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## **The Reconstruction of Inuit Collective Identity: From Cultural to Civic**

### **The Case of Nunavut<sup>1</sup>**

André Légaré

#### **Introduction**

The negotiations that were conducted from 1976 to 1993, and the subsequent creation of Nunavut in 1999,<sup>2</sup> have attracted a flurry of publications on the subject of Inuit self-government in the Canadian central and eastern Arctic (Légaré 1999). A survey of writing on Nunavut since 1976, when the Nunavut project was first put forward (ITC 1976), reveals five main themes explored by scholars. First, there is the historical research done by anthropologists and historians, which recounts the ancestral history of Inuit from pre-contact up to the 1960s when the Inuit were forced by government to settle into villages. The second area contains works that focus on the Nunavut negotiation process and, in fact, this is where most of the academic literature on Nunavut is found. Third, there are publications that deal with the Nunavut political system and the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA). Most recent publications have concentrated on this theme. As with the second theme, these scholarly works have been the domain of political scientists. Fourth, the construction of Nunavut geopolitical boundaries, based on traditional Inuit land use and occupancy, has given rise to some academic research done mainly by geographers. Finally, literature on Inuit identity has been published by anthropologists as well as by sociologists.

Nunavut-related publications show that the last two themes have not been treated as extensively as the previous three. However, they are of crucial importance to understanding how Nunavut was constructed and how the establishment of Nunavut has impacted Inuit collective identity in the Canadian central and eastern Arctic. This paper contains a review of the writings about Nunavut by exploring each theme, with a particular emphasis on the last two themes. In addition, I explore the concepts surrounding the construction of geopolitical boundaries and their linkage with Inuit collective identity and attempt to answer how the establishment of Nunavut boundaries has impacted on Inuit collective identity in the Canadian central and eastern Arctic. Finally, I examine the role of socio-political actors (i.e., governments, Inuit organizations, local medias) in the

construction and in the promotion of a new form of collective identity in Nunavut from “Inuit” (cultural) to “Nunavummiut” (civic).

## **Nunavut: A Historical Background**

### ***Early History***

Scholars (Damas 1984; Smith-Siska 1990; McGhee 2004) have divided the early history of Inuit in the Canadian Arctic into three distinct phases: the Pre-Dorset, Dorset, and Thule periods. Research into the pre-contact period is largely based on oral history and also on archeological research (Bennett and Rowley 2004). The first inhabitants of the Canadian central and eastern Arctic were the Pre-Dorset, whose ancestors crossed the Bering Strait into North America around 10,000 years ago. According to scholars (Burch 1986; Damas 1984), the Pre-Dorset arrived in the eastern Arctic from Alaska at around 4,000 BCE. The Dorset succeeded them in 1,000 BCE. However, with the arrival of the Thule, the ancestors of today’s Inuit, around the year 1,000 CE, the Dorset people vanished. There is still much debate among academics as to the reasons behind the disappearance of the Pre-Dorset and Dorset societies.

Aside from a brief Viking contact interlude with the Dorset people, around 1,000 CE, early contact between Inuit and Europeans started with Martin Frobisher’s visit to Baffin Island in 1576. The story of his arrival, as well as those of subsequent British explorers also in search of the Northwest Passage, has been recounted by a number of scholars (Berton 2001; Fossett 2001; McGhee 2004). Yet, contact between Europeans (later Euro-Canadians) and the Inuit remain limited until the early twentieth century. The establishment of Hudson’s Bay Company’s trading posts and the arrival of the Catholic and Anglican churches in the region increased European contact with Inuit people. Damas (1993) depicted those early contacts as “harmonious” (Damas 1993, 5). In fact, until well into the early twentieth century, the Inuit continued to live a nomadic life in small groups.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Canadian Government Intervention in the North***

Regular contact between Euro-Canadian society and Inuit culture started only after the Second World War (Brody 1991). Canadian government intervention in the North was largely based on concern for the living conditions of the Inuit (Weissling 1991). Damas (2002) and Clancy (1987) illustrated how, in order to facilitate the delivery of government services (health, education, social services) and to improve the Inuit living condition, Ottawa established villages along the Arctic coast.<sup>4</sup> Inuit were settled into those villages where the government could provide health, social services, and education for them.

A number of authors (Creery 1993; Damas 2002; Brody 1991; Fossett 2001) describe this form of interventionism by Ottawa as “internal colonialism.” Indeed,

the move off the land, in the 1950s and 1960s, changed Inuit lives dramatically. The sedentary life in the villages increased the Inuit feeling of alienation from their land and their traditional way of life (Fletcher 2004). This forced settlement soon gave birth to dependency on government social services (e.g., housing, welfare). Inuit had become wards of the federal government (Colin 1988). Billson (1990) described how social ills (alcoholism, family violence, drugs, unemployment, inadequate housing, etc) became prevalent in the newly created villages.

