

Transfer of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* in modern Inuit society Le transfert de l'*Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* dans la société moderne inuit

Frédéric Laugrand et Jarich Oosten

Volume 33, numéro 1-2, 2009

Éducation et transmission des savoirs inuit au Canada
Education and transmission of Inuit knowledge in Canada

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/044963ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/044963ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Inuksiitiit Katimajit Inc.
Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (imprimé)
1708-5268 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Laugrand, F. & Oosten, J. (2009). Transfer of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* in modern Inuit society. *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 33(1-2), 115–152.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/044963ar>

Résumé de l'article

Cet article examine la nature des savoirs inuit et leur transmission. À partir de notre expérience dans l'organisation d'ateliers avec des aînés et des jeunes au cours des 10 dernières années, nous avançons l'idée que la présentation de l'*Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* comme un corpus de savoirs qui pourrait être intégré dans les programmes d'études est une entreprise nécessairement biaisée. Nous suggérons qu'il faudrait accorder plus de place aux aînés inuit et à leur savoir en adaptant le système scolaire aux perspectives inuit et non l'inverse.

Transfer of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* in modern Inuit society

Frédéric Laugrand* and Jarich Oosten**

Résumé: Le transfert de l'*Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* dans la société moderne inuit

Cet article examine la nature des savoirs inuit et leur transmission. À partir de notre expérience dans l'organisation d'ateliers avec des aînés et des jeunes au cours des 10 dernières années, nous avançons l'idée que la présentation de l'*Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* comme un corpus de savoirs qui pourrait être intégré dans les programmes d'études est une entreprise nécessairement biaisée. Nous suggérons qu'il faudrait accorder plus de place aux aînés inuit et à leur savoir en adaptant le système scolaire aux perspectives inuit et non l'inverse.

Abstract: Transfer of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* in modern Inuit society

This paper explores the nature and transfer of Inuit knowledge. Using our experiences in setting up workshops with elders and youths in the past 10 years, we argue that the notion that *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* can be viewed as a corpus of knowledge that can be integrated into academic programs is necessarily flawed. We suggest that more room should be given to Inuit elders and their knowledge by adapting the school system to Inuit perspectives rather than the reverse.

* CIÉRA, Université Laval, Pavillon Charles-De Koninck, local 0450, 1030 avenue des Sciences-Humaines, Québec, Québec G1V 0A6, Canada. Frederic.Laugrand@ant.ulaval.ca

** Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Leiden University, Postbus 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, The Netherlands. oosten@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

Here in our community, when our young people started attending school, our elders were not included in their education. We were left behind. But now we want to take part in what is happening. That is why we should keep on talking about how things used to be done. Because it is not written, people think it does not exist. This makes us feel like we are caught in the middle. As our land Nunavut is different from the land down South, in the same way the culture of the two people is different from each other, not everything that is taught in school is useful to our situation up here (Akisu Joamie in Oosten et al. 1999: 46).

Introduction

The traditional hunting culture of the Inuit was flexible and dynamic, the ever-changing environment requiring the development of new materials, implements, technologies, or means of subsistence. As hunting conditions changed, Inuit adapted their lifestyle. In the 19th and 20th centuries, when *Qallunaat* (non-Inuit) introduced new materials and practices, the Inuit adopted those that would enhance their chances of survival. Early ethnographers described Inuit hunting life, and the beliefs and practices it involved. Respect for the land and its animals was essential to the Inuit who depended on both. A complex system of ritual abstainings and refrainings structured Inuit life with a special focus on birth, death, and wildlife. Although transgressions regularly occurred, *angakkuit* (shamans) could perceive and correct them, thus restoring relations to the land, the animals, and their non-human owners. This cosmic order involving human beings as well as non-human beings was also preserved by elders who instructed younger people on the basis of their own knowledge and experience. Thus the ideas and values of Inuit society were embedded in a hunting life that was always adapting itself to changing circumstances (e.g., Fienup-Riordan (2000).

The development in the 1990s of the concept of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*—knowledge that has proven to be useful in the past and is still useful today—implied a reappraisal by the Inuit of their past. It conveyed an awareness that knowledge that had allowed Inuit to survive in the past should be preserved and passed on to younger generations. Inuit hope that the recording and preservation of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* will help to stop the loss of cultural knowledge. Today, the need to integrate Inuit knowledge and language into contemporary curricula is fully acknowledged by the Nunavut government. But how might such a process be conducted and to what extent is it compatible with the goals to educate Inuit, to provide them with skills to do well in modern Canadian society, or to develop specific Inuit forms of leadership? As many Inuit feel that the modern schooling system is incompatible with Inuit traditions of transferring knowledge, some contemporary initiatives propose to “decolonise” this system. However, it is doubtful whether such initiatives can provide satisfactory solutions to the problems of loss of cultural knowledge in modern Inuit society.

