

The Wisdom of Elders: Inuvialuit Social Memories of Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract. The Inuvialuit of the Canadian Western Arctic are no strangers to change. From the arrival of whalers ca. 1890, they underwent a century of monumental societal upheaval. Perhaps against the odds, they sustained many of their traditional socioeconomic activities and continued to follow a land-based lifestyle through much of the twentieth century. With a few notable exceptions, historical accounts of this period were written by cultural outsiders who conveyed their own perspectives on Inuvialuit culture. This paper focuses on the social memories of present-day Inuvialuit Elders who recount aspects of their lifeways throughout the twentieth century, including seasonal practices, traditional skills they maintained, and responses to the historical events that challenged their ways of living and spurred continuous change. These oral narratives form part of a larger history for succeeding generations, and a platform from which to construct contemporary identities and to negotiate a collective future.

Like other northern indigenous groups, the Inuvialuit of the Canadian Western Arctic have their own sense of the past. This sense derives from their long tenure in the lower Mackenzie Delta and adjacent shoreline regions (Fig. 1) and their collective sense of identity. According to their own stories, Inuvialuit have lived in this region since time immemorial (Kolausok 2005). In archaeological terms, the Inuvialuit are thought to be descended from the pre-contact Thule, and their distinctive social, economic, and political patterns to have developed over the course of the last six to seven hundred years (Alunik, Kolausok, and Morrison 2003:10; Friesen and Arnold 2008:534). By the time Inuvialuit encountered Europeans for the first time, they lived in a series of named groups that collectively formed one of the most concentrated populations in the circumpolar north (Alunik,

Kolausok, and Morrison 2003:14–17; McGhee 1974:xi; Stefansson 1919:22–23).

Inuvialuit identities are drawn from the collective stories, songs, traditions and memories of their long and varied past. As a group, however, Inuvialuit have often suffered the effects of the homogenization of Inuit peoples and knowledge, thus their oral histories are underrepresented in both the oral and textual literature of the north (Cournoyea in Lyons 2007:231). Part of the responsibility for this under-representation lies in the early, sustained history of contact between Inuvialuit and EuroCanadian and American outsiders. Concerted contact began in the late nineteenth century with the arrival of foreign whalers who would supplant the indigenous bowhead industries of the Inuvialuit and neighboring Alaskan Inupiat. Contact with the whalers, and the mission-

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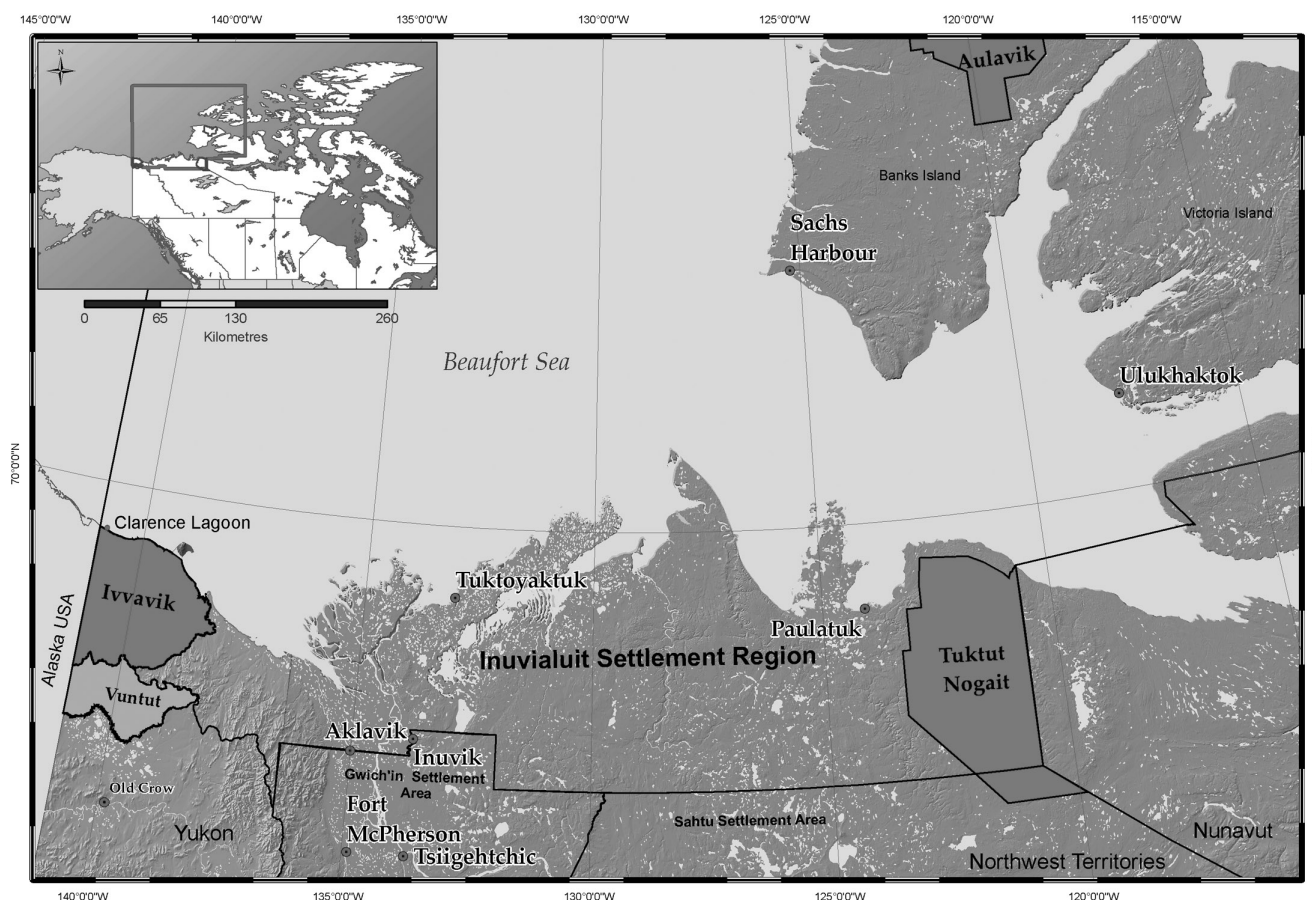


Figure 1. Map showing the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, established 1984 (Lyons 2007:122).

aries traders, and RCMP, would substantively and irrevocably alter the traditional social, economic, and political patterns of the local people. Inuvialuit were not passive recipients of this process, but rather active participants in a rapidly changing socioeconomic reality (V. Allen in Lyons 2007:31).