At the end of the 1960s, having recently come from a tradition of governing themselves in almost all aspects, the Inuit were trying to reacquire control over their lives and their traditional lands (Dickerson 1992). Billson (2001) and Mitchell (1996) maintain that the search for Inuit political autonomy stems from the Euro-Canadian domination of Inuit, which started with the settlement initiative of the 1950s. The Inuit political revolution and the birth of the Nunavut project can be understood only within the context of this dramatic shift from the land to village life (Billson 2001, 284). In July 1971, the Inuit formed a political organization, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, to regain control over their political and economic destinies in the eastern and central Arctic.

## **The Nunavut Proposal: The Negotiation Process**

Most academic literature on Nunavut (Abele 1987; Bell 1992; Billson 2001; Gray 1994; Légaré 1996, 1998a) has focused on the negotiation process that led to the conclusion of the NLCA in 1993, and the subsequent creation of the government of Nunavut in 1999. In addition, people involved in the negotiations, such as consultants, lawyers, and negotiators (Jull 1982, 1988; Fenge 1992; McPherson 2004; Merritt and Fenge 1989; Merritt 1993; Molloy 1993), have also published on the subject.

Put forward by Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC)<sup>5</sup> in 1976, the Nunavut proposal sought an agreement with Canada on land claims and on self-government. The Inuit of the Northwest Territories (NWT) hoped that by signing such an agreement, they would establish a new and respectful political relationship between themselves and the federal government. As demonstrated by Weller (1988) and Hamley (1995), the appeal of Nunavut meant that ITC expected that the proposed government would be closer to the people, both physically and culturally. Decentralization that had already started in the NWT (Dacks 1990; Légaré 1997) was not sufficient to quench the desire of the Inuit to have their own government.

The creation of Nunavut had to be negotiated as part of Canada's policy on Aboriginal outstanding land claims (INAC 1973).<sup>6</sup> Purich (1992) and Légaré (1996) examine the negotiation process at length and describe the events surrounding the three stages (i.e., proposal, elaboration, approval) that led to the signing of the final agreement. At the proposal stage (1976–81), ITC submitted to Ottawa three versions of the Nunavut project (1976, 1977, 1979). Ottawa accepted the third proposal as basis for negotiation. It contained four objectives:

1. Ownership rights over portions of land
2. Decision-making power over the management of land and resources
3. Financial compensation and royalties from non-renewable resources developed in the area
4. Commitment from Ottawa to create the government of Nunavut

In exchange for the settlement of their claim, the Inuit would have to surrender their ancestral Aboriginal rights to all lands in the North.

Duffy (1988) and Purich (1992) provide an excellent description of the elaboration stage (1981–91). This stage was the longest and most important phase of the negotiation process. At that stage, Tungavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN)<sup>7</sup> and federal government officials drafted the NLCA (INAC 1993). Cameron and White (1995) argue that the dominant issue of the elaboration stage focused on discussions regarding the boundary location that would divide the NWT in two halves.

Two separate, territory-wide plebiscites were held on the question of the boundary (Cameron and White 1995). The story surrounding these plebiscites can be found in Abele and Dickerson (1982) and in Parker (1996). They recount how, in the end, a majority of NWT residents supported the creation of Nunavut, thereby forcing the Canadian government through their democratic vote to support division. The first referendum took place in April 1982 and asked if people were interested in dividing the NWT into two political entities: to the west, Denendeh,<sup>8</sup> to the east, Nunavut. The plebiscite received the support of 56% of the residents. A second referendum on the subject of division took place in April 1992, once the final land claims agreement had been completed and once the parties (i.e., TFN and Canada) had agreed on the location of a boundary line to cross the middle of the NWT. This time, 54% of NWT residents supported division.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Dacks (1995) and Légaré (1997) relate the story that led to the Nunavut Political Agreement, which confirmed the scheduled of the Territory of Nunavut for 1999. Both the Nunavut Political Agreement (Canada 1992) and the NLCA (INAC 1993) were approved by NWT Inuit through a referendum held in November 1992 (69% voted in favour) and later by the Canadian government through Parliament in June 1993. This constituted the approval stage (1991–93).

