culture (Wachowich 2006). According to Rasing, the people of Iglulik identify three classes of Inuit: *inummariit*, *Qallunaamiut*, and *Qallunaamariit*. *Inummariit* are “real Inuit” who grew up in the early part of the twentieth century when interactions between Inuit and Qallunaat were rare or nonexistent, and when Inuit had little, if any, access to Western trade goods and government support. *Qallunaamiut* (literally, people of the white people) refers to Inuit who came of age during the 1950s and ‘60s, a period of sedentarization when Inuit began to abandon their seasonal camps to live in one of the dozens of settlements built by whites from southern Canada and other parts of the British Commonwealth. Inuit and non-Inuit scholars identify this period as a pivotal phase in Inuit history (e.g., Graburn 1998; Matthiasson 1992), a time when Inuit sacrificed (or were forced to sacrifice) much of their autonomy by moving into towns controlled by white administrators, teachers, and missionaries (Tester and Kulchyski 1994; Damas 2002). While *inummariit* never had to learn to speak English, *Qallunaamiut* had no choice but to learn the language and culture of the Qallunaat. As a consequence, *Qallunaamiut* have assimilated Euro-Canadian values (Rasing 1994:200). The Inuit of Iglulik still consider *qallunaamiut* to be true Inuit (although not as true as *inummariit*), because they “have learned to operate within the new socio-political framework [of settlement life], while retaining [traditional] values and norms” (Rasing 1994:200).

The third category, *Qallunaamariit*, refers to those persons whose credentials for being Inuit rest only on parentage. *Qallunaamariit* (literally, “real white people”) refers to individuals of Inuit descent who act like Qallunaat, as exemplified by patterns of behavior and lifestyle choices. For example, *Qallunaamariit* prefer to socialize with whites instead of Inuit. From an outsider’s perspective, one can interpret the actions of *Qallunaamariit* as upsetting the boundary separating the Inuit way from the Qallunaat way, for it challenges, or even subverts, a discourse of identity based on the principle that culture (i.e., tradition) can only be refashioned by exogenous forces, not by internal ones (i.e., by individuals with tastes, desires, and attitudes that depart from the norm).

The creation of a new Inuit government of the Nunavut Territory on April 1, 1999, after a long process of development and planning, has reinforced what separates Inuit from Qallunaat values in a way that celebrates the former while repudiating the latter. One of the most potent markers of this divide is the concept of *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (“IQ”). Those Inuit hired to design the Nunavut territorial government consulted with elders to develop a plan to make traditional Inuit knowledge a key aspect of workplace ethics, protocol, and planning. According to *The Inuit Way*, IQ refers to the Inuit way of knowing, or traditional knowledge: “IQ has been adopted as an official policy of the Government of Nunavut, in its commitment to develop practices and policies that are consistent with the culture, values, and language of the Inuit majority” (Pauktuutiit 2006:6). Alexina Kublu, an Inuktitut language instructor and linguist at Nunavut’s Arctic College, defines the concept literally as “things Inuit have known for a long time.” The phrase implies a time that predates the arrival of whites, and the implication is that IQ developed during an era when Inuit supported themselves entirely through their labor and through relationships with other Inuit, a time when, many Inuit believe, true or real Inuit identity first came into being. But equally crucial to its meaning is the implied



absence of *Qallunaat Qaujimajatuqangit* (“QQ”), a Western way of knowing. The goal of creating an IQ government is to design a government more effective and efficient than one managed by QQ principles alone.<sup>5</sup>

The speeches of Inuit politicians and the language in official guides to traditional knowledge provide an array of concepts, images, and icons that fuel and feed off a discourse of Inuit identity, a discourse built on the idea that culture, whether Inuit or Western, is a fixed body of knowledge and values formed in the past. The discourse also rests on the idea that Inuit and Qallunaat cultures (and by implication Inuit and white persons) have been and will remain distinguishable in form and function.