Using different examples as well as our own experiences in setting up workshops with elders and youths in the past 10 years, we examine some of the problems involved in transfer of Inuit knowledge by exploring its contextual nature. We suggest that the notion that *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* can be viewed as a corpus of knowledge that can be

integrated into academic programs is necessarily flawed and raises new problems. We argue that more room should be given to Inuit elders and views by adapting the schooling system to Inuit perspectives rather than the reverse. Hunting camps, workshops of elders and youths, and similar activities provide excellent contexts for transfer of knowledge.

The importance of context in presenting knowledge

Although the Inuit have been a literate people since they were introduced to Christianity, the passing on of knowledge is still based on oral traditions. Modern Inuit students often find literary texts about traditional customs and practices boring. To them, the texts lack life and do not stir up much interest, perhaps because many ethnographic texts tend to present Inuit knowledge as an objective body of facts. These texts provide descriptions of myths and rituals but often lack information on the context in which this knowledge was produced. We suggest that it is precisely this way of presenting information that makes it less interesting to Inuit.

A lack of context can also distort interpretation of information. A case in point is Rasmussen's classic text on Iglulik religion based on information provided by the *angakkuq* (shaman) Ava. Rasmussen (1929) relates that he kept asking Ava and his companions why they observed specific rules, but never received a satisfactory answer. One day Ava took him outside on an unusually rough day when the hunters returned empty-handed. He asked Rasmussen if he could explain why men faced a constant succession of blizzards and needless hardships when seeking food. Rasmussen could not provide a satisfactory answer. Ava then said:

You are equally unable to give any reason when we ask you why life is as it is. And so it must be. All our customs come from life and turn towards life; we explain nothing, we believe nothing, but in what I have just shown you lies our answer to all you ask.

We fear the weather spirit of earth [...]. We fear Sila [...].

Therefore it is that our fathers have inherited from their fathers all the old rules of life which are based on the experience and wisdom of generations. We do not know how, we cannot say why, but we keep those rules in order that we may live untroubled. And so ignorant are we in spite of all our shamans, that we fear everything unfamiliar. We fear what we see about us [...]. Therefore we have our customs, which are not the same as those of the white men, the white men who live in another land and have need of other ways (Rasmussen 1929: 55-56).

Once Ava made this point, he was prepared to teach him more about Inuit traditions. Rasmussen was aware of the importance of what Ava was saying, and made "We do not believe, we fear" the motto of his chapter "Religion and views of life." However, this statement is not taken from Ava's quotation and seems to reflect Rasmussen's own view of Inuit religion. Excerpts from a dialogue in a specific context, were thus transformed into a description of the essence of Inuit religion. Ava's words

were never intended to be such a description. Their purpose was to explain to an outsider why Inuit continued to observe the customs of their ancestors. Furthermore, Ava's comments were made at a time when he was considering conversion to Christianity. In that sense, his original words inform us about ideas and values expressed by an old *angakkuq* during a time of transition and conversion.

Influence of Christianity in transmitting Inuit knowledge

Early ethnographers such as Boas and Rasmussen were well aware of the rapid changes in Inuit culture but preferred to focus on recording Inuit traditions. The introduction of Christianity thus received little attention in their publications. The very fact that Inuit culture and society were changing so rapidly gave a sense of urgency to their ethnographic descriptions of a culture that was not expected to survive. Boas and Rasmussen made their ethnographic recordings when much traditional knowledge was still preserved. The adoption of Christianity in the first half of the 20th century implied a break with the beliefs and practices of the past. The complex system of abstainings was replaced by moral rules such as the Ten Commandments and the obligation to not work on Sundays. Beliefs and practices about important figures in traditional Inuit cosmology such as the *inua* ('person, owner, inhabitant') of the moon, the *inua* of the sea, and the *inua* of the sky were rejected. The missionaries strongly opposed shamanism and in some respects they replaced the shamans themselves. When Inuit adopted Christianity many beliefs and practises were no longer publicly discussed and children were sent outside when serious matters were discussed (Briggs 2000: 10). Children might catch bits and pieces of the conversation, but would not ask for explanation when a conversation was not intended for them (Oosten and Laugrand 1999: 20).

Like many other observers, most anthropologists of the second half of the 20th century assumed that the religious beliefs and practices of the past had disappeared. It was only in the 1980s that a reappraisal of these traditional practices took place and elders openly began to discuss the beliefs and practices of the past. Interviews as well as oral tradition courses and workshops with elders revealed that much knowledge of shamanic practices was retained, especially in the Kivalliq region. However, this knowledge was not passed on easily to younger generations.