## **The Political Institutions of Nunavut**

The academic literature that illustrates the political system of Nunavut comprises the highest percentage of recent scholarly material. Some authors have explored the components of the 41 chapters of the NLCA (Hamley 1995; Kersey 1994; Rodon 1998; Tulloch and Hust 2003), while others have examined the political structures and inner workings of the new Nunavut government (Gray 1994; Henderson 2004; Hicks and White 2000; Légaré 1997).

Tulloch and Hust (2003) argue that the NLCA establishes clear rules of ownership and control over land and resources in a settlement area covering one-

fifth of Canada's land mass (1,963,000km<sup>2</sup>). Hamley (1995), Légaré (2003), and Rodon (1998) provide an overview of the provisions contained in the NLCA. The agreement gave to the Inuit of the Canadian central and eastern Arctic ownership over an area of 353,610 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 36,257 km<sup>2</sup> includes subsurface mineral rights. In addition public boards, composed equally of Inuit and government representatives, were created to manage the lands and resources over the Nunavut settlement area. Inuit also obtained royalties from all current and future non-renewable resource development up to \$2 million a year. Finally, the Inuit were to receive from Canada \$1.15 billion, over a 14-year span (1993–2007), as compensation for extinguishing their Aboriginal land rights. However, scholars (Kersey 1994; Cherkasov 1993) point out that the NLCA does not take into account social and cultural items. Those are contained in the Nunavut Political Accord.

The Nunavut Political Accord provides a blueprint for Nunavut's political structure. Légaré (1997, 1998a) explores how this blueprint was later refined by the Nunavut Implementation Commission (NIC 1995, 1996).<sup>10</sup> Hicks (1999) and White (2001) depict the similarities between the political systems of Nunavut and of the NWT. The Nunavut territorial government enjoys the same political powers as the government of the Northwest Territories. These powers and jurisdictions are similar to those held by the provinces except that in Nunavut, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories, the Canadian federal government owns and manages public Crown lands and non-renewable resources. Nunavut has the same political institutions as the NWT and the Yukon: i.e., a commissioner, an executive council, a legislative assembly, a public service sector, and tribunals.

Nunavut is a non-ethnic public government. However, since Inuit comprise the majority of the population (82%), Nunavut is often characterized by scholars (Gray 1994; Henderson 2004; Légaré 1997; Walls 2000) as a de facto Inuit government. Nunavut legislative authority rests in the nineteen elected members of the Nunavut Legislative Assembly. There is no party system in Nunavut, so each elected member sits as an independent. Hicks and White (2000) argue that the consensus legislative system of the Nunavut assembly should be described as "a non-partisan Westminster cabinet-style regime" (Hicks and White 2000, 69). It is interesting to note that the Nunavut Implementation Commission (NIC) proposed, in 1996, the idea of a gender-equal legislature for Nunavut. The proposal was ultimately defeated by a 57% "no" vote in a Nunavut-wide plebiscite held on the issue in May 1997. Dahl (1997), Young (1997), and Gombay (2000) have recounted the events that led to the proposal and the reasons behind its defeat.

Researchers (Abele 2000; Billson 2001; Henderson 2004) argue that the establishment of the Nunavut government has put in the hands of Inuit, who compose the majority of the population in Nunavut, powers over social and economic issues (e.g., language, culture, health, housing, education, social services) that would have been absent in a simple land claims agreement. To ensure that as many villages in Nunavut<sup>11</sup> as possible could benefit from government jobs, a

decentralization initiative (Nunavut 2000, 2004a, 2004b) has been implemented with mixed results. Thus, the head offices of a number of departments (e.g., housing, justice, culture and language) are now located outside the capital Iqaluit.<sup>12</sup>

Seven years after its installment, Nunavut remains a political challenge. Authors (Abele 2000; Légaré 2001a; Walls 2000; White 2000) have highlighted some of these challenges:

- A lack of affordable housing
- Low education levels
- High unemployment rates
- Numerous health and social woes
- Financial deficiencies

Indeed, Nunavut's heavy dependence on federal funding<sup>13</sup> limits its spending power and curtails its effort to solve internal challenges. Only the future will bring us clarity as to the political success or failure of this de facto Inuit self-government experiment. Nunavut is still in its infancy. It is too early to draw any formal conclusion. Undoubtedly, though, to this day, Nunavut's biggest success has been its contribution in creating a civic regional identity consciousness among the Inuit of the Canadian central and eastern Arctic. This new identity, as we shall see, has been largely built around the construction of Nunavut's boundaries and the ensuing regionalization of Inuit collective identity.

