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Author(s): André Légaré

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Nunavut

The Construction of a Regional Collective Identity in the Canadian Arctic

André Légaré

In 1999, a new political entity emerged in Canada. The Nunavut¹ Territory was carved out of the Northwest Territories (NWT) on April 1, 1999 (Légaré 1998a, 1999; Dahl et al. 2000). It is the largest political unit of Canada, covering one-fifth of the Canadian land mass, 2,121,102 km². Nevertheless, this vast geographic area is sparsely inhabited by only 27,000 people, a majority of whom are Inuit (82 percent).² Nunavut's tiny population is scattered among twenty-seven far-flung communities with great distances in between; the capital Iqaluit is the largest community, with only 5,000 people.

Nunavut was first proposed in February 1976 by the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC), the institution representing the political interests of Canadian Inuit. The Nunavut proposal (ITC 1976) was aimed at settling the outstanding aboriginal rights of the Inuit of the NWT. The basic idea behind the proposal was to create a territory within which the vast majority of people were Inuit.

In Canada aboriginal rights are rooted in aboriginal title. This title is recognized in the historic British document known as the Royal Proclamation of 1763. According to British law, aboriginal title arises from long and continuous use and occupancy of the land by aboriginal peoples prior to the arrival of European colonial powers in North America. It is a form of property rights. The Royal Proclamation recognized this title and requires that the Crown (i.e., the federal government) settle outstanding aboriginal title rights through a land-ceased

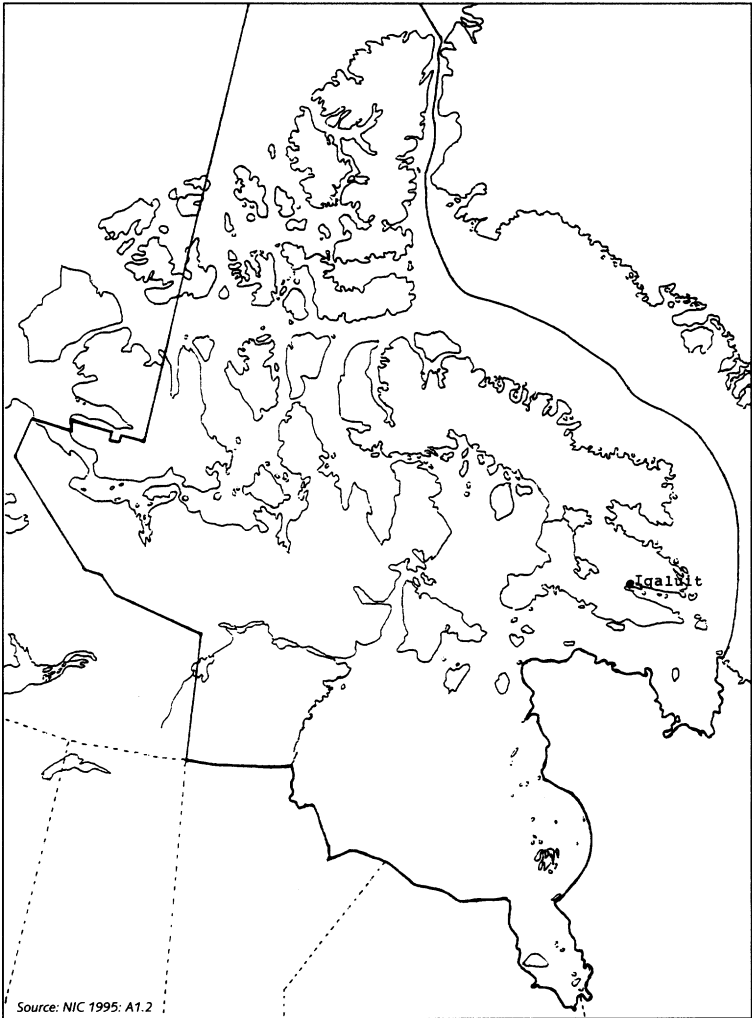


Figure 1. The Nunavut Territory

treaty-making process (Usher et al. 1992, 113). According to the latest version of the federal government policy on outstanding land claims (DIAND 1987), a claimant group who surrenders its aboriginal title will obtain control and ownership of vast parcels of land over specific geographical areas.

The reasons behind the Inuit desire to push for their own political unit were threefold. First, there was the absence of any land cession treaty with the Canadian government. Second, the Inuit possess a demographic majority and cultural homogeneity in the Canadian Eastern Arctic. Third, the Inuit desired to control their own political, social, and economic agendas (Légaré 1996, 1997). Ultimately, ITC shared the idea that a Nunavut Territory would better reflect the geographical extent of Inuit traditional land use and occupancy in the Canadian Eastern

Arctic, while its institutions would adhere to Inuit cultural values and perspectives (ITC 1976, 15).

This paper explores the symbolic and spatial construction of Nunavut, with particular attention to its impact on the collective identity of the Inuit. Its primary focus is on how a group of people's cultural traits have contributed in delineating the boundaries of a region, and how regional symbolisms born from that process were used to shape a common collective regional identity for this group of people. Put directly, this essay is about how an emergent regional political unit (Nunavut) is spatially delimited and how it simultaneously defines a corresponding regional collective identity for the people living there (the Nunavummiut).³ By addressing these issues, we can also explore other important questions such as: Which essential Inuit historical cultural indicators contributed to the spatial construction of Nunavut, and which symbols were used to create a collective identity within this new political unit of the Canadian federation? Which Inuit and non-Inuit actors were involved in the construction of Nunavut? Why did the idea of Nunavut emerge, and which alternative spatial conceptions of Nunavut were rejected? This essay will examine how a region is constructed from specific cultural traits, and how such a region, embedded with regional symbolisms, is used to create among all its residents a common feeling of togetherness leading to a collective identity.⁴

In order to examine these questions, notions pertaining to collective identity and region as socially constructed categories need to be explored. Research and writings on social constructionism began as part of the field of sociology in the beginning of the 1970s. Social constructionism was linked to the 1970s phenomenological current of thoughts, which argued that everything about the world was humanly invented or imagined (Blummer 1971; Spector and Kitsuse 1977). Social constructionism is defined here as the process through which certain people assign meaning to the world based on some assumptions of cultural and political conditions (Best 1989). In the 1980s and 1990s, many geographers adapted the concept of social construction to the field of political geography (Williams 1985; Riggs 1986; Paasi 1991; P. Jackson and Penrose 1993; Massey 1994). This concept was introduced to question the uncritical use of certain political categories such as "region" and "identity."

DEFINING THE CONCEPTS

The intellectual context of this research is mainly shaped by the writings and traditions found in works pertaining to political geography, focusing specifically on the concept of political space and group identity within such space.

