

# VOICES OF INUIT LEADERSHIP AND SELF-DETERMINATION IN CANADA

EDITED BY DAVID LOUGH



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# Contents

*Acknowledgements* | 9

Introduction | *Tom Gordon, David Lough, and Lisa Rankin* | 11

## **I. Leadership**

The Path to Self-Determination | *Natan Obed* | 25

Inuit Youth Today | *Maatalii Aneraq Okalik* | 45

Inuit Women's Leadership: A Nunatsiavut-Based Narrative  
*Andrea Procter, Beverly Hunter, and Charlotte Wolfrey* | 61

Labrador Inuit Leadership—1970s to 2005 | *David Lough* | 91

## **II. Self-Determination and Governance**

The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement: A Modern Treaty  
*Bruce Uviluq* | 117

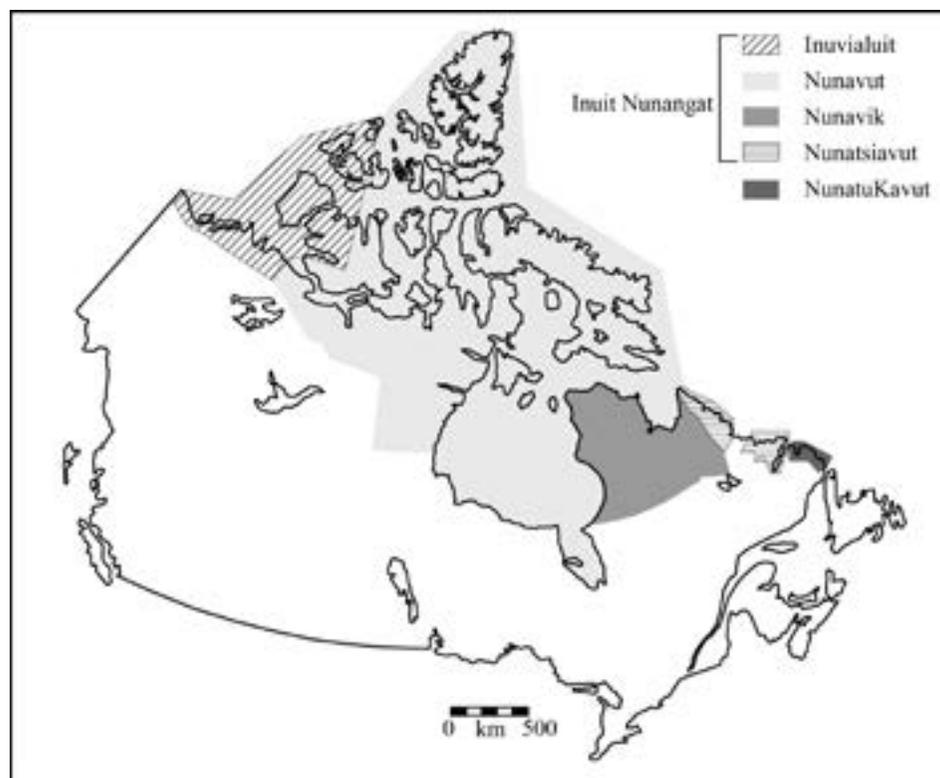
Institutional Design and Inuit Governance:  
Nunatsiavut and Nunavut Compared | *Graham White and  
Christopher Alcantara* | 125

Reclaiming Inuit Knowledge in Pursuit of Self-Governance:  
Regulating Research through Relationships | *Amy Hudson and  
Julie Bull* | 159

Strengthening Inuit Self-Determination in Research:

Perspectives from Inuit Nunangat | *Natan Obed, Scot Nickels,  
Ellen Avarð, and Jennifer Parrott* | 183

*Notes on Contributors* | 207



Inuit regions in Canada referred to in this book.



