

## Being and becoming Inuit in Labrador Être et devenir Inuit au Labrador

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### Résumé de l'article

La recherche longitudinale permet de discuter de certaines des conséquences qu'ont pu avoir les organisations autochtones et les politiques identitaires sur les populations inuit et métisse euro-inuit du Labrador. Les Amérindiens de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador ont constitué la première organisation autochtone de la province de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador, bientôt suivis par une seconde organisation, celle des Inuit. Les « colons » métis euro-inuit (ou Kablunângajuit) du nord du Labrador préféraient à l'origine l'organisation amérindienne, mais ils subirent des pressions pour se joindre à l'organisation inuit qu'ils allaient plus tard dominer. En outre, d'après l'entente sur les revendications territoriales inuit de 2003, les Kablunângajuit peuvent être considérés comme Inuit sur le plan légal. Plus loin au sud, les gens d'ascendance similaire euro-inuit, qui ont longtemps nié leurs racines autochtones, s'organisaient en tant que Métis. Parallèlement aux 40 années et plus de politiques identitaires résumées dans cet article, de considérables changements socioéconomiques internationaux et régionaux ont poussé les gens qui travaillaient localement à partir travailler au loin, ce qui a créé de nouveaux contextes d'organisation de l'identité. Cet article montre en quoi les politiques identitaires ont modifié les relations de pouvoir et d'identité, ont fait augmenter le nombre des gens qui sont légalement inuit ou aspirent à l'être, et, sur un plan plus général, ont conféré aux Autochtones le pouvoir de façonner leur avenir.

# Being and becoming Inuit in Labrador

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John C. Kennedy\*

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La recherche longitudinale permet de discuter de certaines des conséquences qu’ont pu avoir les organisations autochtones et les politiques identitaires sur les populations inuit et métisse euro-inuit du Labrador. Les Amérindiens de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador ont constitué la première organisation autochtone de la province de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador, bientôt suivis par une seconde organisation, celle des Inuit. Les «colons» métis euro-inuit (ou Kablunângajuit) du nord du Labrador préféraient à l’origine l’organisation amérindienne, mais ils subirent des pressions pour se joindre à l’organisation inuit qu’ils allaient plus tard dominer. En outre, d’après l’entente sur les revendications territoriales inuit de 2003, les Kablunângajuit peuvent être considérés comme Inuit sur le plan légal. Plus loin au sud, les gens d’ascendance similaire euro-inuit, qui ont longtemps nié leurs racines autochtones, s’organisaient en tant que Métis. Parallèlement aux 40 années et plus de politiques identitaires résumées dans cet article, de considérables changements socioéconomiques internationaux et régionaux ont poussé les gens qui travaillaient localement à partir travailler au loin, ce qui a créé de nouveaux contextes d’organisation de l’identité. Cet article montre en quoi les politiques identitaires ont modifié les relations de pouvoir et d’identité, ont fait augmenter le nombre des gens qui sont légalement inuit ou aspirent à l’être, et, sur un plan plus général, ont conféré aux Autochtones le pouvoir de façonner leur avenir.

**Abstract:** Being and becoming Inuit in Labrador

Longitudinal research enables discussion of some of the consequences of Aboriginal organizations and identity politics for the Inuit and mixed Inuit-European peoples of Labrador. Newfoundland and Labrador Indians formed the province of Newfoundland and Labrador’s first Aboriginal organization, soon followed by a second, Inuit organization. The mixed Inuit-European “Settlers” (or Kablunângajuit) of northern Labrador initially preferred the Indian organization but were pressured to join and later would dominate the Inuit organization. Moreover, under the 2003 Inuit land claim, Kablunângajuit would legally be considered Inuit. Further south, people of similar mixed Inuit-European ancestry who long denied their Aboriginal roots would organize as Metis. Concurrent with the more than 40 years of identity politics, summarized by this paper, were major international and regional socio-economic changes that saw people move from local to distant work, creating new contexts for identity management. The paper shows how identity politics has changed relations of power and identity, has increased the numbers of people who are legally Inuit or aspire to be so, and, more generally, empowers Aboriginal people to shape their future.