Another important break with the past was caused by introduction of the Western school system, starting with residential schools. It was assumed that Inuit had to adopt Qallunaat knowledge and skills to survive in the modern world. Elisapee Ootoova from Mittimatalik stated:

In our community, school started in 1963. It seemed to be good then. [...] It turns out it was wrong of us to agree to send them to school when the teaching material was irrelevant to the North. [...] It is good when one learns to read and write in English, to be able to understand the language. But they were not taught about the lifestyle in the North. [...] They are not taught our way of life in our community. They are not taught what to do when food

becomes scarce. [...] They should be taught in Inuktitut if they're going to be in the North (in Oosten and Laugrand 1999: 26)

Schooling also had profound repercussions on transmission of knowledge and communication between generations. When students asked Lucaasie Nutaraaluk from Iqaluit why younger people no longer listen to their elders, he answered:

I think education is the root of this. The school children are being taught in English and are taught to ask questions. They know a little of the *qallunaat* way and a little of the Inuit way. They are caught in between. They call their parents by their names. I find it hurtful to hear this, because it takes away from the role of the mother and father. Even toddlers learning to walk call their parents by name. People no longer use correct kinship terms. [...] This seems to take away the feeling of family. We used to address people by using kinship terms to avoid using their names (in Oosten et al. 1999: 121).

Schools separated children from their families during the day or even most of the year in the case of residential schools. These children had less opportunity to become familiar with traditional values, knowledge, and skills. They were taught Western ways of acquiring and valuing knowledge, whereas traditional ways of learning by observation and practice were no longer valued. Because they were separated from their parents, there was disruption of the social life that had closely connected them with the seasonal hunting cycle.

The move to permanent settlements implied a break with a nomadic lifestyle that was at the heart of Inuit culture. Today, Inuit associate the life out on the land with the life of their ancestors, the *inummarit* ('true Inuit'). In early spring those who can afford to do so like to get out of the communities to experience this life on the land that is considered healthier than the life in the settlements. Many Inuit have also retained their camping sites, building wooden cabins at good fishing or hunting spots. Whereas the settlements are often associated with all the problems of social life, being out on the tundra connects a person directly to the land and the animals (Rasing 1994). It is thought to reinvigorate people and today young people in trouble are often taken out on the land as part of a healing process.

Knowledge and experience of elders

The elders grew up in the hunting camps of the past. Their recollections of that time show how their knowledge, values, and experiences are connected. Traditionally, children were expected to not ask elders questions out of reverence for them. Young people still have great respect for elders who are believed to be able to shape the future of newborn children by predicting their fate or qualities. Elders often feel unable to advise young people about the problems of modern life in the communities, but they feel sure about the value of respect for life, land, and animals and the need to pass on their knowledge and experiences (see Oosten and Laugrand 2007). Peter Suvaksuiq stated at the end-of-year Arviat workshop:

The younger generations need to know how our ancestors lived and survived in the cold Arctic before there were *qablunaat* up here. Who helped us to be here today? It is our ancestors who brought us to this point. If we don't give our knowledge to the young people, they will never know about our traditions and just live for today without knowing where they came from. At least if we give our knowledge to them, they will know where they came from.

Gina Auladjud, one of the younger workshop participants, acknowledged the value of this knowledge for young people:

Our ancestors worked very hard to survive. We young people must know how hard they worked to survive. If we published the books in Inuktitut and English, that would help to get the knowledge out to the young people. [...] There are young people who commit suicide because they don't have enough knowledge about our ancestors, about what hardships they went through.

Today, elders are invited to come to schools and share their knowledge or give their views on local projects. In Nunavik, the Avataq Cultural Institute has organised the Inuit Elders Conferences since 1981. In Nunavut, a similar project was developed by the Inuit Cultural Institute that for a few years published journals such as *Isumasi* so elders and hunters could tell their stories. Elders of Nunavut are deeply involved in justice initiatives, workshops, and committees, especially regarding the treatment of young offenders or the preservation of language. They are often asked to share their knowledge in order to preserve and adapt the Inuit perspective to modern conditions.

In Iqaluit, the Pairijait Tigummivik Society has funded a series of books published by the Nunavut Arctic College and devoted to the Inuit elders' perspectives on various topics such as traditional law, traditional health, cosmology, and childrearing. Transfer of knowledge from elders to youths is hence given high priority. In modern Nunavut the value of this relationship has been expressed by creating a special department, CLEY (Culture, Language, Elders and Youths), which aims to preserve Inuit language and culture, and transfer knowledge from elders to youths.