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## Introduction

*Tom Gordon, David Lough, and Lisa Rankin*

In 2015 the Nunatsiavut Government and Memorial University of Newfoundland were awarded a five-year SSHRC Partnership Grant, Tradition and Transition among the Labrador Inuit. The central tenet of the partnership was to provide a respectful forum from which to co-create and share Inuit and academic knowledge deemed beneficial to Inuit self-governance. Following lengthy community consultations, leadership emerged as a primary theme to be addressed by the partnership. From the fifteenth century to achieving self-government in 2005, Labrador Inuit have lived and expressed traditions of leadership passed between generations and across a history of engagement with other Indigenous peoples, transient Europeans, and ultimately settlers. Though well documented, this history had been less than fully considered, but as Nunatsiavut moves forward from its birth as a political entity to a mature expression of a contemporary Indigenous society, the Inuit of Labrador hope to develop a profound understanding of how cultural traditions could guide them into that future.

The Tradition and Transition Research Partnership has focused on past, current, and future leadership in order to understand the context and development of Labrador Inuit cultural identity for the purpose of strengthening Indigenous self-governance. Comparisons with other Inuit governments across the Nunangat are central to this

work, but so too is understanding leadership from multiple perspectives. Honouring the diversity of Inuit experience across the continua of gender and age has therefore been an essential component of the partnership's methodology. More important, however, was creating accessible and culturally appropriate spaces and formats to share this knowledge. The 2016 Inuit Studies Conference, hosted by the partnership, was the first venue to put these goals to the test, allowing Tradition and Transition members to communicate research results alongside invited keynote addresses delivered by contemporary Inuit leaders, and panel sessions organized by Inuit across the Nunangat and beyond. The timeliness of our own explorations of questions around Inuit leadership was confirmed by the quantity and quality of the conference presentations.

The current volume is a collection of reflections on Inuit leadership stimulated by this conference and edited for publication by the authors in the ensuing months. What is compelling here is the broad range of perspectives brought to bear on the topic. This anthology joins voices that come from deep within Inuit society with voices that offer the perspective of external observation. These voices speak in future, present, and past tenses. From current visions of what Inuit leadership is and future challenges to the social and historical precedents which shaped it, a composite vision emerges: a vision which speaks to the meaning of Inuit leadership in twenty-first-century Canada. These perspectives converge in a pattern of complementation rather than opposition, a layering of different ways of seeing and knowing that enrich understanding as they bump into and complete one another and interlock. The very diversity of voices heard here becomes the strength of the whole as a composite picture of Inuit leadership grows.

These are the voices of both Inuit and non-Inuit, united in their commitment to understanding what Inuit leadership is, has been,

and will be. Among the Inuit voices are those of leaders themselves, both present and future. We also hear from Inuit witnesses to leadership: knowledge-bearers, community stewards, questioners, activists, and observant individuals. The non-Inuit voices include academic researchers who have observed and analyzed Inuit leadership across decades and non-Inuit knowledge-workers who have spent careers working in the north, assisting in the development of social and political structures in which Inuit leadership has prospered.

But the multivocality represented here is not a simple binary division between Indigenous and non-Indigenous contributors. Inuit Nunangat has one of the youngest populations in the world. At the same time, Inuit culture places its deepest confidence in Elder knowledge. Thus, it has been critical that the voices heard here counterpoint the aspirations of youth with the wise counsel of Elders. The visions of leadership cast here reflect these perspectives well, not only in the balance of experience lived with experience anticipated but in the respect that flows across these generations.

Also represented here is a dialogue between the perspectives on leadership rooted in lived experience and those developed from observations with an outsider's perspective. These perspectives balance first- and third-person reflections, bringing with them the deep involvement inherent in the former with the objectivity essential to the latter.

