

ICCS RESEARCH REPORT

by Rita Nandori

The aim of my research is to address a gap in the knowledge within the area of Inuit studies through examining intellectual culture by studying cultural identity as it emerges through the ethnohistoric record and short cultural texts, namely, traditional, folk, and popular song lyrics; spoken word performances, and contemporary poems. My research proposes that these intellectual artefacts serve as cultural memory through which the evolution of Inuit cultural identity and the nature and amount of transformation may be observed. Using a composite theoretical system, I embarked upon searching for the presence of Inuit cultural identity in contact-traditional and contemporary texts and offer answers as to the nature of cultural change detectable in Inuit texts.

My research rests within the intersection of literary studies and intercultural psychology, using approaches based on John W. Berry's fourfold model of acculturation and Pierre Bourdieu's generational difference. Additionally, I use spatiality as an investigative lens, focussing on human interdependences that develop in the action and reaction of the Inuit populace to their changing circumstances regarding the utilization of space and its effects on intellectual culture. My intention for my ICCS-supported research was to carry out a detailed analysis of the organization of relations involved in adjusting to outside influences and how these factors are represented in Inuit poetry and other lyric texts.

Based on the work completed during the tenure of the scholarship, I have completed my dissertation, entitled *By the Light of the Kudlik: From Arctic Wayfarers to Arctic Denizens—Inuit Cultural Identity and Its Textual Representations*, the first part of which introduces a novel framework that I utilize to conceptualize Inuit identity, while the second

part of the dissertation surveys the past and present of Inuit cultural history to place the study of cultural identity in context. This part of the thesis surveys how Inuit identity was altered by sustained contact with the South and later sedentism. In the third part of the study, I specifically examine Inuit texts arranging them in a novel system. In the final, and fourth part of my dissertation, I analyze the Inuit character hidden in the aforementioned texts. My research method entails the close reading of poems published in rare Inuit magazines, newspapers, and collections.

A further part of my research detailed in the book chapter “Inuit at School: Education and Enculturation in the Arctic” written for an anthology by Gondolat Press. The chapter focuses on postwar Inuit education, namely, mandatory schooling for the then semi-nomadic Inuit that jumpstarted a paradigmatic change to their lifestyle. I argue that education did not only shape the Inuit mind but urged parents to settle down in order to remain close to their children, many of whom believed that they were taken from their parents never to see them again. Both mission and residential schools as well as contemporary Inuit secondary schools have a reputation despite the fact that many of the most revered Inuit leaders express gratitude for their education that enabled them to enter the political scene and help their own people. This sentiment is sharply contrasted to the narrative of abusive study environment. In my essay, I unfold the reasons behind this discrepancy through an objective, ethnohistoric study of archival data.

The piece also discusses that in the 2020s, schools across the Inuit homeland do not produce a sufficient number of high school graduates. The lowering of standards may be the cause of failure; however, advocates cannot speak often enough about the severity of missionary schools. I ponder if both strict adherence to the rules and leniency are faulty approaches to Inuit education, what method could successfully be employed. My personal

observation based on my experience in Nunavut is that rigorous teaching either regarding the material or pedagogic approach would result in young adult completely avoiding school. It is altogether a conundrum which my book chapter hopes to tackle and serve as a catalyst to generate ideas, especially from the Inuit side so that the situation may be amended internally, which is the expressed wish of most communities.

Finally, I urge education professionals to develop a curriculum in which Inuktitut, Inuit poetry, and mythology are taught and policies that will encourage those Inuit who wish to get out on the land should be implemented. Southern teachers do not possess either the role or the prerogative to develop a specialized curriculum about Inuit culture to be taught in schools in Inuit *Nunangat*. Curriculum, and the language in which it is taught, in fact, is of key importance when generational and individual differences in identity are analyzed. The significance of the language in which knowledge is mediated is key. Although initiatives such as the “First Canadians, Canadians First” curriculum development strategy by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami were formed, successful implementation of a viable program is still in the realm of future aspirations.

Furthermore, based on the popularity and success of traditional forms and themes in the visual arts, such as in the films produced by the Inuit Isuma Productions, both education and culture may receive a well-needed boost through this medium. Although film as a genre is modern and southern, the stories of Isuma are those one might hear in *pisiit* and folk tales. Urban legends from Igloolik, such as *Atanarjuat* (2001) or the arrival of Rasmussen in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (2006) were dramatized and gained popularity among Inuit audience and beyond. This suggests that young Inuit can relate to traditional *Inummarik* values even if they arrive packaged in a modern form.

Since the receipt of my ICCS scholarship and as a consequence of the subsequent research completed, I have also published two scholarly articles, one entitled “*Nunangat and Beyond: Acculturation and the Retainment of Inuit Identity in Canada,*” in the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, and the another, “*Inuit Nunangat and Cultural Identity: Borders that and Unify and Define*” in the *Eger Journal of American Studies*. The first essay examines how acculturative changes affect Inuit culture and discusses Inuit identity within the fabric of multicultural Canada. I propose that access to Southern culture for a people with strong attachment to the land transforms personal and collective identity and creates amalgamated identities which reflect both tradition and acculturative build-up. Building on Inuit-led amendments to the curriculum already in place across the North, I propose a heritage language-based and traditional knowledge-enhanced school curriculum for secondary grades implementing the teaching of traditional texts, such as myths, classic tales, and songs in Inuktitut in order to foster traditional knowledge—known as IQ, or *Inuit Quaujimajatuqangit*—along with Inuktitut fluency, including the sacral language of *pisiit* and *angakkuit*, which are vital aspects of cultural retainment for Inuit in Canada. The second essay in turn discusses how Inuit culture has substantially changed since it came into contact with the South. The remoteness of the Far North, however, contributes to the retainment of traditional lifestyles and the lessening of acculturative processes. I argue that the geography of Inuit *Nunangat* limits Southern impact, which is apparent in many of the customs, along with cultural manifestations of identity that are still practiced. However, Inuit living in Arctic communities today have no personal experience “living out on the land,” which is one of the most basic cultural definitions of being *inummariik*. The essay proposes a method along an equilibrium of North and South to maintain Inuit identity as best as viable in a progressively Western-centred global world.

As the outcome of my ICCS-supported research, I have published two scholarly articles, one book chapter, and completed my doctoral dissertation on Inuit cultural identity to

be defended at the end of the 2023/24 academic year. My achieved progress has been helped by the kind guidance of Professor Martin from the University of Alberta, who also introduced me to the Indigenous Literary Studies Association; and Professor McInnis from the University College of the North, who did not hesitate to read through my essays to and give pointers. I also credit Saint Mary's Professor Hulan, UCN's Professor Wastesiscoot, and Inuit elder Ms. Tagak and Mr. Kotierk for their readiness to engage with me when I reached out. Also, conferences and workshops organized by the Indigenous Literary Studies Association; and Canadian archival resources, such as the National Truth and Reconciliation Archives, the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, the Deschâtelets-NDC Archives, and others also helped formulate an accurate picture of the cultural history of Inuit in Canada. My goal, which was to facilitate a diachronic study of Inuit poetry through which Inuit cultural identity may be observed, has been achieved with the aid of the ICCS bursary. As I set out to utilize the bursary, I hoped for an opportunity to be connected with settler and Inuit scholars and residents so that these connections inform my research; for supporting me in achieving this goal I have the ICCS to thank.