A well-documented suite of societal changes accompanied this integration into the capitalist world system (cf., Friesen 1996). One of the most pervasive social changes was the literal colonization of traditional structures of pedagogy and instruction amongst indigenous northerners. The EuroCanadian newcomers introduced written forms of records, books, and logs that would displace traditional forms of oral transmission (Lyons 2007:11–12). The mission schools took traditional education out of the hands of parents and grandparents and placed it in the hands of Western religious institutions, and later the state (Kolausok 2005). Confronted with the onslaught of foreign languages and the ideological and moral regimen of the mission schools, many Inuvialuit lost the ability to speak their own languages over the course of the twentieth century. At the same

time, outsiders' histories became the normative accounts of the Inuvialuit past. Cultural outsiders produced an array of written accounts of Inuvialuit "history," accounts which inevitably reflected the standpoints and circumstances from which these authors hailed, rather than those of the Inuvialuit themselves. In Julie Cruikshank's words (1998:5), these outsiders' narratives "became authorizing statements, the foundation on which policy decisions were made by colonial institutions—the Hudson's Bay Company, the church, and the government." This process took the authority for self-governance, self-promotion, and self-representation out of the hands of local people and legitimated the role of outsiders in decision-making from afar.

Yet, despite the omnipotent effects of colonizing forces, Inuvialuit have resiliently maintained their identities and even asserted a cultural renewal in recent decades (Lyons 2007, 2009). Social memories of the early to mid twentieth century remain vibrant and intact amongst Elders. Inuvialuit forms of oral transmission and knowledge have survived in the passing of stories within fam-

ilies, the teaching of land-based skills, and the efforts to perpetuate the language. Distinct from outsiders' accounts of their region's "history," Inuvialuit accounts feature their own people and families, their own interactions with the land, elements, and resources, and their own reckoning of notable interactions and events. Until recently, the vast majority of stories about "life on the land" have been told in the company of family, at home, in camp, and in the practice of traditional activities.

A very few of these narratives have been recorded in print by Inuvialuit who wished to memorialize a time and lifestyle that, they felt, was passing from view. Nuligak (1966:160), in his memoirs of a life of trapping and whaling in the opening decades of the twentieth century, said: "Such were our customs, our manner of living. We are losing them. The young Inuit are learning the white man's way of life while our own is fading away." In the forward to *My Name is Masak*, the memoirs of Alice French (1976:vii–viii), then Member of Parliament Wally Firth wrote: "Our history has largely been written by outsiders and these stories do not often mention people like Alice's family. However, one can never understand the North without getting to know its people. *My Name is Masak* is one northerner's story in her own words. The North will never be the same again, but Alice's memories will help to keep the recent past alive." More recently, a swath of oral history, print, visual, documentary and web resources are being produced by and with Inuvialuit for use in their own communities (e.g., Alunik 1998; Alunik, Kolausok, and Morrison 2003; Cournoyea 1997; Hart 1997, 1999, 2001; Hart and Amos 2004; Hart and Cockney 1998; Hart and Inuvialuit Co-researchers 2001; Inuvialuit Communication Society n.d. a, b, c; Nagy 1994, 2002, 2006; Nasogaluak and Cockney 1996; Kolausok 1999; Parks Canada 2004; Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre n.d.; Radford 2005).

This paper focuses on the social memories of present-day Inuvialuit Elders who recount aspects of their lifeways in the early to mid twentieth century. Social memory, as discussed below, is a venue by which Inuvialuit community members can negotiate their identity in relation to the past, and a platform from which they can plan for a common future. Inuvialuit collective memories differ in emphasis and nature from external accounts of Inuvialuit "history," and these divergences are discussed in relation to Elders' narratives about traditional pedagogy, bush life, and involvement in the "new" activities in town. The paper draws primarily on oral history interviews conducted with Inuvialuit Elders and community members between 2005 and 2007 as part of a larger project that examined Inuvialuit represen-

tations of the past (Lyons 2007, 2008, 2009). The details of these interviews are presented in Appendix 1. While the discussion here is confined within the limits of a written paper, it should be recognized that the broader conversations around these narratives form a lively, ongoing discourse in the homes and work-places of present-day Inuvialuit.

This paper is organized as follows. It begins with an abbreviated account of the historical interactions between Inuvialuit with other cultural groups, which contributed substantially to Inuvialuit conceptions of self and identity. Concepts of social memory are then outlined, particularly as they pertain to indigenous societies that traditionally practiced an oral tradition. The social memories of Inuvialuit Elders are explored in the main section of the paper, which presents narratives about their experiences of several aspects of land- and town-based life in the twentieth century. The discussion examines Inuvialuit social memory as it intersects with accounts created by the "other"—namely, outsiders from whom contemporary Inuvialuit are re-claiming their rights, the right to tell their own pasts in culturally distinct and appropriate ways.