Regions

The concept of regions has been, and still is, one of the basic categories of geographical thought. For traditional geographers such as Hartshorne (1959), James (1954), and Hart (1982), a region is commonly regarded as a part of the earth's surface that possesses a quality of cohesion. Such regions are always defined by specific homogeneity criteria (e.g., physiographic regions, economic regions, political regions, and so on). Thus, in the traditional geography current of thought, a political region is defined as a political spatial unit found within a state where the cultural is dissociated from the political (James 1954, 123).

This idea of a political region with its common territory, institutions, and citizenship detached from any cultural referents is too limited because it fails to consider that a region has recognizable cultural characteristics that are specific to that area. In fact, a political region should not be treated as a simple political spatial framework, but should instead be seen as a dynamic manifestation of political, historical, and cultural processes (Paasi 1986, 110). In the case of Nunavut, a region can be defined as an existing or an emergent political administrative unit (e.g., Nunavut, Nunavik, Greenland, Quebec, Scotland), located within a nation-state (e.g., Canada, Denmark, United Kingdom).

One must not assume that a region is some sort of pre-given administrative unit empty of cultural or political referents. Rather, a region is an arena of complex political processes (e.g., governmental institutions) and the cradle of various cultural processes (e.g., languages, customs). To that end, a region is socially constructed (Murphy 1991). It embodies a collection of physical, historical, and cultural meanings that in turn awake in a group of people a common regional collective identity that tends to emphasize their differences from other surrounding groups of people. This raises the questions: What is identity? And how can one define collective identity? How can one decipher between regional, territorial, and cultural identities? What are their similarities and differences?

Collective Identity

The second concept to be explored here is the idea of "collective identity," a term that has been used in a variety of ways. A collective identity is but one of many identities an individual might maintain (Barth 1969; Mackie and Brinkerhoff 1988). Each individual may identify himself or herself with several social characteristics: a country, a region, a culture, a religion, a gender, a political party, an economic status, and so on, and belong to all of them at the same time (Roosens 1989, 16). None of us has just a single identity; as members of a society

each of us occupies a number of statuses and plays a variety of roles that help us shape several forms of identities.

According to scholars (Hall 1990; Breton 1984; Driedger 1989), identity is hard to define. It is, in its essence, a social construct: one's own conscious identity is a product of one's meeting with different forms of others' identities. Researchers (Driedger 1989; Roosens 1989) have generally established that an individual may identify himself or herself with others on three levels: first, at a personal level where one may identify oneself with some important persons in one's life, e.g., family, friends, coworkers; second, at a social level where one may identify with certain social groups, e.g., a gender, a sexual-orientation status, an economic activity such as hunting; third, at a group level where one may identify oneself with a broad category of persons, e.g., a cultural group, a political unit. It is this latter level that is most important for an understanding of the creation of Nunavut.

Research on the concept of collective identity suggests that there are two distinct forms of collective identities: cultural and territorial (Roosens 1989; De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1995; Driedger, Thacker, and Currie 1982). Cultural identity refers to a person's attachment toward a particular cultural group (e.g., Inuit), while territorial identity refers to a person's attachment to a political unit (e.g., Nunavut). Cultural identity has often been portrayed as transparent or unproblematic (Hart 1982). In other words, a cultural identity is considered "given," where cultural traits translate necessarily and naturally into a cultural identity (Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1995). However, cultural identity is not some sort of immutable bundle of cultural traits (Lecours 2000, 504). In fact, there is no pure cultural identity resting on some essentialist heritage. Rather, cultural identity is based on a retelling of the past, where past cultural events are mediated by various actors (e.g., governments, cultural organizations) who, for political or social gains, reconstruct past symbols and memories (Hall 1990, 225–26). Cultural identity thus becomes a socially constructed and inherently political phenomenon that undergoes constant transformation. It is subject to the continuous play of history and power.

For its part, territorial identity is based on a group of people sharing a common political unit where cultural traits are dissociated from the political aspect of the entity (Smith 1988, 10). Here, the political unit is the essential ingredient of a group of people's identity where individuals can identify with a territory. It is the place within which people's activities can take place. Although it is understood that there are several levels of territorial identities (local, regional, national, international), regions have been a particularly strong and influential identity concept in Canada.

As with cultural identity, regional identity is mediated and socially

constructed by various actors who draw upon a group's repertoire of political symbolisms in order to shape a group regional identity. In so doing, actors emphasize group homogeneity within a particular political region while pressing differentiation with neighboring regions: "regional identity is based on a certain awareness among inhabitants of their common spatial environment and of their differences from other regions" (Gilbert 1988, 210).

Some scholars have tried to define collective identity as either primarily territorial, if one's association with his or her region is a key factor in one's identity (e.g., Nunavummiut, Nunavimiut, Nunatsiavummiut), or primarily cultural if geopolitical referents are absent from one's identity (e.g., Inuit) (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1995, 28). Recent research on Inuit collective identity (Dahl 1988; Dorais 1995, 1997; Saladin d'Anglure 1995) shows us that the Inuit of the Canadian Eastern Arctic⁵ are at a transitional stage of identity processes where they still choose to identify themselves primarily through cultural referents (i.e., Inuit) but will use various spatial referents: Inuit of the circumpolar world, Inuit of Canada, Inuit of Nunavut. For now, most adhere only secondarily to a regional collective identity (e.g., Nunavummiut). However, in time, as it has been shown with the case of the Inuit of Greenland who now call themselves Greenlanders, it is quite likely that the Inuit of the Canadian Eastern Arctic will adhere more and more to a regional collective identity (i.e., Nunavummiut): "Group identity is changeable; it can move from primarily cultural to primarily regional" (Dahl 1988, 315).

One must not assume that cultural identity has no land referent or that regional identity has no cultural values embedded within it. Actually, several scholars (Reynolds 1994; Newman and Paasi 1998; Driedger 1989) consider the attempt to define collective identity through two different approaches—cultural or territorial—as counterproductive. They argue that there is no pure territorial identity where all cultural features are completely disconnected from a given political unit. Here, a territorial identity can be interpreted as a complex collection of cultural and territorial group consciousnesses. Thus, collective identity can be defined as primarily a sense of belonging to a particular region and a particular culture. The concept is not given but rather is subjectively based, as it is generally tied to cultural orientations, political values, and languages (Légaré 1998b, 3).

**THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A COLLECTIVE
IDENTITY: EXAMINING THE ROLES OF
ACTORS, BORDERS, AND SYMBOLS**

A collective identity is engraved on a group of people by actors who will subjectively use symbols and geopolitical borders so as to high-

light the differences between one's group from other groups (Said et al. 1990; Massey 1994; Paasi 1991). In so doing, sentiments toward a given land and the cultural symbolisms attached to it become essential in forging a collective identity. To comprehend the emergence of a regional collective identity among a group of people, one must first understand the crucial role play by actors, such as political and social institutions. These actors may come from inside or outside a given region. Through their actions they reinforce the significance and the role of cultural practices as building blocks for a collective identity.