#### DIFFERENCE THROUGH DIET, PROPERTY, AND TIME

Other domains of daily life, such as diet and the experience of time, provide signifiers used to bring into relief the differences dividing Inuit and Qallunaat cultures. Whereas some whites might view eating raw meat as indicating that Inuit need civilizing, this same practice symbolizes to Inuit the superiority of their diet (Searles 2002a). This double-edged aspect of contemporary Inuit identity, a celebration of tradition and a repudiation of things Qallunaat, transforms ordinary activities like hunting at the ice-floe edge into symbols of identity and difference. Inuit emphasize how eating raw seal meat or hunting at the floe edge produces healthy bodies and intelligent minds that in many ways are superior to bodies raised according to town lifestyles and minds educated in Canadian (non-Inuit) schools. One Inuit woman told me how her father had taken her brother out of school when he was seven or eight to teach him how to live off the land. This brother, she claimed, was the most patient person she knew. She then explained how Inuit raised on the land learn to be patient and calm when faced with building a shelter in a blinding blizzard or fixing an outboard motor in a sea churned by gale-force winds. Her reference to her brother’s patience was a way to criticize her white colleagues at work, whom she found easily frustrated, quick to anger, and unable to control their emotions. In a backhanded way she had also condemned the local Canadian school system, for it was her “raised on the land” brother and not her “schooled in the settlement” siblings (all of whom completed the government schooling that was available to them) who stood out as having qualities attributed to real Inuit. She was not alone in thinking that spending time hunting, fishing, and camping exposed Inuit to challenges and experiences that made them develop emotional control, autonomy, and patience (Briggs 1991; see also Briggs 2001), traits that symbolize the opposite of the Qallunaat way.

Discourse about the healthful effects of eating Inuit food (i.e., food obtained locally by hunting, fishing, and gathering, or purchased in government regulated co-operatives) provide another set of symbols revealing the sharp divide separating Inuit and Qallunaat identity (Searles 2002a). Eating Inuit food, as Inuit informants reiterate, cures illnesses, makes one strong, and provides a level of energy and stamina Qallunaat foods lack. One Inuit man, who had spent much of his youth at a hunting camp and later moved to live in Iqaluit, said that his town diet of white foods made him weak, lazy, and ill equipped to deal with the strength and stamina needed to live off the land. Today, at age 30, this

man claimed that his father's health and level of energy were far superior to his own, even though his father is more than 40 years his senior. The son attributed his father's strength and endurance to a diet of Inuit foods and a daily regimen of chores associated with living at a hunting camp throughout the year.

The idea that most Qallunaat find the smell of boiled seal and walrus meat offensive or repulsive, a sentiment corroborated by many white residents in Iqaluit, seemed to increase the salience of the claim that Inuit food was far superior to Qallunaat food. Not only did foods like seal and walrus meat build healthier and stronger bodies, Inuit would remind me, they also helped to make the differences between Inuit and Qallunaat seem innate and natural, even as these two populations worked together, attended church together, and even raised children together.

The concepts of private property and personal possessions generate behaviors and values that reinforce the idea that Inuit and Qallunaat inhabit two distinct worlds. In the first month at the hunting camp in the winter of 1994, our Inuit host family encouraged my wife and me to "eat whatever you want from the meat shed," whenever we wished. This ethic of sharing contrasted with their perceptions of town life in which food and other necessities had to be purchased with cash or credit. One Inuit woman living in Iqaluit told me she was astounded when her brother made her pay for a husky dog she was going to add to her sled team, saying "Relatives should share and not make their relatives pay." In this case, the brother was acting in the Qallunaat way and not in the Inuit way.

The categories of time and temporality provided another domain of discourse in which the Inuit way and the Qallunaat way were easily differentiated. Several Inuit informants stressed how the pace of life at an outpost camp is more natural and healthy than that experienced in Iqaluit. When living at camp, our Inuit hosts explained that in order to succeed in living off the land, one has to adapt to a new pace of movement and activity that is much different than that in Iqaluit. One young Inuit man explained that when he began living with his father at a hunting camp, his father said that he did not need to rush anything. "He told me to take my time." Only by learning to take one's time, by learning to approach tasks patiently and calmly, can a person become a successful hunter, an activity that requires a great deal of persistence and patience. Although some Inuit find the pace of life in Iqaluit to be more exciting than that at the outpost camp, it is not the Inuit way. Some Inuit went even further in contrasting the experience of time at an outpost camp with the experience of time in town. Because of its fast pace, a person living in town is more prone to be emotionally tumultuous and anxious to have everything completed by some arbitrarily imposed time. One Inuit woman thought that Qallunaat plan everything in advance as if they can control the future, whereas traditional Inuit learn how to relinquish a desire to control time in order to become more aware of, and therefore better able to yield to, the rhythm and movements of weather, tides, animals, seasons, etc.

