Sociocultural and political changes in the Inuit nation of Québec
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Introduction

The current reality of the Inuit of Québec was shaped by ongoing contact with Europeans. Influence began gradually, but ultimately framed and structured the Inuit way of life, and accelerated the process of social change. Many ideas originating in non-Native culture were introduced to Northern communities, which either adopted and integrated them, or perceived them as obstacles to rebuilding a society in their own image. This paper illustrates the evolution of culture and governance in the Inuit communities of Nunavik.

1 Brief Cultural History of the Inuit Nation

SETTLEMENT IN NORTHERN TERRITORIES AND TRADITIONAL WAY OF LIFE

The first settlers in the Arctic arrived in around 2000 BP [Before Present]. Inuit migrated from Alaska to the Québec tundra in about the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Once they decided to move into the territory permanently, families of hunter-gathers traveled across the land according to an annual cycle. Individuals made use of all the elements of nature to make the totality of their clothes, their tools, their weapons and their homes. They were able to adapt their technologies to an environment characterized by an extreme climate and absence of vegetation. During the warm season, they dispersed in small hunting groups to maximize their productivity. In winter, they formed igloo villages in order to protect themselves from the great winds. Their view of the universe was infused with mythology based on balance between the natural and supernatural world and was orchestrated by shamans, mostly male, but at times, female.

THE INUIT IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURY

A few contacts occurred during the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. The Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) attempted to establish trading posts on Inuit territory and had to accept some limitations as it tried to develop harmonious relationships with this group. Employees’ lack of knowledge of Inuit culture, and also the remote location of Inuit in no way furthered HBC’s attempts to establish itself. Conflictual relationships persisted among the inhabitants of the peninsula and had the effect of impeding the Company’s attempts to do business in the Arctic. Endeavouring to improve the situation, the Company issued proclamations to limit the movement and actions of Amerindians on Inuit territory.
THE INUIT IN THE 19TH CENTURY
The Moravian missionaries explored the southern part of the Ungava peninsula at the beginning of the 19th century. The first and foremost trading post was Fort Chimo, which opened its doors in 1830, followed by other posts in subsequent years. It took some decades before regular relationships between Inuit and trading post were developed. By the mid-19th century, Inuit decided to settle near the posts.

Inuit began to work seasonally for the HBC, which caused the transformation of their economy into mixed activity permitting both subsistence and market production. The new commercial activity transformed the social organization from what it had been during the pre-contact era. The presence of foreigners led to weakening of traditional solidarity systems and a decline in a certain number of traditional social practices (adoption, shamanism, traditional justice) that had contributed to the integration of Inuit groups.

Instruction that took place in the communities was generally rudimentary and usually occurred during the summer season, during the gathering of people near trading posts. It was dispensed by teachers hired by the government. It was only after the Second World War that a comprehensive education system was established throughout Inuit communities in Northern Québec.

INUIT IN THE 20TH CENTURY
The first decades of the 20th century were marked by strong competition between trading companies, but due to the combined effects of the Depression and of the Second World War, the 1930s were difficult. The companies were forced to diminish their activities and closed numerous trading posts in the Arctic. The situation forced Inuit to take long trips to continue to trade and obliged them to resume their subsistence economy. In addition to the difficult times, the HBC was informed, in 1934, that if it wished to continue its activities in the North, it must assume responsibility for the well-being of Inuit, without charging a cent to the Department.

The first half of the 20th century was a significant stage for Inuit. They had previously worked for the HBC in exchange for food items and credit at the trading posts, thus maintaining the spirit of barter. In the 1930s, the mission had established a sawmill and bakery in southern James Bay and introduced the concept of working for wages. This concept gained currency in the 1950’s, spreading to the majority of communities. From that point onward, the second half of the century was characterized by a definitive transition to permanent settlements, depending on the geographical location of each community.