Actors try to get as much as they can by manipulating and even re-creating or inventing a group's cultural characteristics in order to attain their political objectives (Roosens 1989; Knight 1982) In fact, the collective identity of a group of people never composes the totality of the observable culture, but is only a combination of selected characteristics that actors ascribe and consider relevant. Actors will present their own interpretations of cultural traits as "the truth" (Roosens 1989, 156). Further, to communicate these messages to the population, public forums (e.g., information sessions held by actors within the concerned communities) and mass media (e.g., radio, television, newspapers) are then used (Paasi 1991, 246). Ultimately, the production and reproduction of regional collective identity occurs through contested efforts expressed by all actors.

In the Canadian Eastern Arctic, actors like the federal and territorial governments (Northwest Territories, Nunavut) and aboriginal organizations like ITC, Tungavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN), Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI), Nunavut Implementation Commission (NIC), Office of the Interim Commissioner (OIC), the Inuvialuit, and Dene-Métis Nations are the main players in the construction of Nunavut's geopolitical boundaries and in the emergence of a group regional identity for the residents of Nunavut, i.e., Nunavummiut. Social constructionist theory suggests that one can place these actors in three categories (Spector and Kitsuse 1977; Best 1989; Lemieux 1989): (1) claims makers, e.g., ITC, TFN, NTI, NIC, OIC, the Nunavut government; (2) policy makers, e.g., the federal government and its agent DIAND, along with the government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT); (3) stakeholders, e.g., the NWT population, the Inuvialuit, the NWT Dene-Métis Nations, the Denesuline Nation of Saskatchewan, the Sayisi Dene of Manitoba, the Inuit of Northern Quebec and of Labrador, the James Bay Cree. To understand the creation of Nunavut, we need to look at the interaction between these actors and its impact on collective identity.

Claims makers are the internal actors. They represent the Inuit people and formulate the claimant group's demands and submit them to the policy makers. Claims makers also organize and educate the people about the claim and inform the policy makers and stakeholders

about their intentions. Policy makers receive the claim and have to adopt and implement solutions. To that end, they put forward a public policy, the Aboriginal Comprehensive Land Claims Policy, which was used as a guideline by all actors involved in the construction of Nunavut. Stakeholders are representatives of other aboriginal groups who have traditionally harvested on some portions of land within the claimed area (the Nunavut). They wanted to ensure that their ancestral aboriginal land rights remained intact once Nunavut became a reality. Further, through their land use and occupancy studies (IBNWT 1975; Brice-Bennet 1977; Usher 1990), they influenced the location of Nunavut's boundaries.

The Formation of Geopolitical Borders

Geopolitical borders by definition constitute lines of separation and contacts between regions (Newman and Paasi 1998, 191). Even though borders are more or less arbitrary lines between territorial entities, they also have deep symbolic, cultural, and historical meanings. They have always played a key role in the development of a group's collective identity (Widdis 1997, 50). In fact, groups often conceptualize their identity within the context of geopolitical boundaries. The borders must be seen here as a determining force in the sense that all those who live within a given region share a common existence resulting from geographical and political propinquity. Borders are a means of socially and politically securing the identity of a group of people (Newman and Paasi 1998, 195).

Boundaries both create identities and are created through identities (Newman and Paasi 1998, 194). One may say that identity and border construction are different sides of the same coin. When geopolitical boundaries do not already exist, their formation will often emerge as a result of diverging cultural and political practices (Paasi 1995, 44). Boundaries will then be related to specific historical and cultural factors (Prescott 1987, 123). Thus, borders should be understood as the spatial outcomes of various societal processes, where the production of geopolitical boundaries becomes a form of constructing and reinterpreting cultural space.⁶ The concept of space delimited by people's history, customs, and tradition is at the center of a region's territorial shape and identity. If, as in the case of Nunavut, geopolitical boundaries do not already exist and are not clearly demarcated, claims makers will strive to establish political boundaries corresponding as much as possible to cultural boundaries. However, they will also have to take into account the fact that the boundaries of a region might not necessarily correspond exactly to the cultural space of the dominant cultural group living within that region (Williams 1981, 391).⁷

Ultimately, the quest of claims makers is to find a close congru-

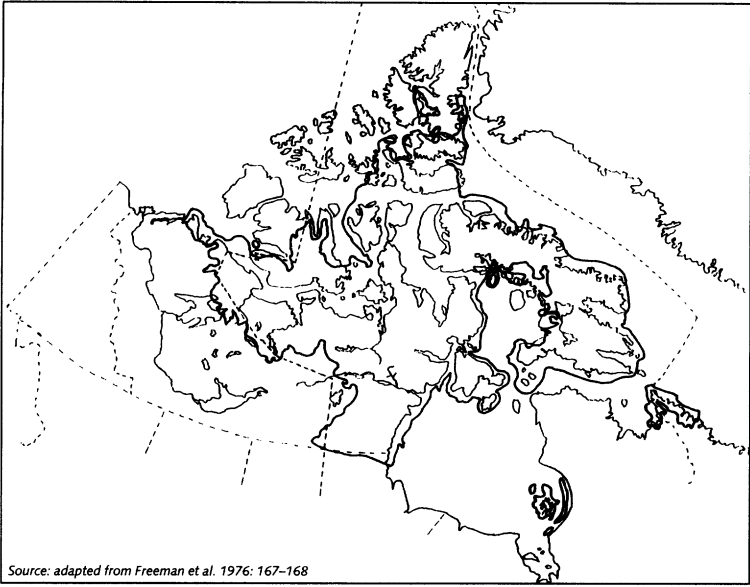
ence between a group cultural space and the territorial shape of the corresponding constructed region. Such a region will then be embedded by the cultural practices of the demographically dominant group of people within that region (e.g., Inuit within Nunavut). In consequence, the territorial shape of the region would be looked upon as reflecting the historical and traditional cultural space of the dominant group of people of that region. This, in turn, will facilitate the identity conversion and help to cement a regional collective identity (e.g., Nunavummit).

In the case of Nunavut, the policy that structured the negotiation between all actors was based on the federal government's Aboriginal Comprehensive Land Claims Policy (DIAND 1973, 1987). The policy states that in exchange for proof of use and occupancy of the land, an aboriginal group may hold land ownership and land management control over vast geographical areas (DIAND 1973, 22). The policy is rooted in moral conceptions of fairness and of just compensation for the Euro-Canadian society's failure to grant moral validity to claims of prior occupancy by an aboriginal group (Ponting 1997, 357).