Inuvialuit History and Identity

Since the time of living and written memory, the Inuvialuit have sustained long and varied relationships with other indigenous groups in the Western Arctic and with European-derived outsiders. These interactions have continually worked to define an Inuvialuit sense of collectivity and identity (see Lyons 2009 for a more complete account). Prior to contact with EuroCanadian and American outsiders, traditional Inuvialuit groups seldom ventured far upstream, having more than sufficient resources within their coastal catchment area. The advent of outside trade introduced new possibilities for material acquisition and drew Inuvialuit cautiously upstream to Fort McPherson and into the territory of their traditional enemies, the Gwich'in, in the mid-nineteenth century (McGhee 1974:2–4). By late century, both of these groups would be drawn into the intense vortex of the whaling industry, whose adopted center was Herschel Island.

Herschel presented a scenario of unprecedented interaction amongst regional indigenous peoples and between them and cultural outsiders. Dene and Nunaatarmiut (a term that in this context includes both inland Inuit and coastal Inupiat of Alaska; Stefansson 1919:10–11) were drawn into the role of provisioning the whalers with terrestrial game (Bockstoe 1986:275), while the whaling crews were primarily of Inupiat, Siberian Inuit, and Polynesian origin (Alunik, Ko-

lausok, and Morrison 2003:80, 82). The Inuvialuit found their principal role in this mix as fur traders (Alunik, Kolausok, and Morrison 2003:83–84). The lingua franca that sprung from these lively cultural interactions included pidgin forms of English, and amongst Inuit, Nunaatarmiut (cf. Bockstoce 1986:194; Stefansson 1919:195).

By 1910, the voracious practices of the whalers had decimated both local whale populations as well as terrestrial caribou populations. This environmental devastation intensified Alaskan Inupiat migrations into the Mackenzie delta, which had commenced before the whaler's arrival (Burch 1998:373–374; Freeman, Wein, and Keith 1992; Usher 1971). Inuvialuit, Inupiat, Gwich'in, Euro-Canadian, and other ethnic groups congregated in the nascent towns of the delta, including the new towns of Aklavik and later Inuvik. Vast disparities emerged in wage labor opportunities between aboriginal and non-aboriginal populations in 1950s Inuvik, and when combined with segregated settlement patterns, created antipathy between these populations (Smith 1971). By contrast, close living quarters and mandatory residential schooling fostered a greater sense of solidarity amongst previous disparate indigenous peoples of the delta (see accounts in Hamilton 1994:133–37; Honigsmann and Honigsmann 1970:39). Intermarriage between these groups became very common, but certainly more so between Inupiat and Inuvialuit, who already had a long history of commerce and intermarriage (Stefansson 1919:155). By this time, both of these populations had suffered considerably from European diseases (Alunik, Kolausok, and Morrison 2003:77, 89, 110; McGhee 1974:5).

Contemporary Inuvialuit in Aklavik and Inuvik, the communities from which the Elders quoted below derive, speak one of the Inuvialuktun dialects or the easily intelligible Inupiaq. Many Elders from these communities have relations on the Alaskan North Slope; certain among them are land claimants in both areas. Members of this generation often have a fluid sense of ethnic identity, asserting their Inupiat identity in one social context and their Inuvialuit in another (Lyons 2009:72). Their migration stories are a prominent feature of family histories (e.g., Alunik 1998; Lyons 2008; Nagy 1994). Gwich'in and Inuvialuit also live side by side in delta communities today, and are broadly intermarried. The Gwich'in administer their own land claim.

Despite a complex and multi-stranded history, an Inuvialuit sense of self has rejuvenated rather than diminished in the past half century. The agitation for and negotiation of the land claim served to rally the lower delta's original inhabitants around a sense of collectivity and to bind them together in new formations (Inuvialuit Final Agreement 1984; Lyons 2009). The administra-

tion of the claim has led to the development of social, cultural, and economic programs that have focused Inuvialuit energies on the reclamation of the language, sharing an Inuvialuit sense of history with the outside world, and finding ways to become economically competitive and viable. The individual and collective memories of present-day Inuvialuit Elders consistently reinforce the idea of both the flexibility and continuity of an Inuvialuit identity amidst the profound changes that have transpired.

Concepts of Social Memory

Social memory refers to the process that a community undertakes in remembering a shared and communal history. A collective past draws on both the memories and life histories of its individual members, as well as the social context that they experienced together. While memories are always individual, Beiner (2007:23) notes that “transmission, performance, and reception ground personal accounts in a collective, community-based experience, which is often implicit in the way narrators tend to alternate unconsciously between the usage of first person singular (I) and plural (We).” Memories are frequently produced through social interaction—for instance, by a group of Elders working together to recall the particular contours of remembered events or shared experiences. Depending on the individual or group assembled, any set of reminiscences will privilege certain memories at the expense of others. In this way, some memories and events become part of the foreground, while others fade from collective memory. Moreover, certain memories are construed in a unique way by each subsequent generation. Over long periods of time, social memories transform from “experiential and personal to abstract and referential” (Kuijt 2008:174).

Social memories are integral to all societies because they structure our present understanding of the world. The founding myths of America, for instance, create contemporary expectations of and social sanctions for individualistic behavior, social mobility, and freedom of speech. Similarly, in aboriginal communities, the present is viewed through the lens of past experiences, expectations, events, places, and objects that are part of a collective history. In this regard, the Trail of Tears or Battle of the Little Bighorn have gained a symbolic significance quite apart from the actual events that transpired (e.g., Deloria 1969, 1974). Connerton (1989:3–4) suggests that “. . . our experiences of the present largely depend on our knowledge of the past, and that our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order.” Thus, the past not only informs the origin of present-day circumstances, but the understandings of the evo-

lution of those historical circumstances influences how the future is negotiated within or between groups (Tonkin 1992:1).

The history of North America, and of Western societies more generally, documents the rise to hegemony of textual sources and the attendant loss of oral memory as a source of history and knowledge (Fentress and Wickham 1992:8). The cultural backbone underpinning the perspectives of Euro-Canadian and American colonizers is the rise of modernism and attendant trappings of “civilization” (Pratt 2004). Colonizers maintained a sense of superiority about the correctness of this worldview and asserted it in their interactions, policies, and pursuits.¹ Modernist sensibilities around “conquering” nature fostered policies of wholesale extraction and control of the seemingly boundless resources within this North American “terra nullius” (cf., Cruikshank 1998:4; Morrison 1998:130).