## **Boundaries and Identity: Different Sides of the Same Coin**

In traditional political geography, the link between territory and boundaries is usually taken for granted (Glasner and Fahrer 2004). Boundaries are understood as neutral lines: fixed, absolute, almost material entities. This paper argues that the study of boundaries needs to transcend the notions of static territorial lines so as to become more contextual. Paasi (1996, 2002) points out that geopolitical boundaries are human creations manipulated by various socio-political groups who attempt to control certain spatial areas. In this context, boundaries have meaning as part of the production of territory. So, the important question here is not only where a boundary is located, but also how this boundary is established and then ritualized in the process of **constructing a collective identity**.

Anderson and O'Dowd (1999) interpret geopolitical boundaries as encapsulating a history of struggle against outside forces and as marking the limit of a society. Boundaries by definition constitute lines of separation or contact. The drawing of any regional border represents arbitration and a simplification of complex political and socio-cultural struggles between various groups who have interests as to the location of the border. Anderson and O'Dowd (1999) explain that once boundaries are drawn, they generate a dynamic for internal homog-

enization among residents located within the boundaries. Boundaries both shape and are shaped by what they contain: they look inwards as well as outwards, and simultaneously unify and divide, include and exclude.

As demonstrated by Newman and Paasi (1998), geopolitical boundaries usually fail to coincide precisely with the extent of a socio-cultural region and are rarely contiguous with the socio-cultural boundaries of a group of people. Geopolitical boundaries, therefore, become inherently contradictory, problematic, and multifaceted. As explained by Bone (1999), boundaries separating socio-cultural regions should be best viewed as transition zones rather than as finite limits. Thus, at its boundary, a region characteristic will become less distinct and merge with characteristics of the neighbouring region.

Paasi (1999, 2003) and Newman and Paasi (1998) have pointed out the importance of political boundaries in the construction of a collective identity for a group of people. Paasi (1996) argues that the bounded territory of a region is the primary focus of collective identification for its citizens. Boundaries penetrate society through numerous practices and narratives and help to construct a civic regional identity. Boundaries both create identity and are created through identity. As I will demonstrate, the link between boundaries and identity is particularly strong.

Identity is a concept that is hard to define. It is, in essence, a social construct: one's own conscious identity is a product of one's meeting with different forms of others' identities (Barth 1969; Hall 1990). A collective or group identity is but one of many identities in an individual's repertoire. As members of a society, each individual occupies a number of positions and plays a variety of roles which helps them shape several forms of identity (Barth 1969; Brah 1996). One can position himself/herself on many identity "axes" (Dorais and Watt 2001). Identity is also hard to define as a category. An examination of the literature that deals with the concept of identity reveals many forms of identity: cultural, gender, ethnic, religious, and others (Castells 1997; Driedger 1989; Roosens 1989).

Scholars (Brah 1996; Roosens 1989) have generally established that a person may identify himself or herself with others at three levels. The first is on an individual level, where one may identify oneself with some important persons in one's life (e.g., family, friends, co-workers). The second level is social, where one may identify with certain social roles (e.g., a gender, an economic activity, a religion, a language, etc.). The third is the collective level, where one may identify oneself with a broad category of persons (e.g., a cultural group, a political unit) at different spatial scales (i.e., local, regional, national, international).

Breton (1984) and Driedger (1989) have identified at least two forms of collective identity. One is cultural or ethnic identity, which refers to a person's attachment to a particular cultural group, i.e., the Inuit; another is civic or political identity, which refers to a person's attachment to a political unit. It is understood that there are several levels of civic identity in one's repertoire (local, regional, national, international), but this particular paper is concerned with identity at a

regional level (i.e., Nunavut). Regional civic collective identity rests largely on certain historical, cultural, and political characteristics attached to a region (Albert et al. 2001; Hakli and Paasi 2003).

## **The Construction of Nunavut Geopolitical Boundaries**

Scholars (Dacks, 1986; Hick and White 2000; Weller 1988, 1990; Wonders 2003) have noted that the most challenging issue of the negotiation process that led to the signature of the NLCA surrounded the discussions about the location of Nunavut's boundaries. Where to put the line which would serve to divide the Northeast Territories in two parts was the dominant question throughout the 1980s. In the NWT, the Constitutional Alliance, composed of Dene, Métis, Inuvialuit, and Inuit representatives, was founded in July 1982. It had the challenging task of determining a western boundary line upon which all affected Aboriginal groups could agree: the Dene-Métis of the MacKenzie valley, the Inuvialuit of the MacKenzie Delta, and the Inuit of the Canadian central and eastern Arctic. To the south, the Denesuline of Saskatchewan and of Manitoba also voiced concerns in regards to the southern boundary of Nunavut (Usher 1990).