The forms that these voices chose to communicate offer perhaps the most insightful complementation. Standard academic publications often suppress Indigenous knowledge, forcing observations into western frameworks. Therefore, we have chosen to allow multiple formats in this volume, preserving the diversity of knowledge and backgrounds, while making the volume accessible to a wide variety of readers. Several of the Inuit contributors have chosen the medium of storytelling to provide an understanding of what Inuit

leadership is. Narratives around exemplary leadership, personal vignettes, and the expression of ambitious dreams align with the traditions of Inuit storytelling. These told narratives retain a conversational voice, inviting the reader into shared confidences and aspirations. Other contributors communicate through the structured dialectic of critical discourse, assembling evidence and arguing it to a conclusion. It is along the continuum that links these two distant modes of communication that the most nuanced understandings of Inuit leadership can be found.

Equally as wide as the range of voices heard in this volume are the platforms on which Inuit leadership is exercised. While pride of place obviously falls to the political sphere, this arena for Inuit leadership which has created the movement toward self-determination is not the only form of leadership examined in these chapters. The future of Inuit Nunangat is dependent not only on strong and courageous political leadership rooted in Inuit traditions and cultural values but, equally, it will require Inuit control of the knowledge creation which will guide it with integrity through that future. Thus, while a considerable number of the chapters deal with the roots of and routes to Inuit self-determination in the political sphere, others consider the critical role that Inuit must play in establishing and controlling research agendas. In contrast to the past, where Inuit studies have been conceived and conducted largely by academic researchers from the south, recent and future practice has shifted research orientations to the expressed needs of Inuit Nunangat. Inuit have begun, and must continue, to assume full responsibility for determining and directing the research agendas based on community priorities. Research in and for Inuit Nunangat must rely on full participation of Inuit researchers and knowledge-bearers. New ways of blending traditional knowledge with scientific methods of creating knowledge have to be

forged. Accelerated opportunities for research training for Inuit need to be mandated both within the north and with partner institutions in the south. Examples of the challenges to and the essential benefits of Inuit leadership in research in the north are found in several chapters.

A further forum for understanding Inuit leadership is the cultural narrative. The stories that illustrate Inuit leadership are being re-framed to reflect the unique forms and platforms for leadership in Inuit society. Their voices reveal Inuit values, values that define leadership on a scale that reflects the social conditions, community, and the physical environment shared across Inuit Nunangat. Among these are modes of leadership that are also expressions of gender. In traditional Inuit society, female and male responsibilities were diverse and complemented one another to assure the well-being of nuclear and extended families. In this context the ways in which Inuit women construct and demonstrate leadership is drawn from a distinct history of experience. Inuit women's approaches to leadership are articulated in this anthology through the voices of Inuit women leaders and researchers, as well as in the oral histories of women from across Nunatsiavut reflecting on the role models who shaped their own understanding of leadership and the ways in which that leadership is manifest in their communities.

To address questions of leadership directly, the conference organizers invited two contemporary Canadian Inuit leaders to share their visions in keynote addresses. Natan Obed's "The Path to Self-Determination" looks more to the future than the past as it charts a vision for Inuit autonomous governance in the twenty-first century. Obed challenges Inuit and Canadians alike to move beyond the settling and implementation of land claims to redefining the relationship between the Government of Canada and the Inuit as a self-determining people. A change is needed in the balance of power in defining control

of policy and resources that affect the Inuit in the seven areas that are articulated in Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami's (ITK) Strategy and Action Plan. These range from suicide prevention to the environment, to curriculum to housing, to health and wellness. In striking that new balance, Obed repeats the refrain that reconciliation must move beyond talk to action and that action must engage and respect Inuit in every aspect of decision making. As he summarizes, "The way in which everyone—all Canadians—can play a role in Inuit self-determination is to accept that we have things to say, and that we do it in a way that respects our people and also respects human knowledge" (34).