While accounts of early contact between Inuvialuit and outsiders are told only from the perspectives of outsiders, remembrances of the twentieth century still reside with living Elders. Elders recount their interactions with outsiders and their experiences of the period from different viewpoints and with different emphases than those recorded in the written histories, as explored below. These accounts demonstrate that there is a significant corpus of social memory within the Inuvialuit community which informs the way that individuals perceive both the past and the present. Their children—the negotiators, administrators, teachers, and leaders of present-day Inuvialuit communities—use this knowledge as a way to understand and appreciate a collective past, but also as a platform to assert their current identities and to negotiate their collective future.

Inuvialuit Social Memories of the Mid-Twentieth Century

The discussions of Inuvialuit social memory presented below are drawn from the lives of present-day Inuvialuit Elders born on the land in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. The memories encapsulated here span much of the twentieth century, looking broadly at the engagement of this cohort of Elders with the historical events and circumstances of the recent history of the delta. Most of the 25 Elders that I worked with were interviewed on several occasions, allowing me to reconstruct partial life histories for them (see Appendix 1 for a list of Elders and interview details; see Lyons 2007 for biographical details and photographs of contributing Elders). Our discussions covered a wide range of topics, following the experiences and interests of each individual, which both converged around certain themes and diverged in important ways.

One area of convergence relates to Inuvialuit pedagogy. All of the Elders interviewed were raised in a land-based lifestyle. In their early years, they were taught how to think and to “be” Inuvialuit (or Inupiat, as the case may be), which provided them with a certain perspective for seeing and contemplating the world. The section *Inuvialuit pedagogy* captures Elders’ discussions about their early years, particularly how they were consciously raised and educated in Inuvialuit ways by their caregivers and educators. A major part of this instruction was in land-based skills. In the section *Bush life*, the Elders discuss the ways that they developed their knowledge of the land, performed the roles and responsibilities they assumed, and the activities they practiced as they grew into adulthood. This upbringing in Inuvialuit ways of being and knowing the world also provided these Elders—who would grow to be parents, educators, and leaders themselves—with a framework for negotiating their way through the experiences in their changing world. All of these Elders described the pressures and challenges of adapting to town-based life as a major part of their life histories. *New experiences in town* discusses the move of Inuvialuit families into settled communities on an increasingly permanent basis, in a period when the state demanded full-time education of children and as the local economy shifted towards an increasing emphasis on wage work.

Inuvialuit Pedagogy

Contemporary Inuvialuit Elders were raised in an era of calamitous change. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Inuvialuit experienced the rapid transition from an industrial whaling to a fur trade economy. This transition was accompanied by an evolving socioeconomic environment that was partly reliant on traditional knowledge and activities and was partly conditioned by the structural needs of the booming fur trade. Through the early century, newly established communities in the delta attracted increasing infrastructure and permanent settlement. The Inuvialuit, a coastal people, had never lived upstream on a permanent basis nor focused on a trapping lifestyle (Usher 1971:178). Yet by the 1920s and 1930s, Inuvialuit and their neighbors had embraced the opportunities of a burgeoning fur trade and become some of the most successful trappers in the world (D. C. Gordon in Lyons 2007:25; Usher 1971). For much of the century, Inuvialuit continued to live a land-based lifestyle, albeit conditioned to the needs of producing goods for an external market.

Nearly all Inuvialuit Elders from this era were born on the land, or, like David Roland, in a snow house out on the sea ice. They were raised in the “traditional” way, usually by parents and grandparents who were constantly hunting and

trapping to provide for them. Families had many camps throughout the coast and delta that they relied on for a suite of seasonal resources—fish, caribou, beluga whales, fur-bearers, berries, and medicines. According to these Elders, the focus on survival was paramount. Rosie Archie observed: “If you’re lazy, you’ll starve! [laughs] . . . You gotta work hard to get your food, hunting and . . . that’s why our parents, they [were] never home. My dad always go out hunting ptarmigan or things like that. He would sometimes camp out” (R. Archie in Lyons 2007:166). Her brother Jacob, among other Elders, underscored the work ethic required of this lifestyle: “Gotta work hard to make a living” (J. Archie in Lyons 2007:166).

In this environment, children were vigilant and active learners, absorbing by watching. At a very early age, they learned to anticipate the needs of their Elders and to perform key tasks before they were asked—to check nets, fetch water, cut wood, or myriad other activities required of a life lived close to the land. Nearly all of the skills needed for this lifestyle were acquired by observation and practice, as exemplified in the following passages of Inuvialuit women.

Ida Inglangasuk: My mom sew lots. Parkies, shoes, waterproof boots, she made that with sealskin. Really light . . . Yeah, that’s where I learned how to sew and cut out (Inglangasuk in Lyons 2008:278).

Alice Husky: Yeah, I watch her when she sew. She never teach me but I watch her. Well, my mother died when I was twelve years old, I think, 1948. I have to try to sew by myself then, since I was twelve years old . . . Well, I got no choice really. We live in the bush and I have to learn things myself (Husky in Lyons 2008:377).

Sheba Selamio: Long ago we live not like today. We just learn everything, fix the grub, put it away. When they hunt my mom always let me cut meat. How to make dry meat. Everything (Selamio in Lyons 2008:146).