To assert its claim over the Canadian central and eastern Arctic, ITC initiated a land use and occupancy study in 1973. The purpose of the three-volume study (Freeman et al. 1976) was to prove to government that Inuit, and their ancestors, had used and had occupied virtually all of the land and oceans in the Canadian central and eastern Arctic for more than 4,000 years. The study was guided by Canada's policy on Aboriginal land claims (INAC 1973). The policy states that in exchange for proof of continued use and occupancy of the land, an Aboriginal group that had not yet surrendered its ancestral title to the land to the government may negotiate a comprehensive land claims agreement with the Canadian government (Saku and Bone 2000; Usher 2003). Such an agreement provides to the claimant Aboriginal group certain land ownership and land management powers over a defined region called a "settlement area."

The *Inuit Land Use and Occupancy Project* (Freeman et al. 1976) assembles more than 1,600 maps (such as biography maps) portraying the journeys travelled by Inuit hunters, on the land and on the sea ice, in search of game animals. In addition, the maps pinpointed the locations of Inuit outpost camps, cairns, burial grounds, and place-names. These socio-cultural traits and activities based on Inuit cultural identity helped trace an Inuit socio-cultural region. Research done by Freeman et al. (1976), Freeman (1984), Keller (1986), Riewe (1988, 1991), and Wonders (1984, 1985, 1990) presents excellent maps of current and traditional Inuit land use in the Canadian Central and Eastern Arctic. In addition, Collignon (1993), Lester (1979), and Wonders (1987) have shown the importance of Inuit place-names in determining the possible extent of the Inuit claim area in the Canadian Central and Eastern Arctic.



The biography maps and their contents were used by ITC and later by TFN to assert Inuit land interests (Wonders 1990). The biography maps became the building blocks in the delimitation of the Nunavut territorial shape (Brody 1991). TFN attempted to design geopolitical boundaries that were as closely contiguous as possible to those of Inuit traditional use and occupancy of the land (i.e., their socio-cultural region). Thus, TFN insisted that the Nunavut western boundary should follow the tree line and should include the Inuvialuit communities and the rich oil and gas fields of the MacKenzie delta.

However, Wonders (1984) and Usher (1990) have demonstrated that very few land areas in the NWT are uncontested or homogeneous. There are significant overlapping areas with a number of Aboriginal groups. Watkins et al. (1986) noted that some areas along the tree line were contested by the Dene-Métis who had also traditionally hunted and trapped in the area. The Dene-Métis socio-cultural region (Ash et al. 1978) also extended north of the treeline as hunters searched for caribou. The area was uninhabited, but both sides had hunting and trapping interests to the area. Similar contested, overlapping claims lay along the proposed southern boundary of Nunavut with Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Usher's land use research (Usher 1990), on behalf of the Denesuline, showed continued use of the land, located in the NWT along the Saskatchewan and the Manitoba borders, by the Denesuline. However, Canada had said that it would deal with the Denesuline's overlapping claim in a separate process and that the Denesuline, being non-residents of the NWT, would not be entitled to influence the negotiations in the NWT (Molloy 1993).

As for the Inuvialuit, in July 1985 they decided not to join their Inuit counterparts (Keeping 1989). Their economic and transportation links along the MacKenzie valley were attached to the western part of the NWT. They preferred not to embark on a claim that focused largely on the eastern and central Arctic (Wonders 1988, 1990). So, by the end of the 1980s, the only outstanding issue was how to draw the boundary between the claim areas of the Dene-Métis and the Inuit. Progress on this matter was not made until February 1987 when both sides agreed, through the Constitutional Alliance, on a compromise boundary (Constitutional Alliance 1987).

However, the agreement broke down a few months later when Dene chiefs refused to endorse the proposal (Dickerson and McCullough 1993; Merritt and Fenge 1989). The heart of the problem lay in the ongoing harvesting activities of both groups on a hundred-kilometre-wide area around the treeline limit. Both groups argued that the whole of the hundred-kilometre-wide area should be on their side of the boundary. Having failed to settle the boundary issue, the Constitutional Alliance was disbanded in July 1987. Negotiations on this boundary issue were stalled for the next three years. In April 1990, Ottawa designated the ex-Commissioner of the NWT, John Parker, with the task of solving the boundary dispute. After consulting with all parties, Inuit and Dene-Métis, Parker recommended a compromise boundary (Parker 1991) largely similar to the border upon

which the Dene-Métis and the Inuit had agreed three years earlier, but which was rejected by the Dene-Métis. The “Parker Boundary Line” was later approved<sup>14</sup> (May 1992) in a NWT-wide plebiscite. It now served to divide the NWT in two halves.