Elders are said to have powerful minds. The knowledge and experience of elders are thought to guide the younger generations. Saullu Nakasuk, an elder from Pangniqtuuq, observed during the 1996 oral tradition course in Iqaluit: "It is not possible to forget the words of our elders, when we had our elders as the ones who gave us instructions. Even so, what one heard as a child keeps on coming back even though it is not always on your mind" (in Oosten and Laugrand 1999: 6). The experiences and life stories of the elders provide a framework for younger people to give meaning to their life and culture. Betsy Annahatak (1994: 17) from Nunavik stated: "Once students face the questions of who they are now and where they are going, it is within the real life stories of elders that they can make meaning of our culture and of themselves as Inuit living in the present." The knowledge of elders is personal and rooted in practice. Elders each have their own knowledge and experiences, and acknowledge those of

others. In sharing their experiences, elders share their knowledge.¹ The importance of talking from experience rather than from hearsay is well demonstrated in the following dialogue between elders Saullu Nakasuk and Pauloosie Angmalik during the 1996 oral tradition course in Iqaluit:

Saullu: [...] One is not to talk about something just from hearsay, because it is too easy to speak a falsehood. It is not desirable to tell untruths.

Pauloosie: The lie would come out later, or if the true story were told, the apparent lie.

Saullu: Yes. That's the way it was.

Pauloosie: Having heard about it just once, knowing [...] I have already stated that I can say that I don't know anything about it if I have only heard about it just once. If at a later time someone were to tell about it, like it really is, and though I did not intentionally lie, I would be like someone who had lied. Thinking about my own reputation, I have continued this as a practice (in Oosten and Laugrand 1999: 5-6).

The values and emotions embedded in the knowledge passed on are as important as its contents. Traditionally, transfer of knowledge was a gradual process. Whereas children were sent out when serious things were discussed, young adults would be allowed to sit in and listen to what their elders had to say, and when they got older they would be allowed to pose a question or a comment in order to be instructed by their elders. When elders pass on their knowledge in schools to young children, they tend to limit what they say as they feel that their audience still has much to learn before the more serious things of life can be discussed.

The land and its animals: A permanent source of life

The Inuit worldview recognises that human beings depend on agents such as the land, the animals, the deceased, and non-human beings for their survival. All these beings had to be respected. If people broke the moral and ritual rules that organised their life, these agents would retaliate. Today as in the past, the land and its animals remain a source of life that has to be respected. In a workshop in Iqaluit in 1999, elder Emile Imaruittuq from Iglulik recalled:

From the time we were small we were taught to have the highest respect for all wildlife, even for the smallest bird. [...]. If we didn't do this they could take revenge on us. If we abused a certain part of an animal, that same part within us would be affected. [...] There is a *piqujaq* [a rule] to respect even the smallest bird. We have to ensure that the younger generation is aware of this as well.

¹ Cf. Fienup-Riordan (2005) for similar views in a Yup'ik context.

Imaruittuq believed that even insects would retaliate. Regarding animals, Imaruittuq explained: “If you legitimately hunt wildlife and don’t cause them to suffer, if you respect them, then it is fine. [...] We should not even make nasty comments about wildlife. We shouldn’t quarrel about them amongst ourselves. Wildlife has been placed on this Earth for us to use, but we must treat them with respect” (in Oosten et al. 1999: 38). Imaruittuq pointed out that *Qallunaat* are not always aware that Inuit consider animals to be cosmological agents that will take action whenever people break the *piqujait* (‘rules’) about them: “When we started dealing with land claims we had to talk a lot about wildlife. This created a lot of fear amongst the elders. They used to tell us not to quarrel about wildlife because this was a very dangerous thing to do. [...] We should not quarrel about wildlife or it will take revenge on us” (*ibid.*).

The land should also be respected. In an oral tradition course in Iqaluit, Agiaq Kappianaq from Iglulik recalled various places near Iglulik that were considered dangerous (Oosten and Laugrand 2001: 81). Kappianaq added that people should still respect these places since “even though we have become Christians, the land hasn’t changed” (*ibid.*). He emphasized that one should not challenge the wisdom of the elders: “When people, through experience, have learned about these places, they caution others about them. If a person knowingly decides to challenge this knowledge and goes there, he will lose his strength. It is usually hills and high places that are dangerous” (*ibid.*).