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## Introduction

Over the past several decades, identity politics, Aboriginal organizations, land claims, and self-government have had monumental consequences for Labrador, and, most especially, for the region's Aboriginal peoples.<sup>1</sup> Based on anthropological research in Labrador between 1971 and 2013, this paper summarizes identity politics within the context of Aboriginal organizations and describes sociocultural outcomes that would have been unimaginable when I began my research. The emergence of the politics of identity has occurred alongside major socio-economic changes along the Labrador coast, including new fisheries, civil service, and mining jobs, which often take people away from their home communities, creating new possibilities for how they see themselves, and how they express their culture and identity. I acknowledge the limitations of outsiders' accounts like this one. In discussing the informants' culture and identity, outsiders like me may not grasp the nuances of what are sometimes nascent and/or tacit perceptions of self and community. If nothing more, the paper provides a starting point for discussion of both the history I summarize and the questions of identity and culture that are raised. The discussion focuses on Inuit and Inuit-descendant people, and primarily on those living along the southeastern Labrador coast (Figure 1).

The paper has four parts.<sup>2</sup> The first part is a retrospective, describing some of the relevant findings from my anthropological fieldwork in northern and southeastern Labrador, research that very significantly occurred prior to the era of Aboriginal organizations. Back then, words like Aboriginal, land claims, and even Inuit were new or seldom heard. My early research forms the baseline from which to discuss subsequent changes attributable, to varying degrees, to Aboriginal organizations. The second part briefly describes the introduction of Aboriginal organizations in northern and southeastern Labrador. A third part presents some findings from fieldwork I undertook in 2013 in southeastern Labrador to investigate, among other things, how people viewed themselves, their identity, and their culture. A brief discussion concludes the paper.

## Before identity politics

In 1971-1972, I conducted 13 months of social anthropological research in Makkovik, a village of "Settlers" and Inuit, who were relocated there in the late 1950s. My research was a follow-up to Ben-Dor's (1966) study, which concluded that Makkovik was not a "community" in the conventional sense but, instead, a

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<sup>1</sup> "Labrador" refers to a part of Canada's eastern and most recent province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Labrador's Aboriginal peoples are the Innu (formerly called Naskapi and Montagnais "Indians"), the Inuit (singular Inuk—formerly called "Eskimos"), and Métis or Inuit-Métis. This paper focuses on Inuit and Inuit-Métis.

<sup>2</sup> For additional details and documentation on the history of Labrador Aboriginal organizations, see Kennedy (2014a); on Inuit-Métis culture and identity, see Kennedy (2014b); and for a comprehensive history of southeastern Labrador, see Kennedy (2015).

“multicellular” community composed of two separate peoples cohabiting on the same territory and governed by the same three administrations. The first of these, the Moravian Church, began serving Labrador Inuit, and later Settlers, in 1771, and was the *de facto* government in northern Labrador until well into the 20th century (Ben-Dor 1966: 183-184), when its secular work began to be replaced by the other two administrations, one being the Newfoundland government. The third administration, a medical mission then called the International Grenfell Association (IGA) or the Grenfell mission, had until then worked mainly in central Labrador and southward along the coast. But following Newfoundland’s entry into the Canadian federation in 1949, new federal health-care funding enabled the Grenfell mission to expand into northern Labrador and supplant the rudimentary health care long provided by the missionaries. Guided by the modernization agenda of the 1950s, the Grenfell mission, along with the Moravians and the government, closed two northern Inuit communities and relocated Inuit to more southerly villages, including Makkovik. These three administrations consulted neither the Inuit they moved south nor the people in the communities where the Inuit went to live (Brice-Bennett 1994).<sup>3</sup>