As in small settlements like outpost camps and hamlets, everyday life in town is punctuated with reminders that Inuit and Qallunaat do things differently and occupy separate cultural worlds. It seems that increased contact and co-operation (and conflict) between Inuit and Qallunaat in places like Iqaluit has made it easier to tell the two

cultures apart. Despite predictions of acculturation and a progressive erosion of Inuit tradition and identity, regular contact between Iqaluit Inuit and Qallunaat and increased exposure to Western persons, objects, and values have made Inuit culture more secure and Inuit identity more robust.

When our Inuit host family in Iqaluit in 1994 was playing the board game, *Sorry*, it seemed odd that no one expressed joy or disappointment when the winner's piece crossed the finish line. Excitement was focused on who would finish last. The last-place finisher, we learned, would be responsible for cleaning a day's worth of dishes, cups, and utensils stacked in the kitchen sink. A white woman who was watching explained that Inuit and Qallunaat have different goals when they play the game. Unlike Qallunaat, whose aim is to win, Inuit are concerned with who loses. Focusing attention on the winner, as Qallunaat tend to do, makes that person feel superior to others playing the game. The woman ventured the opinion that having the loser "pay" for not keeping up with the rest stresses the importance of the group over the individual.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, an emphasis on exposing the differences between Inuit and Qallunaat ways inevitably leads to contested claims about culture and identity and disagreements about what precisely constitutes the Inuit way and the Qallunaat way. One example involves the government public school system in Iqaluit. In the mid-1990s, many Inuit and Qallunaat regarded the school system as progressive because of the greater emphasis placed on Inuit language and culture. Any child could be enrolled in the Inuktitut-only language track from kindergarten through third grade, and the local school board, which included Inuit and Qallunaat members, had revised major portions of the grade-school curriculum to include more components on Inuit language, culture, values, and learning style.

Despite these changes, some Inuit claimed that schools continue to be places of discrimination and racism, places where teachers place white students in accelerated classes and Inuit students in remedial ones. These Inuit felt that teachers taught and evaluated Inuit students with a set of standards and expectations different than Qallunaat ones, which was evident in the extra time given to Inuit students to complete their assignments.

Another example of educational reform was attempted in the mid-1990s by a young Inuit woman who wanted the school system to be more appreciative of Inuit values and traditional knowledge. She intended to introduce a program of experiential learning developed in Britain in the early 1940s, called *Outward Bound*. Together with another resident, the two women started a chapter of *Outward Bound* in Iqaluit to provide educational adventures to stimulate the intellect, improve self-esteem, lead to the discovery of innate abilities, and inspire a sense of responsibility towards others. Because it teaches self-reliance and the importance of helping others, it appears to closely resemble the Inuit way of education.

The Inuit woman claimed that *Outward Bound* incorporates many values and educational techniques that are similar to how her parents and grandparents were taught, techniques that were not part of the federal day-school curricula forced on Inuit children. One example of the Inuit way is learning to control one's emotions. The absence of such control can be disastrous, even fatal. The worst response to an unexpected storm or to

a broken motor hundreds of miles from the nearest settlement is to panic so that one cannot think clearly or calmly. Outward Bound, like traditional Inuit child rearing practices, trains youngsters to confront their fears and to feel their way out of difficult situations. Qallunaat educational methods, she believed, do not encourage students either to think independently or to develop emotional stability. Instead, they encourage students to be discouraged when they get the wrong answer or to respond to failure with disappointment and fear. Rather than shield one's children from adversity, as Qallunaat tend to do, one must challenge them to make them more emotionally resilient (Briggs 1998). This Inuit woman's borrowing from one tradition (British) to explain another (Inuit) reveals how the content of Inuit culture can be stretched sometimes to include Western knowledge and values without blurring the boundary that separates the Inuit way and the Qallunaat way.