In the end, Nunavut’s geopolitical boundaries largely reflected the Inuit socio-cultural region in the Canadian central and eastern Arctic. However, other important factors also had to be taken into account in the delineation of Nunavut’s boundaries. Thus, TFN did not claim land jurisdiction beyond the southern border of the NWT, even though some Inuit groups had in the past travelled down to Churchill, Manitoba. Rather, they chose to respect the existing provincial Manitoba border (Molloy 1993; Fenge 1992; Merritt 1993).<sup>15</sup> They also respected the existing settlement area boundaries of the Inuvialuit who had signed a comprehensive land claim agreement with Canada in 1984 (INAC 1984). Finally, once Canada had accepted the idea of creating Nunavut, it supported an eastern border for the Nunavut Territory that follows the NWT’s existing geopolitical boundaries (Molloy 1993).<sup>16</sup> Those borders extend around James Bay, even though the waters and the islands in James Bay had never been used or occupied in the past by the Inuit.

In sum, the construction of Nunavut’s geopolitical boundaries was determined by:

- The spatial localization of certain past and present Inuit cultural traits and activities
- The pre-existing borders of provinces, administrative districts, and settlement areas
- Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic through the meridian approach to the geographic North Pole
- By the land use interests of other Aboriginal groups (i.e., NWT Dene-Métis)

Today, the western boundary of Nunavut cuts into part of the socio-cultural region of the Dene-Métis (Ash et al. 1978), who now find some of their traditional hunting grounds within Nunavut. In addition to the Dene-Métis, the Denesuline of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the James Bay Cree, and the Inuit of Northern Quebec have also been affected, since they also use some of those lands, now within Nunavut, for harvesting purposes. For all of these affected Aboriginal groups, the creation of Nunavut, and the location of its boundaries in particular, has signified a loss of their socio-cultural region.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, one may now expect that the newly created Nunavut government will redefine these lands as part of the heartland of the Inuit socio-cultural region in an attempt to fuse the socio-cultural region with the newly created political region of Nunavut. Obviously, like any other province or territory, Nunavut will jealously guard its geopolitical integrity.

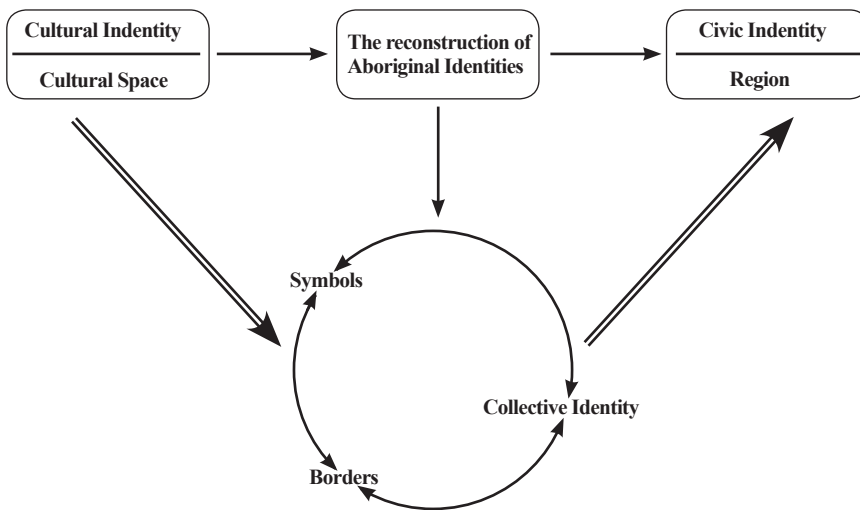
## The Reconstruction of Inuit Collective Identity in Nunavut

Research on identity in the Arctic has been conducted mainly by anthropologists and sociologists (Briggs 1997; Dorais 1995, 2001, 2005; Dybbroe 1996; Searles 2001). They have focused on Inuit social and individual forms of identity. They have explored particularly the themes of language (Dorais and Sammons 2000; Shearwood 2001), religion (Laugrand 2002), and harvesting activities (Doubleday 2003; Gombay 2005; Rasing 1999; Searles 1998; Wenzel 2001) as building blocks for Inuit identity. A few scholars have examined contemporary Inuit collective identity (Billson 1988; Dahl 1988; Dybbroe 1996; Muller-Wille 2001) but have done so from an ethnic or cultural (e.g., Inuit identity) perspective rather than on a civic or political basis (e.g., Nunavut residents' identity). To my knowledge none has looked at the connection between the construction of geopolitical boundaries and the re-definition of Inuit collective identity.