1.1 IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY AND FAMILY
For Inuit, the family represents the continuity, protection and survival of each member of the clan. Community and family practices underwent numerous changes, caused by the foreigners’ presence in the Arctic region. The presence of foreigners brought about many changes. The proximity of settlements to trading posts encouraged
mixed marriages between Inuit and trading post employees. The fur trade led Inuit to develop a new mixed economy based on commerce and traditional economic activity. This new economy encouraged the adoption of individual activities and contributed to a redefinition of the community, creating new roles and hierarchies.

The missionaries encouraged Inuit to abandon polygamy and polyandry, an ancestral practice devised to meet the economic needs of the family. They also encouraged Inuit to leave family members behind so they might receive health care or an education. This trend intensified with the government transfer payments.

The situation of the Inuit was extreme and they had to face dependence on the state and on its interventions to solve problems caused by social change. The state wanted to streamline services offered to the Inuit population and relocated many Inuit in already established villages, either on the peninsula or even on other islands on Canadian territory. These processes led to social dislocation of Inuit communities, notably because they caused the physical destructuring of family systems on which the community was built.

The construction of frame houses now met the needs of a nuclear family, not the needs of an extended family. The second half of the 20th century was the most significant change for families and communities, with interventions by the state, and the finalization of the settlement process that would reach its peak in the 1970s.

1.2 IMPORTANCE OF GIFTS

The structure of the Inuit system is expressed in two principles: the act of sharing, and the giving of gifts. They were essential for the perpetuation of communities, took place within the same family or community and reinforced pre-existing ties.

The sharing of food however would only be possible in the context of production, where hunting was of the highest importance. Hunting structured and continued to structure sharing and giving, which rebalanced inequities. The distribution took place according to the degree of participation and was formalized by ritual and rules. The basic rules of gift giving and sharing were strictly applied, and most of all, during periods when animal resources were scarce.

These principles have been preserved over the centuries and are now enshrined within modern political structures such as the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA). Inuit chose their own way of administering an aid program for hunters, one that encouraged everyone’s participation in the hunt. The hunters distribute their catches to members of their families and, when necessary, sell the rest of their catch to the municipal freezer. This freezer then distributes meat without cost to community members who wish to eat traditional food, or who do not have the financial means to buy food at the supermarket. With these aid programs for hunters, the inhabitants of the Arctic are able to integrate a traditional way of life and a market economy (with salaried work). This mixed economy provides a clear picture of the reality of Northern Québec, in its modern form.
2 Brief History of the Evolution of Community Governance

2.1 PRE-CONTACT

In an egalitarian society, certain criteria were required to choose a leader. The chief represented the public will, was a man of wisdom and had the ability to communicate, which encouraged, above all, cooperation between the sexes, unanimous decision-making and the maintenance of harmony with the natural and supernatural universe. The leader had good knowledge of the territory and the resources available. Inuit men and women divided tasks in a systematic fashion in which each gender had responsibilities. In addition to this division of labour, some activities depended as well on personal qualities and competencies.

2.2 EVOLUTION OF GOVERNANCE UNTIL THE SIGNING OF THE JBNQA

The period of first contact with new arrivals did not cause any significant changes in the governance arrangements of Inuit in Northern Québec. However, the fur trade did modify several aspects of material and organizational culture among Inuit, while preserving their traditional economic and political strategies.

1670 Founding of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC).

1830 First trading post in the Ungava peninsula at Fort Chimo.

1867 Founding of Canada through the British North American Act (BNA), without either the consultation or presence of the Native population.

1869 The Rupert’s Land territories granted to the HBC remained under the Company’s authority, when the British Crown bought them.

1870 Rupert’s Land was sold to the Canadian Confederation and was annexed to the Northwest Territories,

1898 The Act respecting the delimitation of the Northwestern, Northern and Northeastern boundaries of the Province of Quebec, 1898 was adopted and the border of Québec was extended to the Eastmain River.