In an effort to hold control over parcels of land in the Canadian Eastern Arctic, in 1974 ITC initiated a land use and occupancy study so as to determine the spatial extent of certain cultural Inuit traditions there.⁸ The purpose of the study, published two years later in a report entitled *Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project* (Freeman et al. 1976), was to prove that Inuit have used and occupied virtually all of the land and oceans in the Canadian Eastern Arctic for more than four thousand years. Some of 1,600 map biographies collected from Inuit hunters and depicted in the report trace the territory (i.e., the cultural space) over which each hunter has ranged in search of game animals.⁹ As Giddens and others have noted, groups who until recently were nomadic possess a conception of territoriality that is different from that of modern Euro-Canadians: "nomadic societies occupy definite, if only diffusely bounded social spaces over which they lay claims to" (Giddens 1981, 45).

Besides the location of harvesting journeys, Inuktitut place-names also played a crucial role in determining the spatial extent of Inuit occupancy. Research on nomadic societies (Correll 1976; Brody 1988; Collignon 1993; Sterritt et al. 1998) has demonstrated that the extent of a group's cultural space is clearly produced by the termination of place-names relating to one's group and the beginning of those of another: "Names . . . indicate ownership by a person or a group. More importantly, they establish power and territorial claim" (Nuttall 1992, 50). In addition, historical cultural signs such as old camp sites, burial grounds, and cairns¹⁰ also helped locate the extent of Inuit land occupancy in the Canadian Eastern Arctic.

The gathering of hunters' mental maps and of Inuit historical sites resulted in the publication of an Inuit cultural space map for the Canadian Eastern Arctic (Freeman et al. 1976, 167–68). Claims makers



Source: adapted from Freeman et al. 1976: 167-168

Figure 2. Inuit cultural space in the Canadian Eastern Arctic (1920s)

used this map to determine the likely geographical extent of the claimed Nunavut region.

In sum, to help delineate Nunavut's geopolitical boundaries, the geographical location of specific cultural and historical indicators were used by claims makers: Inuit hunters' harvesting journeys, cairns, camp sites, burial grounds, Inuktitut place-names. These indicators constituted the cornerstones of today's Nunavut territorial shape.

Although the territorial shape of Nunavut does largely reflect the spatial extent of Inuit cultural space in the Canadian Eastern Arctic, other factors also had to be taken into account. Rather than undertake the politically suicidal task of drawing Nunavut's boundaries to coincide precisely with Inuit cultural space in the Canadian Eastern Arctic, claims makers did not request land jurisdiction beyond the southern border of the present NWT. They elected to respect existing provincial boundaries, accepting these divisions as "givens."

The southern boundary of the present NWT has been established since 1912 and followed the northern extent of provincial boundaries; through the principle of territorial integrity no province would have acquiesced to a reduction of their northern lands so as to transfer them to an emerging Nunavut region, even though some of these northern lands (e.g., Quebec, Manitoba, and Labrador) may have been occupied or used by Canadian Eastern Arctic Inuit in the past. To facilitate the boundary delineation process, ITC requested that the borders of Nunavut be in close congruance with other political boundaries already in existence in the NWT: the Nunatsiak federal electoral district; with

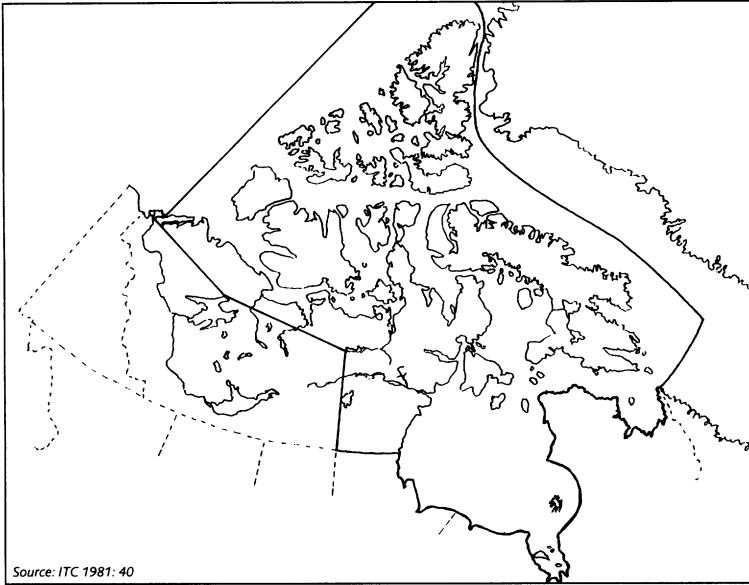


Figure 3. Nunatsiag federal electoral district (1976)

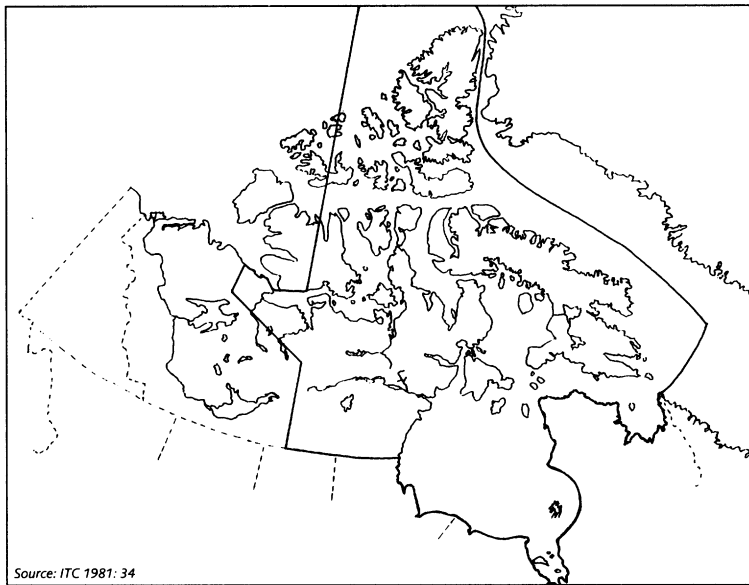


Figure 4. The Arctic Islands Game Preserve (1926–1946)

boundaries that existed in the past, e.g., Arctic Islands Game Preserve, 1926–1946;¹¹ and with proposed past boundaries, e.g., Nunatsiag Territory, 1962 (ITC 1976, s402.1).¹² To that end, ITC attempted unsuccessfully to have all of the land north of the NWT's tree line be part of a future Nunavut Territory.