Young Inuvialuit boys learned a complementary set of skills.² Colin Harry recounted learning to make fishhooks, knives, harpoons, and deadfalls from his father. Victor Allen conveyed the fact that “[we had] no problem having food. We just learned to work . . . All kinds, anything. Instead of playing around” (Fig. 2; V. Allen in Lyons 2008:519). He also specified the mode by which knowledge was transferred to him and his siblings: “I make my harpoons only after my grandfather died. But before that, everything is grandfather. He’s the maker, we’re the helpers . . . We weren’t wealthy, but we never get hungry. That’s the name of the game right there . . . we were proud, proud to be right there, you know. Sometimes, [game

was] not too good, but we say ‘ah’ [he laughs]” (V. Allen in Lyons 2008:515).

All of these Elders talked about the members of their grandparents’ and preceding generations with great admiration. As they grew older, they also became cognizant of the fact that they had received teachings from an ancient body of tried-and-true knowledge, knowledge that was always adapting to the ever-changing environmental conditions of their region. Their grandparents not only coached them in the skills necessary to become successful adults, but influenced the decisions they made in negotiating the new social environment. They taught by being role models themselves. David Roland noted that “Old Irish” Kuiyura, who ran a Hudson’s Bay store on the Yukon North Slope, taught himself to write in English and Inuvialuktun, in addition to learning how to manage the store’s books: “He put through school hisself, [taught himself] his ABC’s!” (Roland in Lyons 2008:17). Today, Old Irish’s “diaries,” in the form of recordings about the weather and the store’s transactions, are kept as an heirloom by his descendants. Victor Allen’s grandfather recognized that some elements of traditional technology were passing out of use: “When I was growing up, we had guns, compass [etc.], and we used them! . . . Got inboard engine; I run that engine for many years. I learn how to operate it for my Daduk.” In his estimation, his grandfather . . . was “civilized” already! These guys, they buy schooners, they buy outboard motors, they were smart!” (V. Allen in Lyons 2008:522).

Elders also emphasize that life on the land was fun. Nellie Arey said, “When my Daduk was alive, we do so much work. Oh yeah, I enjoy it! I just love to do what he tell me to do!” (Arey in Lyons 2007:31). Apart from this evident enjoyment, Elders also feel that they received a comprehensive education. Remembering the skills they learned causes Elders to reflect on the education that their own children and grandchildren are receiving within the current school system. Today, they generally assert, there is less risk involved in Inuvialuit lifestyles, but more idleness. Sheba Selamio feels that both discipline and fun seem to be missing in current models of pedagogy: “long ago, [we] go by the time [set by] my mom and dad. Nine o’clock, ten o’clock, you come home. We get used to it, we learn. Well, today, kids just doing what they want, that’s why [they make] too much trouble” (Selamio in Lyons 2008:147). Nevertheless, when exposed to life on the land, kids today readily absorb their own languages and their traditional skills. Nellie Arey suggests that her grandkids love spending time at her coastal camp: “My grandkids follow me all the time. Especially my boy’s kids.” Like her grandfather before her, she aims to teach her grandchildren about their collective past, “‘Cuz they gotta know what we . . . [did]



Figure 2. Victor Allen, Inuvialuit Elder, 2005.

long ago and how we used to live" (Arey in Lyons 2008:183).

Bush Life

Life in the bush was both rigorous and rewarding. Inuvialuit families integrated ancient knowledge with new technologies in a seasonal pattern that was punctuated by the harvest and trading seasons. In the early decades of the century, trappers and their families continued to live on the land and journeyed seasonally to trade posts, such as the burgeoning community of Aklavik. The delta would become increasingly crowded, however, as the century progressed, with the steady in-migration of Alaskan Inupiat (Usher 1971:178). The fur trade correspondingly became increasingly bureaucratized, resulting in the eventual system of registered traplines (Wolforth 1965).

Inuvialuit Elders' memories of bush life, however, revolve around the rhythms of seasonal activities (Fig. 3). Barbra Allen (Fig. 4) describes the seasonal progression:

[M]uskrats start in March [and go] till June the 15. Before all that, winter, at a certain time you have to get the fur-bearing animals like mink and foxes and white foxes and all that . . . As soon as it start getting warm, no more trapping for minks and foxes and that. We live, that time, like season-

ally . . . In fall time they go hunt caribou too, lot of caribou in fall, enough for the whole winter. And then there's a time for fishing too, in the fall time, you have to have enough fish to last you the year round for your dogs and yourself. (B. Allen in Lyons 2008:100)

Contemporary Elders entered this lifestyle at a very young age. Many Inuvialuit at this time suffered from tuberculosis and spent long spells in hospital, and children were expected to care for their younger siblings and to help provide for the family. This prevented many children from either going to mission schools or being able to stay for an extended period. Moses Kayotuk left school when he was eleven to help his family, because his mother was ill. Moses trapped muskrats, the main fur resource of the delta, every year. He and many of his contemporaries garnered the skills necessary to stay out on their own in their early teenage years. The trapping lifestyle entailed long periods traveling in the bush interspersed with short trips to town to re-supply and trade. In the following dialogue, Moses Kayotuk (in Lyons 2008:103–4) talks with me about the travails involved in coming into town:

NL: How often would you come into Aklavik to trade?

MK: We don't come in very much. It's too far and got no trail. It's loooong. [laughing]



Figure 3. Inuvialuit schooners arriving in Aklavik after the whaling season, ca. 1925 (NWT Archives N-1991-041:0011).



Figure 4. Alice Husky and Barbra Allen, Inuvialuit Elders, 2005.

NL: So that was by dog-team?

MK: Yeah. After you break trail it's okay. Takes about a day and a half, two days, after you break trail. That's when I learned how to make my snow house.

NL: Really? Where was that?

MK: Up around Shingle Point, down this side . . . I got Jimmy's lead dogs, tie up dogs [to make a snowhouse]. No holes [when I make it]; come out and now holes! . . . Didn't fall on me anyway! [laughing] Kept me warm all night. Yeah, it was good living those days.