The land is not only a place where one can encounter animals and non-human beings, it is also scattered with graves. In the past, people visited the graves of their relatives as it was considered beneficial for the living person. Rose Iqallijuq from Iglulik related that she had recovered a few times from a comatose state thanks to her visits to her namesake’s grave (Bennett and Rowley 2004: 5). Peter Suvaksuiq from Arviat also told how he had been cured by honouring the wishes of the deceased and visiting their graves (Arviat workshop 2003). During visits to the graves, human remains and burial objects should be left alone as Guy Kakarniut explained at the 2004 Kugaaruk workshop: “My father used to say if I wanted something from a grave, I was to replace it with something else. [...] My son took something from a grave. Because he was only a child, he gave me something from a grave, but I had to return it. I told him that we were not to take anything from the dead.” These recollections of elders reflect a worldview that is intimately connected with a hunting existence out on the land. It focuses on a deep respect for the land, the animals, the deceased, and the non-human agents that are still around.²

Transmitting knowledge through families, schools, cultural workshops, and social networks

Today Northern life is very different from what it was in the past, but the connection between Inuit knowledge and a hunting existence remains strong. Inuit

² For more information on Inuit meeting non-human beings, see Laugrand and Oosten (2009: chapter 6).

continue to identify themselves as hunters and make great efforts to make a hunting existence viable (e.g., Peter et al. 2002). Inuit live in permanent settlements most of the year. Many Inuit derive their main income no longer from hunting but from jobs within their communities. The dead are no longer deposited out on the land but buried in cemeteries close to the communities. Dogsleds are mainly used for recreation, and people now travel great distances by skidoos or by planes. Thus the world has changed and Inuit knowledge has changed with it, having always been dynamic and adaptable. Although it is hard to predict how Inuit knowledge will take shape in coming years, we will briefly examine here a few structural features and recent initiatives.

The Inuit family remains the main locus for elaboration and transmission of knowledge, as many children are still reared in a specific Inuit way. They are given Inuktitut names that connect them to their living and deceased namesakes and taught to respect their elders. The practice of adopting children is a tradition that continues in Northern communities, securing strong social networks. Many children are carried in an *amauti*, ensuring close contact between the mother and the child. As in the past, children learn traditional Inuit ideas and values from the elders and at the same time discover new technologies and new ways of living. Since elders prefer to pass on their knowledge to trusted relatives, much more continuity is going on in family life than is often acknowledged and it remains one of the most important domains for transfer of knowledge.

Many elders acknowledge the importance the schools may have in transmitting their knowledge. According to Anautalik, “There are teenagers who also go out hunting and fishing as part of a school course. We could teach them about our knowledge in the schools” (Arviat workshop 2003). Angutinnurniq from Kugaaruk added, “I think it’s a good way for them to get to know more about our culture and traditions. Get them out of the schools, and have them learn about our traditions. I think [...] it would be an incentive for them to learn more” (*ibid.*). In our own experience at workshops, students as well as elders thought the school context to be less suitable for transfer of knowledge from elders to youths. Changing the set-up of the room—students and teachers sat on the floor while the elders sat on a couch—made the ambiance more relaxed. This created a more informal context that was very helpful, as elders sometimes feel very uncomfortable when brought to the schools and asked to talk about Inuit traditions.

Workshops of elders and youths organised out on the land are the preferred context of knowledge transmission for both generations. Elders often do not wish to talk but prefer to demonstrate practices and techniques. In a traditional health workshop, participants went to the tundra to be able to observe and talk about the plants (see Therrien and Laugrand 2001). In our workshops on cosmological issues (held in Kangir&iniq, Arviat, and Kugaaruk), the elders’ demonstrations of *qilaniq* (head lifting) and various other traditional practices were very instructive (see Laugrand and Oosten 2009).

When elders discuss sensitive issues, the family relationships that come into play have to be considered. It is thus helpful when participants are connected by kinship and namesake relationships. This being said, relations between elders and youths are also built as elders teach young people traditional skills and convey their knowledge to them. Although in the oral tradition courses students did not find it easy to ask elders questions, the latter encouraged them to do so. The interviews were rewarding for the elders as this process gave value to their knowledge and experiences, and provided them with an opportunity to pass this information on. Giving accounts of the past also means coming to terms with it. During the interviews, elders and youths are involved as partners and each party has its role to play. Without that special relationship, traditional knowledge easily becomes rather abstract and devoid of meaning to young Inuit.

In Arviat, where the Inuit Cultural Institute is based, Inuit leaders and elders such as Mark Kalluak and Luke Suluk (who attended the tundra school opened by the Ledyards missionaries at the Maguse River) are greatly concerned with preserving Inuit traditions. They not only publish papers and books on these issues but also work closely with the Department of Education in Arviat in helping prepare more appropriate curricula. In Iglulik, the Inullariit Society has long been undertaking oral history projects, and much of the data in *Uqalurait. An Oral History of Nunavut* (Bennett and Rowley 2004) comes from those interviews.