The failed attempt can be explained by the fact that the social construction of a region's territorial shape is influenced not only by

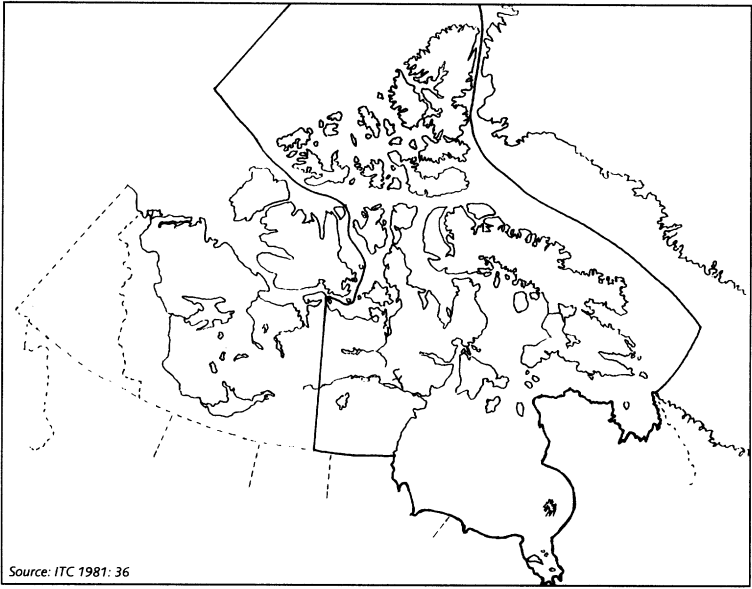


Figure 5. Proposed Nunatsiag Territory (1962)

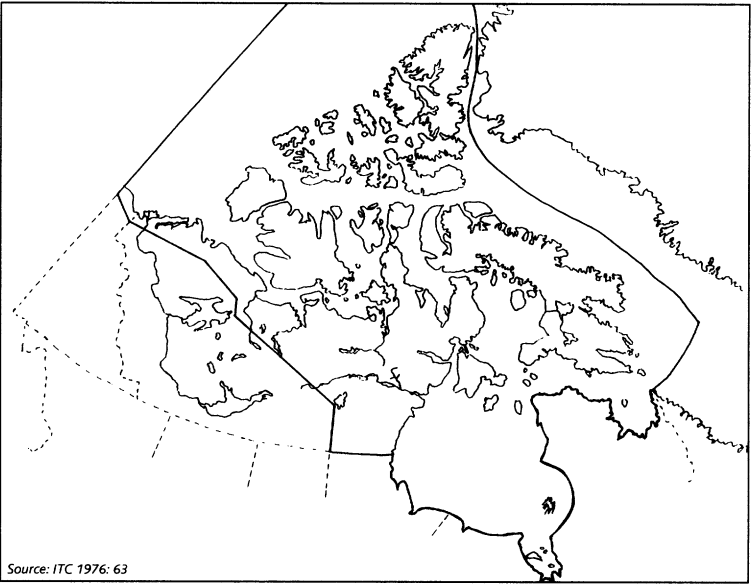
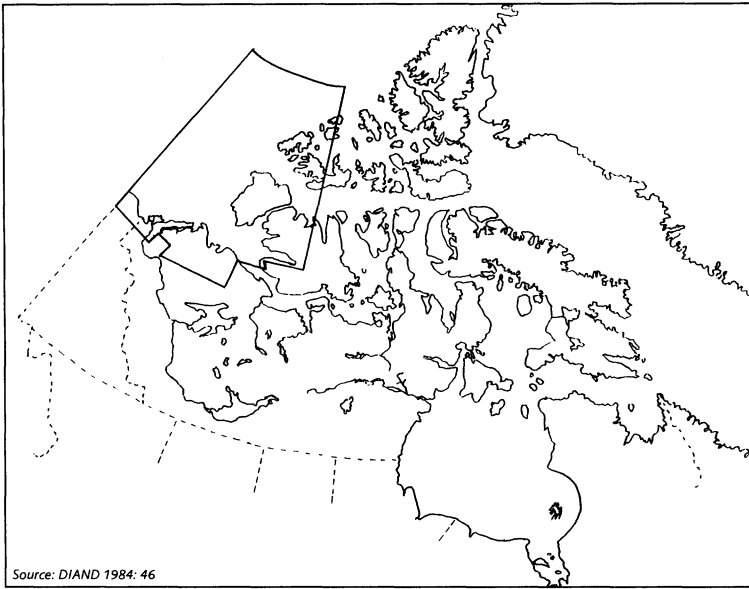


Figure 6. Proposed Nunavut Territory (1976)

internal actors (e.g., claims makers) but also by external ones (e.g., policy makers, stakeholders). Once the federal government had accepted the idea of creating Nunavut, it supported an eastern border for Nunavut that followed the existing NWT geopolitical boundaries around Hudson Bay and James Bay (Canada 1993, art. 5.1), even though the waters and the islands in James Bay had never been used or occupied in the past by the Inuit.¹³



Source: DIAND 1984: 46

Figure 7. The Inuvialuit land claim area (1984)

One should also not forget the pivotal role of other actors like the stakeholders in forging Nunavut's boundaries. Since very few cultural spaces remain uncontested and homogeneous, divergent interests are bound to exist in regard to the use of the land in an area by other aboriginal groups. For instance, very soon after it presented its first map proposal, ITC had to take into consideration the Inuvialuit land claim area.¹⁴ In addition, Dene-Métis had claimed exclusive use of some land (e.g., Contwoyto lake area, Thelon Game Sanctuary) that had been selected by Inuit as being solely occupied and utilized by them (Wonders 1984).

Today, the western boundary of Nunavut undercuts part of the cultural spaces of Dene-Métis who now find some of their traditional hunting grounds within the new region of Nunavut. This may eventually constitute a cultural loss for the Dene-Métis peoples, for the newly created Nunavut government will redefine these lands as part of the heartland of Inuit cultural space and, like any province, will jealously guard its geopolitical integrity. Claims makers' actions will therefore threaten the continuing cultural ties that Dene-Métis have with these lands now located within Nunavut.