In addition to being stretched to accommodate anomalies, the classification system used to divide Inuit and Qallunaat can also be contracted to exclude certain people and places. For example, Inuit in Clyde River (a small settlement in northern Nunavut) assert that "no Inuit live in Iqaluit." This is perplexing because there appear to be thousands of Inuit living in Iqaluit, including prominent Inuit leaders and intellectuals, some coming from small settlements like Clyde River, who devote much of their adult lives to protecting and promoting Inuit traditional knowledge.

The claim made by Clyde River Inuit reflects a demotic discourse of Inuit identity—that living in close proximity to Qallunaat changes Inuit into Qallunaat. Whether such claims are still being made is unknown, but they do expose a tension that exists in how far the divide separating one group from another can be stretched or contracted before that divide is no longer valid or worth maintaining.

A final case study involves an Inuit man for whom the border between Inuit and Qallunaat provided opportunities as well as obstacles. While many aspects of his life history reveal a strong commitment to the ideals embodied in the concept of IQ, he also had desires that seemed more in keeping with the Qallunaat way than the Inuit way. Such desires often got him in conflict with his peers and members of the Inuit community, which seemed to him even more evidence that the Inuit way was in need of reform and revitalization.

In many ways, this man's life was similar to other Inuit of his generation. He was a competent hunter and adept in many different kinds of habitat (tundra, sea ice, open ocean). He spoke Inuktitut fluently and belonged to a large, well known southern Baffin Inuit family, which bestowed on him many name-souls, including the name of a renowned Inuit hunter, a leader of one of the bands of Inuit that relocated to Iqaluit in the mid-1950s. Because he worked several jobs and was an active member of the local fire department, it was difficult for him to hunt as much as he wanted. But his freezer in Iqaluit was always filled with seal meat, caribou meat, and arctic char, which he shared freely with family and friends.

Some community leaders in Iqaluit were mentoring him to become a person who could bring Inuit values into the regional government. With the consent of government officials, he won a contract to oversee the supervision and rehabilitation of young Inuit criminal offenders. Unlike standard government procedure, which was to place young

offenders in custody facilities in Iqaluit, this man recruited two Inuit elders and some younger Inuit to take the young offenders to an outpost camp 150 miles from Iqaluit and teach them traditional Inuit knowledge and values as part of their sentencing. One goal of the program was to transform a government program for young offenders from the Qallunaat way to the Inuit way.

In a previous job, he similarly bridged the Inuit and Qallunaat worlds. While still in high school, a multinational telecommunications company hired him to help set up their infrastructure in various parts of the Northwest Territories. Because of his language skills, kinship ties, and knowledge of the environment, he facilitated communication between the Inuit and non-Inuit employees of the company. His experiences taught him the value of wage work and private enterprise in building character and growing the local economy, goals he thought were essential for future generations of Inuit and their communities.

His many years of work in the private sector also affected his views of the relationship between poverty, government intervention, and economic development. He regularly criticized the programs and policies of the territorial government designed to help those in need, programs like social assistance and family allowance, which he thought provided financial support to individuals who were capable of working for a living. These welfare programs, he thought, only made Inuit more dependent on Qallunaat, which for him symbolized a move away from being a real Inuit. As an example, he mentioned how his relatives took advantage of the young offenders program by taking more than a fair share of supplies of fuel, tobacco, and soda. He also attributed the high rate of substance abuse in Iqaluit to the existence of welfare.

In 1996, his contract with the outpost camp ended, but he was already engaged in starting an information technology company which would give him exclusive rights to provide internet service to large parts of the Northwest Territories. He beamed with pride as he related how a young, inexperienced Inuit entrepreneur managed to outbid a group of elite white businessmen to win this contract. Rather than interpreting his new business venture as a departure from his maintenance of Inuit traditional knowledge and values, he saw it as a continuation, as bringing the Inuit way into the private sector and showing the world that Inuit could be just as successful in realms of activity that many associated exclusively with Qallunaat culture. Convinced himself, he wanted to convince others that Inuit culture could be created anywhere.

His story reveals the many-sided and contradictory dimensions of Inuit identity and the kinds of subjectivities it engenders. From the perspective of Clyde River Inuit, other Inuit from Iqaluit, and some members of his own family, he was a Qallunaat. His distaste for big government and welfare programs were antithetical to the views of Inuit who imagined these programs as like the Inuit way because they mirrored the social support networks that Inuit relied on in the past.