While Obed's keynote set its sights squarely on the future, the president of the National Inuit Youth Council started her keynote address with a reflective gaze toward the past. Maatalii Okalik remembered the leadership models cast by earlier generations of Inuit who laid the groundwork for the youth of her generation. She showed a 1970s video clip of Inuk land claims negotiator John Amagoalik explaining Inuit aspirations to the panelists on the TV news quiz *Front Page Challenge*. Then as now, the future for Inuit lay in vesting power in the communities. The aspirations of today's Inuit youth include strengthening their relationship to their language, culture, and cultural practices. Pride in and the practice of culture are the keys to combatting the problems that plague these youth: suicide, educational deficits, and social disenfranchisement. Inuit youth need a knowledge of the catastrophes in recent history in order to reclaim pride in pre-colonial Inuit culture, a culture at risk of being lost. Initiatives that strengthen language and culture, implement an effective suicide prevention strategy, address social inequities, and encourage empowerment through education reflective of Inuit values are the necessary steps to true and meaningful reconciliation.

The social and cultural determinants of leadership and governance

are explored through close lenses in the collaborative project *Daughters of Mikak: Celebrating Inuit Women's Leadership in Nunatsiavut*. In *Daughters of Mikak*, a digital library of oral history, Inuit women of all generations across Nunatsiavut narrated the stories of the women who had shaped them. From these stories, Beverly Hunter, an addictions and trauma counsellor with Nunatsiavut's Department of Health and Social Development; Charlotte Wolfrey, AngajukKâk of Rigolet and an advocate against family violence; and Andrea Procter, social justice researcher and an adjunct professor in Memorial University's Department of Gender Studies, have extrapolated profiles of Inuit women's leadership in "Inuit Women's Leadership: A Nunatsiavut-Based Narrative." This chapter's chorus of Inuit voices illustrates and honours the distinct leadership style of women in Nunatsiavut who created social networks that have withstood the impacts of colonialism.

David Lough charts a parallel trajectory for Nunatsiavut as a whole, focusing particularly on the qualities of leadership demonstrated by the architects of Nunatsiavut, in "Labrador Inuit Leadership—1970s to 2005." Formerly deputy minister of Culture, Recreation and Tourism in the Nunatsiavut Government, Lough worked in various capacities with Labrador Inuit leaders across four decades. While the Nunatsiavut Government is a young political entity, it was born out of more than thirty years of reflection and negotiation on social authority and mediated political culture. That gestation was informed by more than 250 years of simultaneous resistance, negotiation, and empowerment between the Labrador Inuit and European/southern colonial powers. Lough offers an informed and personal observation on Nunatsiavut's march toward self-determination.

Two chapters relate the evolution of Inuit self-governance in Canada in the first decades of the twenty-first century and offer

preliminary assessments of the effectiveness of the institutions which have emerged and the accomplishments of the individuals who have led them. Bruce Uviluq, a negotiator with the Legal Services Division at Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), examines the creation of the territory of Nunavut in “The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement: A Modern Treaty.” Modern treaties with Indigenous peoples, like Nunavut’s 1993 land claims agreement with Canada, share one theme: resources. Uviluq premises his discussion on the “hard truth ... that if the resources were not on Indigenous peoples’ lands, we probably would not have treaties today” (117). Uviluq surveys the comprehensive land claims settlements in Canada since 1975, leading to the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA), signed in 1993 after seventeen years of negotiations and creating the Territory and Government of Nunavut. The NLCA established innovative governing structures to facilitate co-management of resources and to assure that benefits would return to Inuit. However clear these frameworks, the implementation has not been without complications, largely rooted in cultural differences in understanding the frameworks. While the Inuit regarded them as the bases for discussions, the federal government saw them as a *fait accompli*. A 2016 lawsuit by the NTI representing the Inuit of Nunavut against the federal government for NLCA non-compliance was settled in favour of the Inuit with a cash settlement and a markedly improved process for treaty implementation.