In addition to the Dene-Métis, the Denesuline of Saskatchewan, the Sayisi Dene of Manitoba, the James Bay Cree, and the Inuit of Nunavik have also used for harvesting purposes some of the land that is now part of Nunavut. The likely loss of stakeholders' cultural spaces in Nunavut may be understood by the fact that, in the process of constructing a region's territorial shape, claims makers redefine the significance

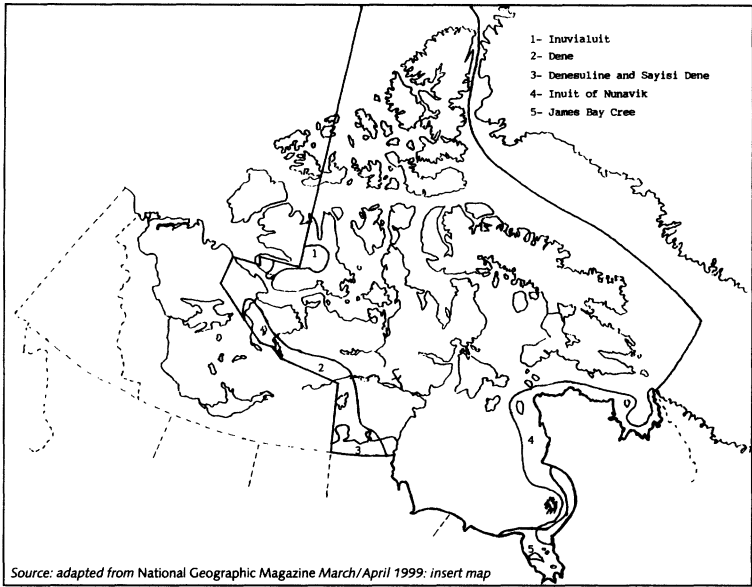


Figure 8. Other aboriginal groups' cultural spaces in Nunavut.

of the region as truly reflecting the cultural space of the region's dominant group of people (e.g., Inuit).

In sum, the social construction of Nunavut's geopolitical boundaries was determined by (1) the spatial localization of certain past and present Inuit cultural practices over the claimed region; (2) the pre-existing presence of various borders (e.g., provinces, parks, electoral districts); and (3) the interests of stakeholders who also used some of the same lands claimed by claims makers. In the end, the interaction of these combined elements gave Nunavut its present territorial shape.

The Formation of Symbols

During the construction of a region's boundaries, certain cultural or regional symbols are established through which the people learn the distinctiveness and the uniqueness of their region. These symbols canonize certain features to distinguish the region from all others (Paasi 1991, 245). Thus, once a region's boundaries are determined, symbols are reinforced and are used as components of an emerging regional collective identity (Paasi 1986, 125). These symbols express the physical, social, psychological, and political integration of a group of people within a particular region.

One should not perceive symbols as pre-given or immutable. Rather, they change with time; they are forged in social context and are continually reinvented. As scholars such as Roosens (1989), Driedger (1989), De Vos and Romanucci-Ross (1995), and Dybbroe (1996) note,

it is clear that symbols are social constructions; yet they are not without factual foundation. Actually, symbols are borrowed from constituent elements of a group cultural identity. Roosens goes so far as to say that culture manifests itself in the form of symbolism: "Cultural symbols are idealized versions of cultural traits" (155). Cultural symbols can be created from one's own tradition, or from other people's: "Groups often create their cultural symbolism based on outsiders perspectives of them" (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1995, 351). Their predominant malleability make symbols remarkably flexible and useful as building blocks for a collective identity (Roosens 1989, 161). The meaning that one ultimately will give to them is largely determined by one's perspective (155).

Symbols are usually created to consolidate and to legitimize political claims and to enhance the social status or economic advantages of a group of people: "A group can legitimize its claim by mythologizing cultural symbols" (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1995, 351). Symbols create a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, and a sense of continuing tradition (Driedger 1989, 146). Thus, to be efficient, symbols must be exaggerated and dramatized by actors who create a reinterpretation of a group's past history and traditions in order to organize the social relevance of political or social claims.

Symbols are shaped and manipulated through a negotiated process in an attempt to communicate their vision of political and social development to others. Symbols are spread by internal actors (e.g., claims makers) as much as by external ones (e.g., policy makers): "The symbol system of a region can be based upon non-local forces shaping life in the region" (Paasi 1986, 250). Actors' interpretations of symbols are not random; they are rather responsive to historical and political circumstances. In this sense, symbols are "invented traditions"; they are used differently at different times and may change their meanings over time.

Symbols legitimize and celebrate the existence of a common collective identity. They do not simply float in the minds of actors; they are manifested in the field of communication (mass media), and they also materialize in the forms of books, publicities, and memorials (Driedger 1989, 140). The production of social and political symbols, such as parades, ceremonies, flag days, reminds individuals that they are all members of the same unique region, the "product" of the same collective regional identity. In Nunavut, NTI declared July 9 to be Nunavut's "national holiday" since on that date in 1993 the Nunavut Political Accord (the Nunavut Act) received royal assent.

Symbols provide people with the means to make meaning. Although the meaning that a group of people may attach to symbols may differ among individual members of that group, they still share similar symbols. Indeed, their common ownership of symbols may be so intense

that they may be quite unaware or unconcerned that they attach different meanings to them. For example, the Inuit stone monument called an "Inukshuk"¹⁵ may suggest several interpretations (Hallendy 2000).

For traditional Inuit hunters, Inukshuit are used as referent points on a treeless land or as "scarecrows" over enclosed valleys in order to scare and to ambush animal game such as caribou. However, more recently an Inukshuk has taken on another meaning; it has become the ideal pictorial tool for highlighting the distinctiveness of the region to outside observers. Thus, Inukshuit are found on Nunavut's coat of arms and flag, and they are pictured as emblems on many Inuit and non-Inuit political and economic organizations in Nunavut. Inukshuit are also utilized on Nunavut tourism promotion pamphlets. Even though the Inukshuk may have several meanings, actors have used this symbol to emphasize the uniqueness of the region.

A symbol like an Inukshuk functions quite effectively as a means of communication without its meanings being rigorously tested: "Symbols are effective because they are imprecise" (Cohen 1985, 21). Symbols express things in ways that allow their common form to be retained and shared among the members of a group while not imposing the constraints of uniform meaning.

Regions are important repositories of symbols. The name of the region, its flag, as well as its printed political map are all important symbols (Paasi 1986, 125). Thus, the map of Nunavut is used as a logo on Nunavut's Internet sites and on most Nunavut government documents (e.g., envelopes, letterheads, business cards). Nunavut's territorial boundaries are also depicted on the 1999 Canadian two-dollar coin.

The proliferation of logo-maps depicting the geopolitical boundaries of a region bring to people a new self-consciousness about the land, a new sensitivity to the territorial shape (i.e., the geopolitical boundaries) of the region. Said another way, maps are cultural texts that construct the world.

The name of a region, such as Nunavut,¹⁶ is venerated above all other symbolic elements as the ultimate symbol of the region's group identity. It is the most widespread, diffuse word in the region. Further, the regional identity name (e.g., Nunavummiut) is derived from the region's name (e.g., Nunavut). In so doing, the name of the region connects its image with the regional consciousness of its inhabitants. Furthermore, the region's name carries its meaning to the outside world. A word like "Nunavut" was unknown just a few years ago in the lexicons of world atlases; now it is shown in all newly printed atlases of the world.