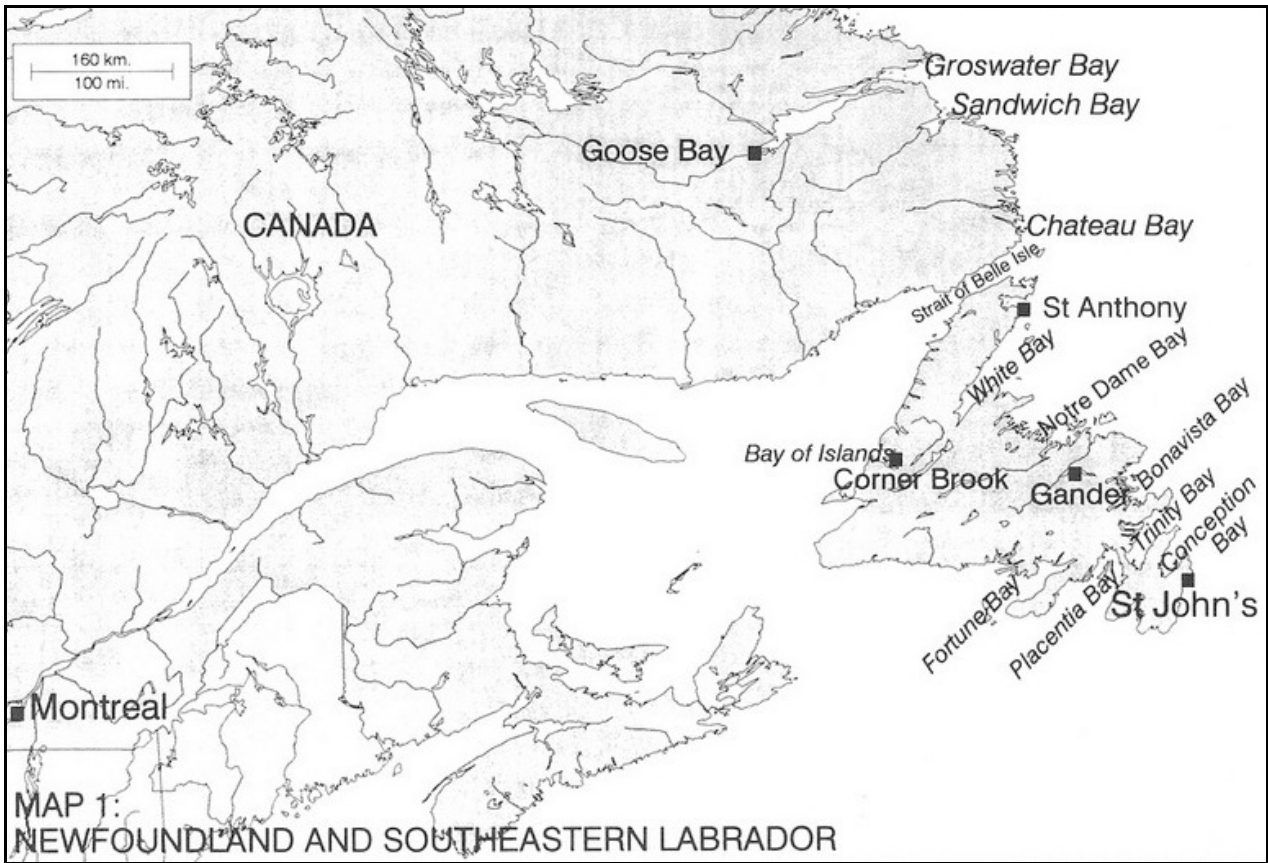


Figure 1. Map of Newfoundland and southeastern Labrador. Map by Peter Ramsden.

<sup>3</sup> The relocation of Labrador Inuit was so heartless and misguided that representatives of those responsible for it appear to have felt guilty. Each blamed the other, according to allegations they wrote on the final page of the Hebron Moravian mission guest book, a document I viewed years ago and which is reproduced in and discussed by Evans (2009: 6-7).

My research corroborated the gulf that separates Settlers from Inuit and which Ben-Dor described. Nonetheless, during the nine years between his research and mine some changes had occurred. Increased federal funding administered by the Province had expanded the government's role in northern Labrador. Settlers who had during the mission era elected Moravian Elders now preferred the province's new, incorporated community council, and dominated this new polity. English-speaking Settlers benefitted more than Inuit from the new economy and polity, further marginalizing the relocated and minority Inuit population. Housed first in tents, relocated Inuit later moved into the drafty wooden houses built for them at both ends of the village. Strangers in a landscape long monopolized by local Settlers, relocated Inuit hunted in vain for the kinds of game animals and fish more available further north. They were now poor, not solely in an economic sense, but also in the sense of being less able to hunt and share the foods so essential to their way of life. Some Inuit responded to their misery by returning north to Nain. This and a number of tragic deaths explain why only about half the Inuit population Ben-Dor reported remained in 1971-1972 (Kennedy 1982: 86-87). Ben-Dor's and my conclusions about the Settler-Inuit schism were confirmed in Nain by Brantenberg (1977) and in Hopedale by Richling (1978), as well as regionally by Kleivan (1966). Because younger readers may not be aware of these scarce but potentially acrimonious Settler-Inuit relations, I quote Sophie Tuglavina, an Inuk woman whose published memoirs document her school days in Makkovik. Tuglavina writes:

It was difficult to be in school. After we relocated from Hebron we were outsiders. We didn't really fit in; people [i.e., Settlers] didn't think we should be there; there was a lot of prejudice. Our culture was different, our language, our clothes, everything was really different. And I guess they found it hard to accept us. The settler children used to throw rocks at us. We had a path in the woods to get away from them; we'd had to go that way so often we wore the path (Tuglavina 2010: 172).