When Inuit adopted Christianity many traditional ideas and values were integrated into a Christian context. Religion has always played an important part in shaping traditions. Evangelical movements have especially proven to be open to old Inuit ideas and values. Evangelical groups such as the Canadian Awakening Ministries give scope to traditional Inuit convictions that the transgressions of human beings affect the animals and the land. In a healing ritual organised by this ministry, people apologise for their transgressions or that of their ancestors. They participate in a “healing the land” ritual, often directed by a team from Fiji, that is expected to result in a return of the game and the prosperity of the land (Laugrand and Oosten 2007). These Evangelical movements also take a strong position against Southern environmental groups that try to restrict hunting and that advocate a strict fur boycott. They emphasise that God entrusted human beings with stewardship over the animals and thus present a cosmological perspective that is highly attractive to Inuit. Membership in Evangelical movements is rapidly growing as many Inuit find their fundamental values much better represented by these religious groups than by modern educational or political organisations.

Today, Inuit ideas and values also take shape in the perception of Inuit rangers as the image of the *inummarit*. Inuit rangers have been present in Northern communities since 1945 but their visibility has increased considerably with efforts to assert Arctic sovereignty. Inuit perceive rangers as experienced hunters and knowledgeable persons, able to live like the *inummarit* of the past and to save lives when young people or hunters get lost out on the land. Being a ranger implies mastery of survival techniques and excellent knowledge of the land. It is striking to see how in this context the Canadian government as well as public opinion recognise the continuity and strength of

Inuit traditions. The Inuit rangers are not only presented as “the elite marksmen of the Canadian Forces” but also as a group where traditions are still very much alive: “They bring with them unique skills, rooted in their demanding ways of finding and killing prey in this tough land. They can orienteer in terrain that a Southerner would find almost featureless. They have mastered the skills of stalking fleet prey animals” (DeMille 2005).

A new appraisal of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* in modern Nunavut

Inuit qaujimajatuqangit emerged gradually in the late 1990s as a notion “encompassing all aspects of traditional Inuit culture, including values, world-view, language, social organization, knowledge, life-skills, perceptions and expectations” (Anonymous 1998: 1). The term is also a political tool to give more space to Inuit perspectives. Jaypetee Arnakak wrote a paper on its application in modern administration. In Arnakak’s approach, the focus in *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* is not on skills and techniques, but on Inuit concepts as moral principles that may be used to shape modern societies. Arnakak (2002: 33-39) argues that “*Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*”, or IQ, from its inception, is intended to include not only Inuit traditional knowledge, but also the contemporary values of Nunavut’s communities.” He quotes the Throne Speech to the Second Session of the First Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. “Our government will work with our partners like the Nunavut Social Development Council to ensure that *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* is a basis for all government decisions and actions” (*ibid.*). The “Community Economic Development from the Perspective of *Inuit qaujimanituqangit* framework,” presented by Arnakak, has four basic guiding principles:

- 1) *Pijitsirniq*, a concept of serving (a purpose or community), and providing for (family and/or community), an essential element of the leadership role as Inuit understand it to be – authoritative as opposed to authoritarian
- 2) *Aajiiqatigiingniq*, the Inuktitut way of decision-making – through conferences. It implies a way to involve communities in their own development as a learning organisation and seeks to improve consultation processes, and monitoring and evaluation methods
- 3) *Pilimmaksarniq*, knowledge gained through observation and experience, empowerment
- 4) *Piliriqatigiingniq*, working together for the common good

Aranakak explains, “These core principles, we found, are prerequisites for family (and leader/community) relationships to function at their most ideal. The Community Economic Development Framework (indeed, the IQ Framework) is based on a traditional Inuit family model.” And he adds, “From there, the DSD [Department of Sustainable Development] IQ Working Group adopted, and expanded the framework to include two more guiding principles for program and policy development”:

- 5) *Avatimik Kamattiarniq*, environmental stewardship
- 6) *Qanuqtuurunnarniq*, ability to improvise with what is at hand, resourcefulness in finding solutions, adaptability

In Arnakak's concepts, the relations with the hunting lifestyle, the land, and traditional life are no longer directly relevant. The concepts are modelled on principles that used to steer Inuit society in the past, but they are adapted and applied as guidelines to the modern system of administration in Nunavut. Obviously, his approach raises a question. To what extent can Inuit principles of social management be embedded in, or even direct, the modern system of administration developed by and modelled on Southern ideas, values, and organisations? Such an endeavour certainly would need time to succeed. According to Wenzel (2004: 241), in a review of Nunavut Bill 35, other principles have been added:

- 7) *Papattiniq*, guardianship of what one does not own
- 8) *Qaujimanilik*, respect knowledge or experience
- 9) *Surattittalimaniq*, hunt only what is necessary and do not waste
- 10) *Ilijaaqaqtailiniq*, harvesting without malice
- 11) *Sirliqsaaqtittailiniq*, avoid causing animals unnecessary harm
- 12) *Akiraqtuutijariaqanginniq nirjutiit pijjutigillugit*, no one owns animals or land, so avoid disputes
- 13) *Ikpigusuttiarniq nirjutilimaanik*, treat all wildlife respectfully