Today, several institutions spread throughout Nunavut make use of regional symbols in their names or in their logos. Organizations tend to employ as indicators only those symbols of the region that distinguish it from other regions (Paasi 1986, 130). For instance, institu-

tions featuring as part of their logos the map of Nunavut, certain Arctic animals (e.g., polar bear, seal, walrus), an Inukshuk, an igloo, or an Inuk are now common, while such logos were unknown thirty years ago.

One can use the spatial diffusion of territorial symbols of a region as a good indicator of the degree level of a region formation (Paasi 1986, 130). For example, the widespread diffusion of the network of organizations, businesses, and companies carrying the name "Nunavut" demonstrate the spatial spread among the public of this new region. In 1970, the name "Nunavut" was unknown as a political symbol. Twenty-five years later (in 1995), more than fifty-two companies and various organizations located in Nunavut included this spatial terminology as part of their institutions' name identification.

Through the diffusion and creation of symbols, political and social traditions are being implemented and constantly expanded. In time, people develop an attachment to the symbols of a region. They create feelings of togetherness, transmit ideal criteria for collective identity, and maintain as well as promote the cultural uniqueness of a region (Paasi 1986, 129). Since the symbols are the same for all individuals living in the region, they help to create a regional bonding among all regional residents of diverse cultural backgrounds: "Symbols remind people that they have a common predicament, a common destiny, and common political institutions inexorably tied to the region" (Williams and Smith 1983, 515).

The formation of symbols is based largely on regional, cultural, and physical elements of distinctiveness, such as the Arctic climate and ecology or the Inuit traditional economy of harvesting, that are reinterpreted by actors. Following a careful examination of literature on Nunavut, one may assert that the most reoccurring symbols of identity in Nunavut rest upon three forms of manifestations: (1) rituals (Nunavut holiday); (2) pictorial graphics (Nunavut's flag, logo-map of Nunavut, Arctic wildlife, an igloo, an Inuk, an Inukshuk); (3) social and political names (Nunavut, Nunavummiut). These forms of manifestation are exposed in various regional institutions' toponyms and largely communicated to the population through regional newspapers (e.g., *Nunatsiaq News*).¹⁷

The Emergence of a Collective Regional Identity

As we have seen, the emergence of a collective identity happens when certain historically contingent geographical and cultural features, materialized in the forms of symbols, are reinterpreted and mediated by actors and are instilled into the social fiber of a regional group of people. This "indoctrination" of people into a collective identity based on a region takes place in the various political and social practices of daily life encountered in the region and in particular through the

education system¹⁸ and the mass media that carry the messages of the actors.

In the 1960s, the education system implemented in Canada's Arctic engendered a sense of large-scale collective identity to the Inuit who until then generally identified themselves through small groups, i.e., band or tribal identities (Mitchell 1996, 42). Historians and anthropologists (Damas 1984; Coates 1985; Crowe 1991; Brody 1991; Morrison 1998) have identified close to twenty Inuit traditional tribal groups in the Canadian Eastern Arctic, including the Ahirmiut, Sadlermiut, Igloodimiut, and Netsilingmiut.¹⁹ In fact, the generic term "Inuit" was used by these groups only when they were confronted, in traditional times, with Indian groups or more recently with white Europeans (Mitchell 1996, 48). Reading some of the history of early contacts between Inuit and Euro-Canadians in the Canadian Eastern Arctic, one concludes that the idea of instilling a collective regional identity to the Inuit first evolved in the 1960s from initiatives introduced by non-aboriginal people via the implementation of Western education, the introduction of the Inuit cooperative system, and the suggestion of creating a new territory in the Canadian Eastern Arctic (Nunatsiq Territory). In fact, one may pretend that collective identity in the Canadian Eastern Arctic has evolved from being primarily tribal, in early and precontact times, toward a more regional concept in modern times. The origin of regional collective identity is, however, a non-aboriginal category that was reaffirmed by claims makers in the 1970s through the Nunavut project.

With the establishment of the Nunavut government on April 1, 1999, and with the growth of additional Nunavut political institutions (Légaré 2000), one may expect a progressive assertion of collective identity in the region. Indeed, according to Paasi (1996), social and political institutions attempt to portray a region as reflecting a single collective history, culture, and politics. This process is reinforced once a region is equipped with all its political institutions (e.g., Department of Education, Department of Culture and Language, Department of Sustainable Development), as has been shown in the case of Greenland (Dahl 1988; Dorais 1995).²⁰

Thus, as a region is being highlighted or constructed, the basis of membership in the collective identity becomes more and more in large-scale political and spatial terms (e.g., Nunavummiut), and less and less in purely cultural (e.g., Inuit) or communal traditional terms (e.g., Ahirmiut, Igloodimiut). In today's Nunavut, the Inuit collective identity is redefined around large-scale political and spatial characteristics so as to incorporate all Inuit as well as the people of non-Inuit descent into a common identity: Nunavummiut. Still, because of Inuit dominant presence in the region, the "Nunavummiut identity" would inevitably inherit strong Inuit cultural foundations. For example, the

Inuktitut language could eventually be the official language of work for all Nunavummiut (NIC 1995).

In the case of Nunavut it is clear that the emergence of a collective identity is intimately linked and parallel to the construction of geopolitical boundaries. Symbols born as part of the territorial formation are used to instill among Nunavut's population a common group regional identity. Such a collective identity is embedded with the region's cultural, spatial, and political characteristics.

CONCLUSION: THE MAKING OF NUNAVUT

The analysis of the process leading to the formation of a regional collective identity has demonstrated clearly the interconnectedness between actors, borders, and symbols. Where Inuit cultural characteristics helped to define the territorial shape of Nunavut, the symbolisms emerging from the construction of Nunavut as a political reality became the cornerstone of an emergent regional collective identity. In Nunavut, while claims makers tried to shape a particular region from certain Inuit cultural traits, regional symbolisms became reified and venerated; they became the ultimate manifestations of identification for Nunavut's residents.

My analysis does not pretend to explain all forms of collective identity constructions. It is, however, an interesting theoretical framework for interpreting the creation of collective identities in emerging public regional governments where aboriginal peoples are the majority and non-aboriginals the minority (e.g., Nunavik, Inuvialuit settlement area, James Bay Cree settlement area). This is a matter of worthy importance in Canada, particularly in light of the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP 1996).