To add analysis to the narrative of the path to political autonomy, political scientists Graham White and Christopher Alcantara draw insightful comparisons between the two jurisdictions in “Institutional Design and Inuit Governance: Nunatsiavut and Nunavut Compared.” Both White, an emeritus professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto, and Alcantara, an associate professor of Political

Science at the University of Western Ontario, have published extensively on governance and intergovernmental co-operation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada. Their detailed comparison of Inuit governance in Nunatsiavut and Nunavut examines the differences and similarities in categories of representation and participation between the self-government of the Labrador Inuit as an autonomous Inuit region within a province and the “public” government of Nunavut, a territory with responsibility for Inuit and non-Indigenous citizens. Though many commonalities can be cited in the goals and aspirations to promoting Inuit representation, inclusiveness, responsiveness, and participation, stark contrasts between these two Inuit jurisdictions have resulted from fundamental differences in governance structures and practices; in the historical context of land claims negotiation; in the size, makeup, and geographic distribution of populations; and in the relationships to other levels of government. While White and Alcantara pass no judgment on these differences, their comparisons offer analysis which may “help Inuit better understand the effects of their institutional design choices and whether reforms are needed to achieve the priorities of their residents, beneficiaries, and political leaders” (126).

Self-determination necessitates agency in knowledge creation. The relationship between research agency and political autonomy is made explicit in Amy Hudson and Julie Bull’s “Reclaiming Inuit Knowledge in Pursuit of Self-Governance: Regulating Research through Relationships.” Both authors have been engaged with research governance in the southern Inuit communities of NunatuKavut in central and coastal Labrador. Amy Hudson, manager of Research, Education and Culture at the NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC), is a PhD candidate at Memorial University specializing in Inuit community governance, self-determination, and sustainability.

Julie Bull, who holds a PhD in Indigenous research ethics, has more than fifteen years of experience in community-based research and education with Indigenous communities and is currently a Research Methods Specialist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). Projects undertaken in three pilot communities, together with a vast literature on Indigenous-led research, have brought them to an understanding of how Inuit autonomy in research both influences and creates pathways for Inuit self-determination. Further, they demonstrate how research grounded in relationships based on respect and reciprocity further enhance community capacity and outcomes by building on the strengths, expertise, and local knowledge of Inuit in their time and place.

Inuit agency in setting, directing, and fully participating in the research agenda is vital to the future of Inuit autonomy. Several conference presentations narrated the successes and lessons of community-driven, Inuit-led research projects from across the circumpolar north. From community monitoring initiatives to best practices in research training in the north, the recurrent theme focused on research autonomy by and for Inuit. One of the more interesting presentations was a roundtable organized by the Inuit Qaujisarvingat—the Inuit Knowledge Centre at ITK. Transcribed and annotated as “Strengthening Inuit Self-Determination in Research: Perspectives from Inuit Nunangat,” the roundtable was anchored on presentations by representatives of the research agencies from regions of Inuit Nunangat. Moderated by ITK president Natan Obed, the roundtable’s host, Inuit Qaujisarvingat, was represented by Scot Nickels, ITK’s Special Advisor on Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning. Nickels opened the discussion with an overview of ITK’s Inuit Research Strategy. With a mandate of achieving Inuit self-determination in research, the strategy’s objectives include developing Inuit-specific

research priorities and methodologies, assuring research training for Inuit that values traditional knowledge, and establishing standards of research ethics and intellectual property rights that safeguard Inuit rights in research.

Ellen Avard is director of the Nunavik Research Centre (NRC), Makivik Corporation. Created in 1978 following the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) to respond to Inuit research questions, the NRC is the oldest Inuit research organization in Canada. Avard provided an overview of five current research projects that demonstrate research activity that support wildlife management and country food security. Jennifer Parrott, research manager for the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, outlined the provisions in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement that ensure the Inuit voice in all matters concerning renewable and non-renewable resources, as well as research. Collaborative research is protected by a research licencing process that requires direct involvement with local Inuvialuit organizations. The roundtable concluded with an animated Q & A session that expanded on the essentiality of Inuit self-determination in research.

Across the pages that follow a portrait of Inuit leadership for the twenty-first century emerges. It is both visionary and consensual, brutally honest about the past and optimistic for the future, respectful, and resilient. It is rooted in ancient cultural traditions, yet focused on a future that will define its political and cultural autonomy on the very principles that underscore that culture. It is determined in its will toward self-determination and resolute in its desire to assume control for the creation of knowledge about itself and its people.