These notions develop traditional respect for animals from a modern moral perspective. The notion that land and animals do not belong to anyone makes possible a religious perspective where non-human agencies punish immoral behaviour. In a list of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* guiding principles and concepts, the Nunavut Education Act introduces two new concepts:

- 14) *Inuuqatigiitsiarniq*, respecting others, relationships and caring for people
- 15) *Tunnganarniq*, fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming, and inclusive

Although these principles build on old Inuit traditions, they also break with them. The concepts are presented as general moral principles and are no longer immediately connected to elders, camp leaders, or other people who can speak with authority because of their knowledge, skills, and experiences in life. They are a result of discussions in meetings and by committees, not key notions that have been handed down by the elders. Therefore these new forms of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* are not shaped by the process of transfer from elders to youths and correspond in their presentation and organisation much more to the way moral principles of behaviour are perceived in *qallunaat* traditions. This may be necessary in a system of governance modelled on Southern political systems that tend to give precedence to general principles over specific experiences.

The Piqqusilirivvik Cultural School project

The Nunavut Government plans to open the Piqqusilirivvik Cultural School in Clyde River in the near future. In this project, traditional elements are combined with new orientations. According to journalist Jane George (2009), this institution is set to open in 2011. The school will employ 14 people on a fulltime basis and the building will house about 26 students aged 18 and older for periods ranging from four months to a year. According to the Department of CLEY the curriculum will be “a radical departure from normal school programs” and “a deliberate reversal” of the one in conventional schools because the students’ routine will be dictated entirely by what’s happening on the land:

Because Piqqusilirivvik falls under CLEY—rather than the Department of Education, prospective instructors won’t have to demonstrate normal academic qualifications to be hired. Instead, Piqqusilirivvik will look for instructors who possess strong ‘traditional’ knowledge. Students won’t have to show their grades to get into Piqqusilirivvik either, although they will need to demonstrate that their communities support their attendance at the cultural school. After finishing their stay at Piqqusilirivvik, graduates won’t get typical graduation certificates, but something useful to take back home with them, such as hunting equipment. [...] while Greenland’s folk school is now moving towards providing more academic education, Piqqusilirivvik will use the knowledge of Inuit who live on the land (George 2009).

Whatever the final plans may be, this project is the result of a long reflection about Inuit education and the key role of IQ. It shows how transfer of knowledge is, like preservation of language, a big challenge for contemporary Inuit who wish to preserve the richness of their different cultural traditions. A few years ago, Betsy Annahatak (1994: 13) already pointed out the tremendous tensions she could feel as an educator working in a Nunavik school trying to develop quality education for contemporary Inuit: “There are the tensions related to Inuit values versus institutional values, traditional activities versus current activities, obedience versus originality, Inuit worldview versus mainstream worldview, and modern cultural tools versus traditional knowledge.”

The Piqqusilirivvik project is an attempt to reconcile the school system developed down South with traditional teaching methods based on observation and practice. The Western school system focuses on acquisition of knowledge and skills, and even moral values that allow people to live and work in modern society. So far, it has been unsuccessful in integrating *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*. There is always a danger that IQ will be appreciated for its practical usefulness, but that its central moral ideas and values will be discarded as irrelevant although Inuit elders see them as essential.

Conclusion

Inuit qaujimajatuqangit emerged as a new concept with the creation of Nunavut and usually refers to traditions developed over many centuries in a hunting society. It is primarily concerned with survival and implies a worldview based on respect for the land, the animals, the deceased, and all other beings out on the land. As such it encompasses old values and rules. When Inuit converted to Christianity, they did not give up these fundamental values but positioned them as much as possible in a Christian perspective. Inuit children learnt them by listening, observing, and practice.

When the modern school system was introduced, children were sent to schools that did not acknowledge Inuit ideas and values. The schools were considered as a means to do well in Canadian society, not to teach children the ideas and values of the hunting life. Inuit elders are keenly aware of this and some of them regret that they sent their children to the schools. Today the schools take a much more positive attitude towards traditional Inuit ideas and values. Elders are invited to teach children at school and *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* is integrated into the curriculum, but these processes are still difficult to set up for important cultural reasons. It is difficult to develop curriculum material from Inuit knowledge and there is always a risk of simplifying Inuit traditions and values too much, and underestimating their diversity not only in terms of dialects but also according to social relations, since traditions might differ from one family to the next.