In their final report, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples suggested the implementation of aboriginal self-government through regional political units based on the sixty to eighty aboriginal First Nations in Canada (RCAP 1996, 29). Further, the report also proposed implementing public government administrations for most of these new regions where the interests of both aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples would be represented (29). The report mentioned the soon-to-be-created Territory of Nunavut as a model of governance that should be followed by other aboriginal groups (112). However, as the Nunavut case shows, implementing public governments in areas where aboriginal peoples are a majority may lead to regionally based aboriginal groups. This, potentially, could further the division between aboriginal groups in Canada.

The salient point about the creation of a region like Nunavut is the birth of a new group identity allegiance, i.e., Nunavummiut. As a consequence, one may suppose that the creation of strong regional

collective identities among the Inuit people of the circumpolar world could further balkanize their cultural unity. For example, the Inuit of northern Quebec become Nunavimut, the Inuit of the Western Arctic become Inuvialuit, the Inuit of Labrador become Nunatsiavummiut. They may begin to identify more with their region than with other Inuit groups. Each of these newly constructed regions born from land claims and self-government initiatives (e.g., Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut) create their own collective regional identity, but they often do so at the expense of their neighbors' cultural space and identity. This may ultimately give rise to further dissensions among aboriginal groups, as it has been shown with the Sayisi Dene and the Denesuline, who have recently launched court actions against the federal government in order to assert their land claims rights within Nunavut. In the final analysis, it is interesting to note that the redefinition of aboriginal collective identity is inspired by, and takes place through, a non-aboriginal process, i.e., the Canadian government policies on land claims and self-government (DIAND 1987, 1995). This process accentuates preexisting group definitions of one another and provides delineation to aboriginal land claims regions.

N O T E S

Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the Colloquium on Federalism, Identities, and Nationalisms, Edmonton, December 9–12, 1999, and the Conference on Inuit Identity in the Third Millennium, Quebec, May 11–14, 2000.

- 1 "Nunavut" is an Inuktitut word that translates in English as "our land."
- 2 "Inuit" is an Inuktitut word that in English means "the people." Although it is not grammatically correct, I sometimes use "Inuit" as an adjective. In addition, the word "Inuk," also found in the present work, is the singular form of Inuit, referring to one person.
- 3 "Nunavummiut" is a Inuktitut word meaning "the people of Nunavut." It applies to both Inuit as well as to non-Inuit citizens of Nunavut. "Nunavummiut" is a derivative from the Inuktitut word "Nunammiut," which means "the people of the land."
- 4 Before proceeding to answer the aforementioned questions, I wish to raise a caveat: I am not trying

here to ascertain a micro-level or supranational-level of collective identity among the general Inuit population of the Canadian Eastern Arctic based on individual surveys, but rather I intend to obtain an indication of the sociopolitical symbols used regionally by actors while Nunavut was under construction. The focus therefore is on the "elite"; how the concepts of Nunavut and Nunavummiut are absorbed by the general Inuit and non-Inuit population is beyond the scope of this paper.

- 5 The term "Inuit of the Canadian Eastern Arctic" is a geographical generic term that has no meaning as a concept for Inuit collective identity. The term is used here solely for the purpose of geographically locating the subject group studied in this paper.
- 6 Cultural space is understood here as the geographical area occupied by a distinct cultural group of people, e.g., Inuit, Acadian, Cree (Jackson and Hudman 1995, 30).

- 7 Homogeneous regions are those where political and cultural boundaries coincide. Such regions, however, are rare occurrences.
- 8 The funds for such a study were provided by the federal government as part of its Aboriginal Comprehensive Land Claims Policy.
- 9 In order to avoid any conjectures as to the location of Inuit harvesting activities, the map biographies represent only the harvesting journeys traveled in the past by living Inuit hunters (DIAND 1983). Thus, these maps delineate the Inuit cultural space as it existed back to the 1920s, but do not necessarily take into account areas traveled by historical Inuit groups. In sum, these map biographies provide a modern picture of Inuit cultural space.
- 10 Cairns are man-made piles of stones used as reference points over the treeless Arctic tundra landscape.
- 11 On July 19, 1926, a Canadian Order-in-Council was adopted creating the Arctic Islands Game Preserve. The whole purpose of the preserve was to protect both the natives as well as the wildlife and to place something on the map to indicate that the Canadian government controlled and administered the area. The preserve was abolished in 1946, a few years after the Norwegian claims to the area had been settled (Pharand 1988, 52–54).
- 12 In 1962 the NWT Council asked the federal government to divide the NWT in two. Thus, the territories of Nunatsiaq and MacKenzie were proposed. The idea, originating from the western NWT politicians and businessmen, was to permit the establishment of a responsible government for the more developed western part of the NWT. However, with the change of government in Ottawa in 1963, from Progressive Conservative to Liberals, the proposal died.
- 13 This course of action was chosen so as to avoid opening the century-old debate regarding provincial ownership of offshore islands in Hudson Bay and James Bay (Dorion et al. 1970).
- 14 The Inuvialuit, faced with oil and gas development in the MacKenzie delta and Beaufort Sea areas, decided to come to a quick land claim settlement with the federal government in order to obtain financial benefits and control over oil and gas development. In 1978, they pulled away from the Nunavut process, initiated by ITC, and came with their own claim, Inuvialuit Nunangat. In 1984, while the Nunavut claim was still under negotiations, the Inuvialuit signed their final land claim settlement with the federal government.
- 15 An Inukshuk is a cairn. "Inukshuk" is an Inuktitut word whose translation into English is "in the form of a person." The plural of Inukshuk is Inukshuit.
- 16 As with all other symbols, the word "Nunavut" may contain several meanings. In traditional Inuit society, the word was used to mean a land familiar to Inuit hunting parties. However, since 1976 it has taken on a more political meaning, defining an emergent political unit.
- 17 Throughout 1978, the term "Nunavut" was found 57 times in all articles printed by the weekly newspaper *Nunatsiaq News*, and the word "Nunavummiut" was non-existent. In 1998, an examination of the same newspaper revealed that the word "Nunavut" appeared 556 times throughout the year, and the word "Nunavummiut" occurred 106 times.
- 18 Paasi claims that group identity consciousness normally develops

in individuals at the approximate age range of twelve to twenty years (1991, 251). According to Paasi, it is at this time that social and political events have the most impact on the development of group identity. Thus, the curriculum of a region's education system, in particular history and geography courses, plays a crucial role in shaping the minds of young people to the idea of sharing a common collective identity.

- 19 Inuit groups referred to themselves by the use of specific place-

names bearing the suffix "miut" meaning "people of." For example, "Netsilingmiut" means "people of the place where there are seals."

- 20 Before the establishment of Greenland's home rule in 1979, the Greenland Inuit defined themselves in small-scale groupings. However, surveys conducted in the 1990s (Dorais 1995) have demonstrated that a majority of Inuit in Greenland now have a primary regional identity, i.e., Greenlanders.

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