1912 The Quebec Boundaries Extension Act of 1912 defined Québec’s borders as we know them today. Nevertheless, the coastal islands would not be added to the package for political and strategic reasons, therefore dividing the Québec entity as well as the Inuit cultural and hunting territory. Inuit came under provincial jurisdiction.

1930 The Depression of the 1930s forced Inuit to return to a subsistence economy because of the fluctuations of the fur market, and a reduction in game.

1935 The Supreme Court of Canada specified that Inuit were Indians but the Canadian government would exclude them from the application of the Indian Act.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1939-1945</td>
<td>Second World War. After this war, territory fell under Canadian control.</td>
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<td>1950s</td>
<td>Inuit of Northern Québec began to want to build frame houses. At the end of the decade, the government encouraged private construction accompanied by installation of infrastructure networks (potable water supply, generating stations, etc.) intended to relieve social health problems. Inuit were given a new political structure; the village council and the federal government encouraged them to develop their economy on the model of cooperatives that corresponded perfectly to the values of their society. Cooperatives were the cradle of the Inuit autonomy movement.</td>
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<td>1953</td>
<td>Relocation of Inuit living in Inukjuak to Ellesmere Island, situated 3,200 km north, where the game resources were still intact.</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>Universal suffrage granted federally. Québec took control of the territory during the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s.</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>The government of Québec established the Direction Générale du Nouveau-Québec to administer the lands north of the Eastmain River. “The goal of the agency was to aid communities, providing a range of services, from education to welfare to town zoning and policing.”</td>
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<td>1969</td>
<td>Québec provincial granted Native people the right to vote provincially.</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>On April 30, the Prime Minister of Québec, Robert Bourassa, announced the beginning of construction of hydroelectric installations in La Grande River. Creation of the Northern Quebec Inuit Association.</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>On November 15, Judge of Quebec Superior Court, Albert Malouf, made the decision to halt the construction and required Québec to negotiate a treaty covering the territory, forcing the Québec government to provide monetary compensation and the recognition of specific Native rights in exchange for the development of the vast resources of the territory. The Supreme Court of Canada established that Native people had legal title on Canadian territory due to the sole fact of their previous occupation and use, a title that survives in Canadian law unless it has been surrendered by the Native people or extinguished by successive governments. The same year, the federal government adopted a policy that consisted in settling, through negotiation, Native territorial claims.</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>November 11, ratification of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement by the Québec government, the Government of Canada, the Grand Council of the Crees, the Northern Quebec Inuit Association, Hydro-Québec, the Société de développement de la Baie-James and the Société d’énergie de la Baie-James. Three Inuit collectives, with Povungnituk at their head, refused to sign the Agreement for a long time, objecting among other things to matters referring to the education of children. It wasn’t until 1989 that the village of Povungnituk ratified the accord and decided to harmonize its relations with the Québec Government and the other villages of Nunavik. Founding of the Makivik Corporation.</td>
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2.3 SINCE THE SIGNATURE OF THE JBNQA

1983 In light of the government’s failure to respect the promises it made in the JBNQA, Inuit renewed their efforts to obtain greater autonomy. They met Québec’s Prime Minister, René Lévesque. The response from the Prime Minister was positive, but only to the extent that Québec borders would frame Inuit autonomy.

The Ujjituijit committee was set up and tasked with establishing proposals and procedures that would result in the founding of the Nunavik Regional Government.

1988 The place-name Nunavik was now official.

1989 On April 10, the residents of Nunavik elected a representative assembly tasked to develop the constitution of Nunavik.

1991 Nunavimmiut accepted the constitutional project by referendum by.

The end of the 1980s marked the beginning of the second phase of the hydroelectric project on Great Whale River. In order to demonstrate their discontent, the Crees and the Inuit took the debate to the international scene and won sympathy from people. Crees and Inuit made two expeditions paddling down to New York City and Québec in a specially combined canoe and kayak, with the objective of forcing Hydro-Québec to reconsider its environmental review process.