Inuvialuit constantly emphasize both the self-sufficiency and the great satisfaction entailed in a land-based lifestyle. Colin Harry spent five winters trapping on the coast west of the delta, "Trapping and everything you know. [That's] how to live! I used to [go] to Yukon every winter anyway. Four dogs, five dogs, I stay down there in the winter time, [near] Firth River there . . . It was up in the land down by the coast there. I stay there

in the wintertime. I trap white fox and [other furbearers]" (Harry in Lyons 2008:473). After having children, Winnie Cockney acutely missed the trampoline and dogteam she maintained as a girl: "I had five dogs [and] they listened to me . . . Brownie, my leader was Brownie . . . That was their mother; with their mother, I [had] five dogs" (Cockney in Lyons 2008:50).

As part of this lifestyle, Christmas and Easter became important anchor points for seasonal festivities, augmenting traditional gatherings such as the summer beluga hunt. This was one of the rare chances in the year for Inuvialuit to visit and socialize en masse, in addition to the business of trading furs, getting news, and buying supplies. Elizabeth Aviugana grew up in a log house with her parents in the delta, and specified, "that's where they stay for winter. Only time they come to Aklavik [was] after "ratting, around June 15. And Christmastime, or Easter" (Aviugana in Lyons 2008:309). Hilda Irish remembers her mother preserving berries in a whale's stomach for these

occasions: “That’s our fruit! Fruit for Christmas, Easter, oh! Yellow berries and cranberries, blueberries, blackberries. Pretty soon they’ll . . . start picking again” (Irish in Lyons 2008:351). As the century wore on, Inuvialuit would continue to integrate these outside institutional influences into their seasonal patterns.

New Experiences in Town

Inuvialuit experienced many adjustments as the Government of Canada decided to “move north” in the aftermath of World War II (Finnie 1948). This movement spelled the growth of infrastructure, policy, and government involvement in the lives of northern trapping families. In 1944, the Government mandated that northern children must attend the new government Day Schools in order to qualify for the national Mother’s Allowance (Alunik, Kolausok, and Morrison 2003:163). This policy greatly inhibited the mobility of young Inuvialuit families as well as their ability to stay together throughout the year. As a center-piece of Arctic “modernization,” the Government built Inuvik in the 1950s, in order to consolidate and administer to regional populations (Zaslow 1988:319). Many

moved into the new town; others did not. This was a period of heightened interaction between new populations and considerable adjustment for all parties.

Inuvialuit Elders’ memories focus on the new activities of the period and the ways that the community adjusted to them. To begin with, many of these changes were social. Alice Husky (Fig. 4), like most youngsters, lived in the bush with her family, and said of her move into town, “I used to be shy because I live in the bush all the time. I never go out first time, when we move in Aklavik, [I] just stay home. Once in a while I go to store with my dad. ‘Cuz it was strange to see [so many] people . . . after a couple of years, I get used to [it]” (Husky in Lyons 2008:376). Friends like Sarah Meyook and Hilda Irish met when they moved to Aklavik and supported each other through the new experiences they underwent in town.

The growing wage economy and attendant need for currency led many young Inuvialuit into paid labor positions. Peffer’s hotel was one of the largest employers in mid-century Aklavik (Fig. 5). Barbra Allen (in Lyons 2008:100) “work[ed] at the Peffer’s hotel, for Stan Peffer, for I don’t know how many years. Just so that I would help my mother



Figure 5. Spring on Aklavik’s main street, 1954, with Peffer’s Hotel at the far right (NWT Archives N-1992-192:0030).

out, 'cuz she was a widow for so many years, she brought us up." Ida Inglangasuk also worked there in the early 1950s as a waitress and cook. It was, busy, she said, "Especially weekends. When Navy guys used to stay here boy it was busy. Ice cream and coffee . . . Dance, when they have a dance, whoa. Really can go through ice cream! Yeah. [People played] fiddle and guitar . . . But it's so tiresome too when you work, stand up all day, twelve hours or thirteen hours" (Inglangasuk in Lyons 2008:284).

Elders also discussed the wages and work opportunities they garnered and created at this time. Moses Kayotuk had a job raising and feeding the RCMP's dogs with Peter Esau. He said, "they raise my wage up to \$6 and it's too much. So they had to cut me down to \$4 [laughing]! I was making \$2/day for a start. Anyway we had good times" (Kayotuk in Lyons 2008:105). As government infrastructure grew in the delta, so did the needs of the newcomers. Winnie Cockney and several of her contemporaries sewed traditional winter clothing for the oil and gas folks. To take advantage of the booming economy, Jimmy Gordon started a company called Beluga Transport. He operated one barge out of Inuvik ". . . over ten years. I had another one at Norman Wells, another boat over there working twenty-four hours a day too. For about five years, six years. It was really good money" (J. Gordon in Lyons 2008:387).

When Inuvik was built, Inuvialuit had to make choices about moving into the new center, which offered new employment opportunities and experiences. Newcomers were offered \$70 to pay for their move and were promised housing. Many came and lived in the tent town on the "native" side of town that lacked waste and water services. Sarah Tingmiak noted that she and her family lived "in a tent for many years. Yeah, our kids going to school from down there." For winter, "Double tents is good. Frame it and double tent" (Tingmiak in Lyons 2008:553). Other Inuvialuit, like Colin Harry, made choices contrary to the government's bidding. "They asked us to move alright, but people, old people, don't wanna move . . . I think lots of people liked it here [ie., in Aklavik]. Lots of people didn't move . . . I like it here yet" (Harry in Lyons 2008:480). Both Aklavik and Tuktoyaktuk continued on as the more "traditional" centers of the delta, where game was more accessible and life was quieter.