Who were these Settlers? The category "Settlers" is one of several problematic names the Moravians and others used to refer to the descendants of unions between European men who came to work for the Hudson's Bay Company or other trading companies and local Inuit women. Northern Labrador Settlers are often related and similar to people called Inuit-Métis, except in where they lived. The earliest known European-Inuit unions occurred in the late 18th century (see Way 2014), but most occurred after the Hudson's Bay Company entered the Labrador trade in the 1830s. Many English, Scottish, or other European men began their Labrador careers in Central Labrador and later moved north, where the Moravians chided them as unwelcome intruders. The Moravians initially considered the offspring of Europeans and Inuit "half-castes," "half-breeds," "English Settlers," or "white Settlers," but by the mid-19th century the mission's opposition to the intruders softened. The mission's difficulties in transforming communal Inuit into individualistic "economic men" frustrated the European missionaries, and the Moravians also feared that Settlers might affiliate with competing Protestant denominations further south. Hans Rollmann (2014) explains that the first married couple the Moravians accepted into the Hopedale congregation, a husband of European-Inuit ancestry and his Inuk wife, were selected because of their

loyalty to the mission, their literacy, and their adherence to individualistic economic practices that the missionaries hoped Inuit might emulate. Soon other Settlers and their Inuit wives were permitted to join the church, albeit under mission rules that were distinct from those applying to Inuit. By the early 20th century, outbreaks of European diseases such as the 1918 flu pandemic (Spanish flu) devastated some Inuit communities while the population of Settlers grew (Kleivan 1966: 95-96).

In 1979 curiosity about little-known southern or southeastern Labrador, the coast and interior between Chateau Bay and Sandwich Bay, led me to return to Labrador for new fieldwork. First, however, I consulted with people in St. John's who had visited or worked there. They claimed that the people of southeastern Labrador were indistinguishable from Newfoundlanders living in Fortune or Bonavista Bay.<sup>4</sup> Following consultations with representatives of Labrador organizations, I chose the winter village of Lodge Bay, whose people fished cod during summers at Cape Charles. I arrived in Lodge Bay by bush plane in January and began the rounds common to ethnographic fieldwork: chatting with people where they gathered; interviewing them in their kitchens and at their fishing stages; joining the dart league for weekly competitions; accompanying fishers, hunters, and woodsmen while they work; attending "times," which were periodically held to benefit the Anglican church or other local causes at the hall; and more (see Kennedy 1996).

I lived that winter with a young family of six crowded into a square-shaped house perched above the banks of Rabbit Brook. Before long, an older woman in the house across Rabbit Brook made me begin to question the opinions of those I had interviewed in St. John's, to the effect that southeastern Labrador people were just like Newfoundlanders. The woman, whom I shall call "Aunt Alice," definitely appeared to have Aboriginal ancestry. A handicap prevented Aunt Alice from talking, and her daughter was vague about her mother's background, saying only "she was from Cartwright," a community further north. I would meet others appearing to have Aboriginal ancestry during the rest of my time in Lodge Bay, and more during three months in both Port Hope Simpson and Cartwright in the autumns of 1982 and 1983 respectively. Generally however, individuals appearing to have Aboriginal ancestry would not discuss their forebears. They were evasive or would abruptly change the topic. When inquiring about a person's or family's social history, informants would say that they were from Fox Harbour or Cartwright, places locally considered to have a strong Aboriginal heritage. Why were people reluctant to talk about their ancestry? The condescending manner in which locals discussed "native people" further north led me to suspect that the social stigma of looking "native" or "Skimo," the pejorative term

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<sup>4</sup> As detailed in Kennedy (2014a; 2014b; and 2015), prevalent thinking of the time about the supposed absence of Inuit along the southeastern Labrador coast was supported by one group of academics in the fine collection edited by Martijn and Clermont (1980). At the time, however, little actual archaeological excavation or ethnographic research had occurred in the region. Since then, the excavations by archaeologists Marianne Stopp, Lisa Rankin, and others, as documented in this volume and in Kennedy (2015), show beyond doubt that Inuit had occupied southeastern Labrador year-round as early as the late 16th century. Similarly, land claim research by the NCC (2010) and my own ethnographic and archival research revealed that my local informants had Inuit ancestry.

locals commonly used to refer to “Eskimos,” inhibited acknowledgment of Aboriginal ancestry.