The reconstruction of collective identities is mediated and invented by various actors (i.e., TFN, Government of Canada) who will subjectively use symbols and geopolitical borders in order to highlight the differences between one group from other neighbouring groups (Massey 1994; Paasi 1999). During the construction of a region's borders, symbols, resting on an Aboriginal group's socio-cultural and physical environment, are established through which the group learns its distinctiveness and its uniqueness in relation to neighbouring regions (Paasi 1986, 1991). Once a region's boundaries are determined, symbols are reinforced and are used as components of an emerging regional collective identity. Symbols manifest themselves in the field of communication (advertisements, television, newspapers, books, sculptures, paintings, memorials, etc.).

Symbols have been shaped and manipulated by TFN through the local medias, during a land claim process, in an attempt to communicate their vision of political and social development to other actors (e.g., the government of Canada, Dene-Métis of the NWT, Denesuline, etc.). Symbols are "invented tradition": they are simple to understand and may change their meanings over time. They are continually reinvented by actors, who often use them to gain certain socio-political claims (Dybbroe 1996). In sum, symbols legitimize and celebrate the existence of a common regional consciousness or civic identity within a political unit. In Nunavut these socio-cultural symbols rest on the Arctic climate and wildlife as well as on socio-political traits, and manifest themselves in three forms: (1) rituals (e.g., the Nunavut holiday—a statutory holiday in Nunavut); (2) pictorial graphics (e.g., Nunavut's flag, logo-map, arctic wildlife, igloos, inuksuit, etc.); and (3) socio-political names (e.g., Nunavut, Nunavummiut).

Boundaries have an important role in the construction of a regional identity as symbols of the region (Paasi 1997), becoming instruments of communication (i.e., narratives) through which social distinctions are constructed. Scholars (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999; Newman and Paasi 1998; Paasi 2002, 2003) have

**Figure 7.1: The process leading to the reconstruction of Aboriginal identities**

demonstrated that collective identities are constituted in relation to differences. Boundaries are symbols and manifestation of such differences. They are critical elements in establishing common consciousness within the borders, the “Us,” and excluding those outside the borders, the “Others.” A major part of the process of producing a common regional civic identity consists of presenting the residents of a region as being as united as possible, and of pointing out socio-cultural differences with people living outside the existing political boundaries of the region.

Meanings and symbols can be attached to borders. These are then exploited, often by political elites, to mobilize people and to construct a civic identity. Indeed, according to Paasi (1997) and Pickles (1992), regional civic identity is often associated with the narratives of a region’s boundaries and carried through the media by socio-political actors (e.g., TFN in Nunavut). So, regional civic identity becomes, basically, a form of categorization, where boundaries are used to distinguish one spatial domain and social collectivity (e.g., Inuit) from another (e.g., Dene-Métis). **These boundaries are then used to further define all residents as regionally united through a common civic form of identity, as TFN has done with both Inuit and non-Inuit in Nunavut by using the term Nunavummiut.**<sup>18</sup> In sum, one may say that regional identity and geopolitical boundaries are different sides of the same coin.

## Conclusion

A review of the academic literature on Nunavut shows that a significant number of scholarly works have focused on the history and on the politics of Nunavut. Even though one may argue that the greatest success of Nunavut has been the

emergence of a new regional self-consciousness among the Inuit of the Canadian central and eastern Arctic, few articles have explored this important subject matter (Dorais and Watt 2001; Légaré 2001b).

I have indicated that, as the boundaries of Nunavut were being constructed, Inuit collective identity was being (re)defined on a civic-regional scale (i.e., Nunavummiut) and less and less in solely cultural terms (i.e., Inuit). This regionalization of Inuit collective identity is based on Inuit socio-cultural traits and activities. Since the socio-cultural region is the source of Nunavut's geopolitical boundaries, the regionalization process attempts to incorporate all Inuit of Nunavut, as well as non-Inuit residents, into a common civic identity: Nunavummiut. Obviously, as demonstrated by Dahl (1988) in the case of Greenland, this civic identity inherits strong Inuit cultural foundations since the vast majority of Nunavut's residents are Inuit.

In Canada, Inuit collective identity is being redefined around large-scale political units born through the land claims/self-government processes so as to incorporate Inuit and non-Inuit people into a common civic identity: e.g., Nunavummiut, Nunavimmiut, Nunatsiavummiut. Obviously the Nunavummiut identity portrayed by various socio-cultural symbols will inherit strong Inuit cultural foundations.