One aspect of group identity that appears to be clear is that as the Inuit become more economically stratified and culturally differentiated, "they [will] mature into status groups in the classical Weberian sense of the term" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:65). That is, the bonds that unite Inuit will seem more and more like primordial ties.

## CONCLUSION

The discourse of Inuit identity in Nunavut draws from a range of criteria, including some based on principles of inheritance and some based on principles of performance. Some aspects of Inuit identity are conferred at birth through substance transmitted from biological parent to child, while other parts of Inuit identity are conferred around the time of birth, as well as later on in life, through spiritual substance transmitted by namesouls. The discourse of Inuit identity also makes use of two twin concepts, *inuktitut* (the way of an Inuk) and *qallunaatitut* (the way of a white person), as well as their counterparts, *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (Inuit traditional knowledge and values) and *Qallunaat Qaujimajatuqangit* (Qallunaat traditional knowledge and values), in establishing a cultural, intellectual, physiological, and psychological boundary between the Inuit and Qallunaat worlds. Inuit associate each culture with a range of activities and experiences, including hunting seals on the sea ice, learning how to read and write in a classroom, playing the game of Sorry with family and friends, and having a cup of coffee at the office. Inuit also agree that these cultures show little or no signs of converging or overlapping in the future, even as changing conditions make the socioeconomic divide between Inuit and Qallunaat less pronounced in some settings, as more and more Inuit adopt a middle-class lifestyle similar to their Qallunaat neighbors, and more pronounced in others, as the wage earning gap and poverty rate between Inuit and Qallunaat persist.

Although it is still too early to tell if Kuper's (2005) prognosis—that contemporary indigenous political movements will soon be dominated by Eurocentric notions of blood and soil—will come to pass in Nunavut, the ethnographic data from this region suggest that cultural tests of identity remain important to Inuit, even if what Inuit consider to be cultural tests vary from community to community, family to family, and person to person. The data also suggest that it is the boundary between the Inuit way and the Qallunaat way that is regarded as permanent, not the traits and values associated with each (Barth 1969), so it is likely that new ways of interpreting and defining the boundary will persist. *Pace* Kuper, however, the situation in Nunavut indicates that descent-based criteria and cultural tests are mutually compatible frames of reference for defining Inuit identity.

Recent events, including the establishment of entitlements for the beneficiaries of Inuit land claims in the Canadian Arctic, have led to the adoption of new criteria of identity, evident in the Inuit use of terms like "blood lines," to determine who qualifies for beneficiary status. More research is necessary, however, to determine the full range of factors used by enrollment committees to decide who is authentically Inuit and who is not, and whether these factors include criteria like possessing Inuit traditional knowledge and values, engaging and maintaining certain types of relations with other Inuit, and having the proper parentage.

Also unclear is how social and cultural divisions emerging among the Inuit in Nunavut, divisions caused by shifting residency patterns (i.e., town and village) and by increased socioeconomic stratification, will lead to a reconfiguration of what counts as a cultural test of identity and to new ways of imagining Inuit ethnicity. To what extent and by what means the boundary between the Inuit way and the Qallunaat way will shift

remains an open question, and may well be another case of the more things change, the more they stay the same.

## NOTES

1. I am grateful to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Washington, the US-Canadian Fulbright Exchange Program, the Canadian Embassy, the Faculté des Sciences Sociales at Université Laval, and the National Science Foundation's Division of International Fellows for supporting this research.
2. According to the 2001 Canada census, Iqaluit was home to 5,235 people, approximately 60 percent of whom defined themselves as Inuit (Dorais and Sammons 2002).
3. See also Fienup-Riordan (2001:235) for an example of how Yup'ik names made her a "real person" and related her to a Yup'ik family and community.
4. These are the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (passed in 1978), the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (1984), the Nunavut Land Claims Settlement Agreement (1993), and the Labrador Land Claims Agreement (2004).
5. To be fair, one of the architects of Nunavut, John Amagoalik, claims that he and the other Inuit who helped to design the Nunavut Government refused to create an ethnic government. They wanted a government that would welcome anyone, regardless of ethnic identity, to serve in its parliament or work in one of its departments.

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