## Aboriginal organizations

A series of decisions and events in the 1960s led to the emergence of Aboriginal organizations across Canada.<sup>5</sup> The first such organization in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Native Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (NANL), was formed primarily by Newfoundland Mi’kmaq at Gander in February 1973.<sup>6</sup> NANL representatives soon visited Labrador, where the Association’s innovative housing program attracted Settler and Inuit members from Lake Melville northward (Kennedy 2014b). In September 1973 the national Inuit (formerly “Eskimo”) organization, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC),<sup>7</sup> helped to form the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA) as a regional affiliate. Initially, the NANL and the LIA cooperated, but relations eventually soured. Both groups courted northern Labrador Settlers, who, as I observed during fieldwork in northern Labrador, preferred the Indian “strangers” of the NANL to their relocated Inuit neighbours (Kennedy 1982: 106-107). Events outside Labrador affected what happened next. The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada recommended that the new LIA accept only Inuktitut-speaking members, effectively excluding most Settlers. About the same time, word came from Ottawa that the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development would allow only one Inuit group in Labrador. Ottawa’s dictate, coupled with effective competition for Settler members from the NANL, would eventually lead Inuktitut-speaking Inuit to ignore the advice of the ITC, and offer the primarily English-speaking Settlers of northern Labrador full membership in October 1974 (Brantenberg 1977: 397-398). The NANL subsequently changed its name to the Indian and Métis Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (IMANL) and eventually returned to Newfoundland. I attended the IMANL meeting in St. John’s on 25 June 1975, encountering one Inuk, many northern Labrador Settlers, Newfoundland Mi’kmaq, and Labrador Innu. Settlers continued to prefer this group to the LIA, although by this time it was becoming increasingly clear that north coast Settlers would have to either form their own group (as was discussed) or join the LIA. Labrador Innu still involved with the IMANL would leave to form the Naskapi-Montagnais Innu Association, the predecessor to today’s Innu Nation. Returning to Newfoundland, the IMANL would become the Federation of Newfoundland Indians, the predecessor to today’s Qalipu Mi’kmaq First Nation.

One issue not mentioned in this brief summary requires comment. Why did neither the NANL nor the LIA become active along the Labrador coast from Sandwich Bay

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<sup>5</sup> Readers seeking additional details, interpretations, and/or documentation for this abbreviated version of a complex history are directed to Anger (1983); Brantenberg (1977); Kennedy (1975, 1982, 1987, 1988, 1997, 2014a, 2015); and Tanner (1993, 1998). See also reference to Plaice’s work in footnote 13.

<sup>6</sup> Excluding civil servants, community development workers, and representatives of Canadian Aboriginal organizations, 25 Newfoundland Mi’kmaq and nine Labrador Innu attended the NANL’s founding meeting (NANL 1973).

<sup>7</sup> Now called Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

south? I cannot answer this question. Mike Martin, a Cartwright native and the region's member of the Provincial House of Assembly, suggested at the NANL's founding meeting that the Association go to southeastern Labrador, even though he understood how the ethnic stigma might dissuade people from acknowledging they were "Native people" (NANL 1973 :23).<sup>8</sup> In 2013, I interviewed one man, originally from Sandwich Bay (where Cartwright is located), who claimed that the LIA came to Sandwich Bay around 1974 to ask whether Inuit-descendant people there wished to join, only to encounter disinterest because they did not want to be called "Eskimos." Yet this man was not present at that meeting. On the other hand, Carol Brice-Bennett (pers. comm. 2014), who began working for the LIA in 1974, recalled that "no one mentioned the possibility of Inuit residing in Cartwright and consequently research was not extended to that community." From what little is known, it appears that *if* the NANL or the LIA had attempted to recruit members from Sandwich Bay or further south at that time, the stigma of being "Skimo" would have prevented those of mixed Inuit-European ancestry from joining.

The recognition of aboriginality by the LIA would have very different consequences for the Inuit-European Settlers of northern Labrador. They eventually became LIA members and, as such, full beneficiaries in any future land claim. Under the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement, Settlers/Kablunângajuit,<sup>9</sup> "with or without Inuit ancestry" (LIA 2003: 34), are legally Inuit and today constitute most of Nunatsiavut's population.<sup>10</sup> But how do these "new Inuit" manage their new legal status? Any answer to this question would require new research.<sup>11</sup> I can report my findings from research in northern Labrador in 2000. At that time, English-speaking

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<sup>8</sup> Martin noted that 90% of his riding were of mixed descent, but questioned whether people would accept being called "Native people" (NANL 1973: 22-23).