Through the reconstruction of Inuit collective identity from cultural to civic one can see the interconnection between borders, symbols and collective identity. Their construction occurs simultaneously and is mediated by actors (**Figure 7.1**). In the case of Nunavut Inuit cultural factors helped to define the borders of Nunavut. The symbols born from the spatial construction of Nunavut became the cornerstone of an emergent Nunavummiut civic collective identity. To sustain itself this new civic identity reinforces the symbols and highlights the borders of Nunavut.

With the continued emergence of new Nunavut institutions (e.g., the Department of Education, Department of Culture and Language, etc.), one should expect the progressive growth of regional civic identity i.e., Nunavummiut. In time, as illustrated by Dahl (1988),<sup>19</sup> one may suppose that the Inuit of the Canadian central and eastern Arctic will identify themselves more and more as Nunavummiut. This regionalization of Inuit collective identity has yet to receive broad attention by scholars. Ultimately, we can only hope that more scholars will explore the concepts of regional identity and boundary construction and its impact on Inuit collective identity in Canada's Arctic.<sup>20</sup>

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## Endnotes

- 1 This paper is based on the author's speaking notes for a presentation entitled "The Reconstruction of Aboriginal Identities: From Cultural to Civic. The Case of Nunavut," presented at the Aboriginal Policy Research Conference, Ottawa, March 21–23, 2006.
- 2 On April 1, 1999, the Canadian government officially proclaimed the Nunavut Territory and government. Nunavut, an Inuktitut word that means "our land," was carved out of the Northwest Territories to become the most recent member of the Canadian federation. Nunavut is inhabited by only 28,000 people, 82% of whom are Inuit.
- 3 There were approximately 50 Inuit "tribal" groups in the Canadian Arctic whose size varied between 30 to 100 individuals (Damas 1984; McGhee 2004).
- 4 Today, there are 28 communities in Nunavut.
- 5 In 2004, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada was renamed Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.
- 6 The story surrounding the origins of Canada's Aboriginal land claims policy is described in detail by Weaver (1981).
- 7 In July 1981, TFN replaced ITC as the responsible Inuit negotiating body for the Nunavut claim. TFN represented solely the Inuit of the central and eastern Arctic. ITC felt at the time that it had to pull away from the Nunavut negotiations to concentrate more on Canada-wide issues.
- 8 Denendeh was a political project somewhat similar to Nunavut (Watkins 1986; Smith 1992). Ultimately, the project was rejected in 1991 by the Dene-Metis Chiefs of the NWT (Légaré, 1998b).
- 9 While the Inuit of the eastern Arctic strongly supported the line, the Dene-Metis of the western NWT disapproved of the proposed line. This explains the low approval level.
- 10 The NIC functioned from December 1993 to July 1999. It was composed of nine members equally nominated by Canada, the Northwest Territories, and TFN.
- 11 There are 28 communities in Nunavut. Twelve were targeted to benefit from decentralization. However, many employees refused to move outside the capital, Iqaluit. Today, in smaller communities, many job positions have yet to be filled.
- 12 About 500 of the 1400 government employees work outside the capital region.
- 13 About 95% of Nunavut's 750 million dollar annual budget is financed by Canada.
- 14 In the eastern Arctic, the support for the boundary was strong. However, in the western NWT, most people voted against the proposed boundary.
- 15 Indeed, any changes of the location of a provincial boundary require the approval of the province concerned. It also requires an amendment to the Canadian constitution, a task that is particularly challenging.
- 16 By taking this position Canada avoided the perennial debate over the provincial offshore boundaries in Hudson Bay and in James Bay (Québec, 1972).
- 17 Although affected Aboriginal groups could continue to hunt, fish, and trap within Nunavut, their Aboriginal rights may have been affected by the creation of Nunavut. Thus, any land claims or harvesting right claims by these groups within Nunavut would be complicated, since the newly created Nunavut government will defend the integrity of its newly acquired laws and powers within the borders of Nunavut.
- 18 The term "Nunavummiut" means in English "the inhabitants of our land."
- 19 Dahl asserts that the 1979 introduction of home rule in Greenland has helped to reshape Inuit collective identity. The Inuit of Greenland now identify themselves collectively primarily as Greenlanders. The term also applies to the non-Inuit Danish inhabitants of Greenland.
- 20 One may add that there is also a similar regionalization process among the Inuit of the Quebec-Labrador peninsula, who now identify themselves collectively as Nunavimmiut on the Quebec side and as Nunatsivummiut on the Labrador side. As for the Inuvialuit of the western Arctic, such a regionalization process is currently absent. They have yet to negotiate a self-government component to their land claim agreement. Only persons with Inuvialuit ancestry can identify themselves as "Inuvialuit."

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