1997 Beginning of the negotiations between the Makivik Corporation and Prime Minister Lucien Bouchard.

1999 On November 5, political accord between Nunavik, the Québec government and the Government of Canada to study a form of government in Nunavik through the creation of a Nunavik Commission.

2001 The Nunavik commission tabled its report

2002 On April 9, ratification of the Partnership Agreement on Economic and Community Development in Nunavik (Sanarrutik Agreement).

2003 In July, the two governments and representatives of Nunavik signed an Agreement in Principle on the negotiation process.

2007 On December 5, Consensus of all parties and ratification of the project of the Nunavik Regional Government.

The process will take several more years before Inuit can enjoy a government that allows them to control the decisions that will influence their way of life and their development. The regional government is scheduled to be established in April 2013. The agreement is innovative because it grants Inuit an autonomous regional government within the boundaries of a province, a first in the Canadian confederation. For Inuit, autonomous regional government is a means to preserve and to perpetuate their culture within a framework of modern government, where all institutions will be mandated to ensure the survival of their traditional way of life. It is indeed remarkable that this quest for autonomy has remained at the centre of political relations and will redefine the conditions of a partnership that will enable them to flourish within the boundaries of Nunavik, and with other Native people.
Inuit perceive time as a form of rhythm and cycles. Alternation of day and night doesn’t serve to measure time, but to count it. So, they count the days by the nights, the months by moons and the years by seasons.

For them, time is cyclical. It is based on lunar movements and the seasons. Inuit of Québec and Labrador used vocabulary to designate years, months, weeks and days based on a traditional lexicon of the concept of time. The vocabulary used to designate the days of the week stems from two factors: religion and remuneration. Inuit have hybridized the Western notion of time and their own cyclical view, facilitating the co-existence of a modern and traditional way of life.

### Day of the week

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Day of the week</th>
<th>Day of the week in Inuktitut</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>Alluit, allituqaq, allituni</td>
<td>The taboo is observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Observation of taboo is ended</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Aippanganni, aippiput</td>
<td>The second (day of work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Pingajuanni, pingassiput</td>
<td>The third (day of work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Sitamanganni, sitammivut</td>
<td>The fourth (day of work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Nirissivik or nirissivut</td>
<td>One is given food to eat; The fifth; The fifth (day of work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Taboo is unobserved for the last time</td>
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### 3.1 RELATIONSHIP OF NATIVE PEOPLE TO SALARIED WORK

Inuit activities traditionally provided the opportunity to accumulate food reserves for the survival of the group, and were followed by a period of rest and celebration. Salaried work was integrated into Inuit culture only recently, coinciding with the intensification of the presence of foreigners and government services. Originally, the first salaried contracts were offered on a part-time basis, but that does not explain why some Inuit have succeeded in adopting permanent, full-time work. The explanation might be found in the desire to conserve societal structure and traditional life, based on a variety of opportunities for achieving the well-being and income required to support family needs.

Although many socioeconomic conditions have improved, many Inuit have not had access to work partly because of their lack of qualifications, but also because of a lack of jobs. In such a situation, they must turn to social assistance programs that reinforce their dependence on the state transfer payments. Jobs presently available are mostly related to public administration and public service. The individualism that has developed with the arrival of salaried work has had the effect of creating a gap that has given rise to the concept of social classes in the Inuit Nation.
Disparity of income separates some Inuit from members of the same community, and also from non-Inuit inhabitants.

In fact, Inuit must establish work relations in a language they master less well. The rigidity of work hours is another aspect which cannot be ignored, and to which they are not accustomed. Finally there is a significant lack of preparation and education on the part of non-Inuit people working in Northern Québec. Their limited knowledge of the culture in which they are living and working leads, at times, to frictions and frustrations within Inuit communities. For example, non-Inuit work methods emphasize individual effort and competition in contrast to cooperation and the responsibility of the group.