Obviously these modern efforts to keep *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* values alive are important but they cannot replace transfer of knowledge within the family. In our workshops the importance of oral communication and face-to-face relationships between elders and youths was clear. Establishment of a personal relationship was essential to the nature and transmission of Inuit knowledge. Young people became partners of the elders, sharing their experiences with them and learning from these experiences.

Today, schools can play an important role in transfer of Inuit knowledge but they should understand that traditional Inuit ideas and values will not always agree with those of the modern educational system. Transmission of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* is connected to life out on the land and within small communities. Maintenance and support of the hunting way of life is therefore very important in the further development of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*. Otherwise, its principles may become rather abstract, essentialised, and devoid of meaning.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the many Inuit elders and younger Inuit who participated in our workshops. We wish to express our special gratitude to Susan Sammons of Nunavut Arctic College for her support and Noah Tiktak, Atuat and Alexina Kublu. We also wish to thank the two anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions. Our

research activities are financed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

References

- ANNAHATAK, Betsy,
1994 Quality Education for Inuit today? Cultural Strengths New things, and Working out the Unknown: A story by an Inuk, *Peabody Journal of Education*, 69(2): 12-18.
- ANONYMOUS
1998 *Towards an Inuit Qaujimanituqangit (IQ) Policy for Nunavut: A Discussion Paper*, Iqaluit, Nunavut Social Development Council.
- ARNAKAK, Jay
2002 Incorporation of Inuit Qaujimanituqangit, or Inuit Traditional Knowledge, into the Government of Nunavut, *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, 3(1): 33-39.
- ARVIAT WORKSHOP
2003 Workshop on "Respecting the environment" coordinated by F. Laugrand and J. Oosten, unpublished manuscript in possession of the authors.
- BENNETT, John and Susan ROWLEY (eds)
2004 *Uqalurait. An Oral History of Nunavut*, Montreal, McGill and Queen's University Press.
- BRIGGS, Jean (ed.)
2000 *Childrearing Practices*, Iqaluit, Nunavut Arctic College.
- DeMILLE, Dianne
2005 Beefing up Canada's Arctic Presence - Recruiting Inuit Rangers, Part 5 of Denmark's Arctic Assets and Canada's Response - Sovereignty and Strategic Resources of the High Arctic, *Canadian American Strategic Review*, May 2005 (online at: <http://www.casr.ca/id-arcticviking5.htm>).
- FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann
2000 *Hunting Tradition in a Changing World. Yup'ik Lives in Alaska Today*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press.
- 2005 *Wise words of the Yup'ik people. We talk to you because we love you*, Translations from the Yup'ik by Alice Rearden, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press.

GEORGE, Jane

2009 Ottawa pours money into Clyde culture school, *Nunatsiaq News*, April 17 (online version at: <http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca>).

KUGAARUK WORKSHOP

2004 Workshop on “The transfer of Inuit Qaujimatuaqangit from Elders to Youths” coordinated by F. Laugrand and J. Oosten, unpublished manuscript in possession of the authors.

LAUGRAND, Frédéric and Jarich OOSTEN

2007 Reconnecting People and Healing the Land: Inuit Pentecostal and Evangelical Movements in the Canadian Estearn Arctic, *Numen*, 54: 229-269.

2009 *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity. Transitions and Transformations in the Twentieth Century*, Montréal, Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press.

OOSTEN, Jarich and Frédéric LAUGRAND (eds)

1999 *Introduction*, Iqaluit, Nunavut Arctic College, Interviewing Inuit Elders, 1.

2001 *Travelling and Surviving on Our Land*, Iqaluit, Nunavut Arctic College, Inuit Perspectives on the 20th Century, 2.

2007 *Surviving in Different Worlds: Transferring Inuit Traditions from Elders to Youth*, Iqaluit, Nunavut Arctic College.

OOSTEN, Jarich, Frédéric LAUGRAND and Wim RASING (eds)

1999 *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, Iqaluit, Nunavut Arctic College, Interviewing Inuit Elders, 2.

PETER, Aaju, Myna ISHULUTAK, Julia SHAIMAIYUK, Jeannie SHAIMAIYUK, Nancy KISA, Bernice KOOTOO and Susan ENUARAQ

2002 The seal: An integral part of our culture, *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 26(1): 167-174.

RASING, Wim

1994 *Too many people. Order and Non-conformity in Iglulingmiut Social Process*, Nijmegen, Katholieke Universiteit Faculteit der Rechtsgeleerdheid, Recht and Samenleving, 8.

RASMUSSEN, Knud

1929 *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Copenhagen, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24, 7(1).

WENZEL, George
2004 From TEK to IQ: *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* and Inuit Cultural Ecology,
Arctic Anthropology, 41(2): 238-250.