Negotiating a balance between responsibilities in town and time on the land has been an enduring challenge for the new town-dwellers. When her children were young, Ida Inglangasuk remembers heading to their camp whenever they could: "We used to take the kids with us [whenever we go]. Canoeing, hunting [musk]rat. [We had an] 18 foot canoe, 18 horse kicker. Kids sleeping in the

canoe" (Inglangasuk in Lyons 2007:32). Other families similarly maintained camps and travelled to them whenever possible—Danny and Annie C. Gordon still keep a camp in the delta (passed on from Annie's maternal grandfather), as well as several on the coast at Blow River, Shingle Point, Stokes Point, and Ptarmigan Bay. The Gordons and many other parents taught their children bush skills, but also acknowledged that they needed to prepare for a different kind of future. Said Annie C., about her children's education, "they spend some time in the bush, spring time mostly. But we gotta let them go to school and [study] so they could have a good job" (A. C. Gordon in Lyons 2008:222).

Discussion: Inuvialuit Social Memory and the "Other"

Inuvialuit first encountered outsiders in the early nineteenth century when John Franklin and John Richardson descended the Mackenzie in hopes of finding the Northwest Passage and charted the coastlines east and west of the delta.³ Franklin, for his part, found the Inuvialuit to be curious and intelligent people (Alunik, Kolausok, and Morrison 2003:60); Inuvialuit memories of these meetings have not persisted to the present. Thus was instigated a long period of contact relations between Inuvialuit and newcomers that featured an "us" and "them" on both sides. Exciting adventures and painful tragedies occurred in the course of this history, and each side produced accounts of their experiences of the events that unfolded, Inuvialuit via oral traditions and outsiders via the written record. These remembrances were inevitably structured by the standpoints and cultural circumstances from which their authors hailed, but also by the interactions and experiences with the "other" (Pratt 2008). Unfortunately, only the written records of early contact have survived.

Outsider's accounts of the history of contact with northern indigenous peoples, whether high or low brow⁴, are generally set against a backdrop of macro-level economic and political patterns that occurred on the national or world stage. In the north, as elsewhere in the Americas, these histories are framed by a series of external events—such as the world wars, the depression, changes in imperial and subsequently national policy—that were used as a backdrop to situate and explain events and occurrences at the local level. Often, these documents are written use a detached, third-person narrative, which recounts information in a "factual" style (Clifford 1986:5). Within this rhetoric, northern peoples tend to be homogenized into generic categories and subsumed within the grand story of Western progress—e.g., a chronicle of out-

siders actively bringing civilization and all its trappings to passive local people. Naturalized extensions of this doctrine include the conquering and assimilation of non-Western peoples and the “civilizing” (read: disruption and suppression) of their cultural practices and natural historical processes and trajectories (Pratt 2004:445).

Inuvialuit social memories of these same events and trajectories are notably different. Perhaps the main similarity with Western narratives is that Inuvialuit memories are focused on Inuvialuit people—their stories, adventures, histories, opportunities, and successes. As in Western narratives, the “other” is relegated to a lesser position and often incidental to the main plot line. This is where the similarities end, however. Inuvialuit oral accounts of the past tend to be more experiential, personal and anecdotal, drawing from the learned and lived experiences of individuals rather than organized around a general chronological scheme (Lyons 2007:20). Interrelations with the natural world, weather, and seasonal cycles feature prominently in these Inuvialuit narratives, centered within cultural understandings of how to live within nature and “make a living” doing it (also see Oozeva et al. 2004). Notable interactions and events revolve around one’s own family history, and more broadly, their experiences helping and spending time with others during communal hunts and seasonal events. Inuvialuit make some reference to outsiders, but mostly to those that married in and/or stayed to make a life in the region (Lyons 2009:70).

Julie Cruikshank (2002:13) has said that the oral traditions of northern aboriginal peoples are frequently used as a venue to understand social life and change in these communities. The stories and memories of community historians provide “social frameworks essential for guiding young and not-so-young people, framing ways of thinking about how to live life appropriately” (Cruikshank 2002:13). Perhaps this is why Inuvialuit Elders, when asked about the past, often turn their commentary to the present and to the welfare and well-being of their children and grandchildren. Their concerns revolve around critical questions of cultural survival: are their grandchildren being schooled adequately? Are they learning the skills—both traditional and new—that will appropriately guide them into their future? Are the traditional skills being passed on? Can their languages be saved, and if so, how?

A subtle vein of both resistance and critique also runs through Inuvialuit Elders’ memories of the greater part of the last century. Aklavik’s enduring motto “Never Say Die” is a permanent reminder of the refusal of many of this center’s residents to move to Inuvik in the mid-1950s. Some Elders would gently comment that while they had

not been consulted about the building of the new town, they would not be coerced into the move. These individuals and families held a strong sense of the value of sites such as Aklavik and Tuktoyaktuk, and their proximity to key game resources. Other Inuvialuit moved to the new center to see what opportunities it might bring to their families and children. Another form of critique was reserved for the immediate work that we were engaged in during the interview process. Elders like Victor Allen, Moses Kayotuk, and Frankie Stefansson eloquently critiqued the role of anthropologists in collecting and taking away intangible and material elements of their cultural heritage (Lyons 2007:224). Stefansson, the grandson of notorious explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, dismissed much of the knowledge in the ethnographies as errant, in part referring to problems with the early translations from Inuvialuktun languages (Stefansson in Lyons 2007:224).

Critique flowed much more readily from succeeding generations of Inuvialuit, those generations who were born in hospitals and never lived a fully land-based lifestyle. These generations have also learned Western paradigms of critique and have used that knowledge to their political advantage. The present generation of leaders and decision-makers views the social memories of their parents in different lights and mobilizes them in new ways. One poignant example is the divergent ways that succeeding generations interpret the residential school experience, where the experiences of younger generations tend to be much more acute than for older. When present-day Elders were growing up, school was still voluntary and many children spent fairly abbreviated periods of time at mission schools. By the time they were raising their own children, the government was delivering heavy-handed assimilationist messages and requiring attendance in the new government Day Schools. Billy Day described the conflict parents faced in continuing to hunt and trap as their main source of livelihood and income, but having to leave their children behind. Many parents, like Day and his wife, moved his family into Inuvik so his children would not have to board at school. From the parents’ standpoints, they were trying to make the best of the new situation and to prepare their children for a future very different from their own. The generations who attended these schools, however, are considerably more critical of the role of foreign educators and government in the residential school experience, and more broadly, of the role of outsiders in Inuvialuit affairs in the last half century. Many members of these younger generations cite the cultural and linguistic suppression and erasure they experienced at school as motivation for their present social action: these are generations who are working hard

to reclaim Inuvialuit languages and cultural traditions and to forge a cohesive Inuvialuit identity in the modern world (C. Cockney, T. Cockney, and B. Archie in Lyons 2009:72–73).