3.2 MIXED ECONOMY AND VALIDATION OF TRADITIONAL WORK

The persistence of a mixed economy reveals that the traditional subsistence activities are profoundly anchored and continue to exist in modern times, because varied sources of income coexist in the Inuit reality of each community. Inuit juxtapose their earnings and income obtained through diverse activities with food from hunt, and clothing and accessories obtained through domestic labour. The solidarity system still at the heart of communities and families is embedded in salaried work as well. Workers help each other, therefore, and replace each other at work, permitting several villagers to have temporary access to a remunerated position. The replacements are sometimes sent directly by the former worker, or are requested by the employer who is prepared to accept the cultural differences of Inuit.

The ratification of Agreements have given Inuit the opportunity to preserve the economic diversity they developed over the centuries while embedding in these agreements the structures required to integrate traditional activities and validate their culture. Contemporary life does not permit all Inuit to practise traditional activities, but they continue to attach great value to these traditions. The Inuit elite supports the positions they adopt on the provincial, Canadian and even international scene, by reminding us of the Inuit nation’s special characteristics and uniqueness.

4 Geographical Influence

Inuit integrated the province through the Quebec Boundaries Extension Act only in 1912. They were not really connected to the province until the 1970s, when a road was constructed between the region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue and the Northern Québec and Inuit founded Air Inuit Company. These new communication channels would serve the Northern populations that until then had been isolated.

The cost of transportation is a decisive factor in the fixing of prices of imported products, raising the cost of living to high levels. Furthermore, the northerly location and the lack of passable roads linking the communities constitute a disadvantage. The elevated cost of living, of real estate and the small potential market do not encourage investors or business creation.
Conclusion

To summarize, the Inuit nations have, over the course of the last century, experienced many social, economic, cultural and political changes, orchestrated by agents of the Church, Europe and government. These external influences disrupted the way of life of Inuit in the Ungava Peninsula, leading them to adopt a Westernized, sedentary lifestyle. Until the creation of the Canadian confederation in 1867, Inuit were able to pursue their traditional way of life. After the intervention of government in Rupert’s Land in 1870, the prime objective of Canadian policy was to “civilize the savages” with the ultimate goal of limiting the financial commitment which politicians had undertaken with regard to Inuit, in exchange for the ceding of their lands and ancestral rights, in order to make way for non-Inuit colonists.

Be that as it may, Inuit of Québec entered the modern era with the imposition of a settling process that aimed to streamline government services. After the Second World War, Inuit experienced increasingly restrictive policies aiming for cultural genocide, although such policies sometimes had the opposite effect. The geographical location of Inuit played a positive role, protecting them from the application of these policies. Thus, they were able to preserve the essentials of their values and their culture, still enjoying today these values as the foundation of their society. Thanks to the safeguarding of their social principles and the maintenance of their ancestral modes of governance, they have been able to sidestep the encroachment of the South.

The Québec state, which had previously had no desire to take any responsibility for the well-being of Inuit changed its mind and, several years later, asserted its territorial authority and proclaimed it as a national symbol. By then, Inuit had for several decades attended school, worked at salaried jobs and learned to manage their communities as required by the provincial and federal governments. In 1971, the construction projects of the century began without consulting local populations. At this point the Native peoples realized the importance of events and embarked on a battle for the recognition of their rights. The James Bay Northern Québec Agreement marked an important passage for the Native people of Northern Québec, but also for the First Nations, Inuit and the Métis in the rest of Canada.

Finally, although the First Nations and the Inuit of Québec have long been the forgotten ones of history, today they are in position within a process leading to their political autonomy and are continuing their integration into modern decision-making bodies in order to improve their condition, even though they have encountered frustration in some situations. Union members of the Centrale des syndicats du Québec can guide them in their decision-making processes by supporting and accepting them in their unique cultural voyage. During this period of significant demographic growth due to their high birth rate, it is even more important to work together with all the categories of education employees from Inuit communities, to help them promote the schooling and educational continuity of their children, who represent the foundation of their traditional values, and also the future of their society.