Conclusion

Inuvialuit social memories of the twentieth century remain intact and vibrant for generations born as early as the 1920s and 1930s to those born near the end of the century. Re-visiting past events, people, and places can be alternately joyful, painful, nostalgic, and evocative. For younger generations who did not experience the events of the early century, the stories, memories, and oral histories provide a link to their past that is both familiar and distant. Succeeding generations form their identities around both the continuity and renewal of Inuvialuit traditions and the changes that their people have collectively negotiated (Lyons 2009:74). In the Inuvialuit community, social memories are painted against a loose backdrop of macro-level events and made sense of in the particular events that occurred in their individual lives—the birth of a child, an accident on the ice, a bumper harvest of furs, a cold winter. Family histories are similarly refracted against the major events in the evolution of a delta community, such as the rise of Aklavik, the building of the DEW-line and Inuvik, the advent of the oil and gas industry and the Berger Commission, or the signing of the land claim. Present-day Elders reflect on the past as a kind of pedagogical tool for their children, but also to make sense of social life in the present. Younger generations use social memory as a vehicle towards social action and to negotiate their relations with the outside world.

In recent decades, Inuvialuit have experienced a renewed sense of collective identity, thanks in part to the establishment of an effective land claim that has given the community the security of land, resources, and joint jurisdiction over development, education, health, and welfare (Inuvialuit Final Agreement 1984). This sense of identity is also contingent on the corresponding assertion of their own pasts, in the form of stories, histories, and oral memories. The growth of various forms of Inuvialuit self-representation implies a shifting set of relationships with outsiders and the assertion of their own forms of history-telling, governance, and pedagogy. Inuvialuit have a clear sense of their recent history and the social memories that comprise this collective narrative. As seen in this paper, the social memories of Inuvialuit Elders are precious commodities, as they flow from the last generations to be born and raised on the land. These Elders, like those before them, have consistently looked towards the future with an admirable sense of optimism, pragmatism, and flexi-

bility in the face of change. Of his eventful experiences of the twentieth century, Elder Victor Allen remarked: “We didn’t know that [everything] was gonna change. If we knew it was gonna change, we probably woulda been [more] prepared. But the change went, we went with the change, and what you gonna do?” (V. Allen in Lyons 2007:33).

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Appendix 1. Oral history interviews with Elders from Aklavik and Inuvik NT

Many Inuvialuit have been part of ongoing research efforts to document knowledge of traditional life and the impacts and changes to it brought by contact with Westerners. The Elders and community leaders listed below were part of these efforts and have been cited in this paper. Several of these individuals have been interviewed several times, but the date of the interview relevant to issues and events discussed in this paper are listed here. 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 and Aurora Research Institute in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada (see Lyons 2008 in references cited). Copyright of the interview data is held by Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre, which has graciously granted permission to use the words and perspectives presented in these interviews in this paper.

Name	Place of residence ^a	Date of interview
Elders' interviews		
Alice Husky	Aklavik NT	24 July 2005
Annie C. Gordon	Aklavik, NT	17 June 2005
Billy Day	Inuvik, NT	14 July 2005
Colin Harry	Aklavik, NT	22 July 2005
Danny C. Gordon	Aklavik, NT	17 June 2005
David Roland	Inuvik, NT	5 June 2005
Elizabeth Aviugana	Aklavik, NT	22 June 2005
Frankie Stefansson	Inuvik, NT	21 July 2005
Hilda Irish	Aklavik, NT	23 June 2005
Ida Inglangasuk	Aklavik, NT	23 July 2005
Jacob Archie	Aklavik, NT	13 June 2005
Jimmy Gordon	Inuvik, NT	28 July 2005
Moses Kayotuk	Aklavik, NT	14 June 2005
Nellie Arey	Aklavik, NT	15 June 2005
Rosie Archie	Aklavik, NT	13 June 2005
Sarah Tingmiak	Inuvik, NT	26 July 2005
Sheba Selamio	Aklavik, NT	14 June 2005
Victor Allen	Inuvik, NT	21 July 2005
Winnie Cockney	Inuvik, NT	5 June 2005
Community leaders' interviews		
Billy Archie	Aklavik, NT	29 March 2007
Cathy Cockney	Inuvik, NT	30 March 2007
Nellie Cournoyea	Inuvik, NT	1 May 2006
Topsy Cockney	Inuvik, NT	30 March 2007

^aThe focus of the present research has been with Inuvialuit residents of Aklavik and Inuvik, NT, but similar work is ongoing by outside and community-based researchers in several other communities of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.

Endnotes

1. Ironically, of course, many native northerners, including the Inuvialuit, held a similar feeling of cultural superiority towards the ill-prepared newcomers who generally relied on their good will for survival (McGhee 2004: 223; Savoie 1970).

2. Although Inuvialuit boys and girls were taught gendered roles, they were also welcome to pursue the specialties that they excelled at, no matter whether they were traditionally 'male' or 'female' tasks or not.

3. Alexander Mackenzie (1801: 259–62) descended the river that would bear his name in 1789,

but did not meet an Inuvialuit person on his journeys.

4. These accounts include ships and trading post logs, travelogues and memoirs, official and unofficial correspondence, scientific writings, etc.

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