<sup>9</sup> Kablunângajuit means 'people resembling a white person' (Kennedy 1982: 23-24; Kleivan 1966: 91).

<sup>10</sup> Nunatsiavut ('our beautiful land' in Inuttut, the Labrador dialect of Inuttitut) is the name of the Inuit self-governing territory in northern Labrador. Linguists Clark, Paddock, and MacKenzie write that of the over "2,000 people of Inuit ancestry, just under 500 claim Inuttut as their sole mother tongue" (Clark et al. 1999). The Census of Canada lists Nunatsiavut's 2011 population as 2,325 (Statistics Canada 2013a). The census adds that Inuit represent 89.1% of the total population. It also notes that 24.9% of 2,325 speak Inuttitut (Statistics Canada 2013b). Ben-Dor (1966) cautioned that language should not, *ipso facto*, be equated with identity, but one suspects that most of the 24.9% Inuttitut-speakers would self-identify as Inuit and be considered Inuit by other Inuttitut-speaking Inuit. The implication is that the larger category of "Inuit" in Nunatsiavut are people formerly referred to as Settlers or Kablunângajuit, either born within the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area or with kin ties to it. Finally, note that both when inviting Settlers to join the LIA and (under the Land Claims Agreement) when allowing Nunatsiavut residents lacking Inuit ancestry to be considered "Inuit," Inuit elders opting for a geographic rather than linguistic definition of Inuit sought not to divide communities within the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area.

<sup>11</sup> Following my 2000 research in northern Labrador, and particularly since the settlement of the claim in 2003, I have wondered how people formerly called Settlers were coping with their new legal status as Inuit. What similarities and differences in management of identity are manifest in Inuit-descendant "Inuit" in Nunatsiavut and in their southerly relatives belonging to the NCC? At present, however, and for political reasons, such research does not appear to be welcomed by the SSHRC, who I learned recently now discourages researchers and research "that has documented Inuit occupancy along most of the Labrador coast" (Thomas Gordon, pers. comm. 2015).



Settlers/Kablunângajuit (and, now, legally Inuit) members of the LIA invariably self-identified with statements such as “I’m LIA,” rather than “I’m Inuk.”

Since settlement of the Nunatsiavut land claim, the Nunatsiavut Government (NG) and its business arm, the Nunatsiavut Group of Companies (NGC), have become major players in the Labrador economy, employing numerous beneficiaries. A number of Inuit work at the industrial development that expedited settlement of the land claim, the Voisey’s Bay nickel mine, while others work in the NGC’s various construction, mining, and real estate developments, as well as in Torngat fisheries, and more.<sup>12</sup>

By the early 1980s, people of mixed Inuit-European ancestry in the Lake Melville area felt boxed in.<sup>13</sup> They were worried that they would be even more so if both the Innu Nation and LIA land claims were settled. These and related concerns led to the formation of the short-lived Native Labradorian Association of Labrador (see Kennedy 2014b), and soon after to the formation of the (unaccented) Labrador Metis Association (LMA), formally registered in 1986. Although the term Métis was not common in Labrador, founders of the LMA realized that the 1982 patriated Canadian Constitution included Métis along with Indians and Inuit as Aboriginal people. The LMA mobilized the genuine concerns of people of mixed European-Inuit ancestry who were unable to join the LIA, primarily because of where they or their kin had been born. Although not the sole membership criterion, the LIA required that potential members have some “connection” to the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area. This criterion excluded some people, primarily in the upper Lake Melville region, and occasionally caused hard feelings. In one example from 1999, Leander Baikie of North West River, who described himself as “an Inuit person following Inuit traditions,” lost his LIA membership because “one of my ancestors was born in the wrong place at the wrong time. My family [was] nomadic when they were growing up. They used to go to Grand Lake in the wintertime and into Snook’s Cove, just outside of Rigolet [...] but it just so happens that my father was born in Grand Lake, which is outside of the claim zone” (in Pigott 1999). Several LIA membership reviews from that time either confirmed or reversed cases such as Baikie’s, but at the heart of this problem was the Association’s attempt to circumscribe what was in fact the seamless tapestry of Labrador’s social history. Incompletely appreciated at the time of Baikie’s rejection was that Inuit-descendant people like him lived far south of the LIA’s boundaries, albeit that, unlike the case with Baikie, stigma prevented these people from acknowledging their ancestries and voicing who they were.

In any event, the LMA mobilized Inuit-descendant people who lacked connections to the Inuit Settlement Area. The LMA launched a successful membership drive along the southeastern coast, and in 1998, following an observation in the *Report of the Royal*

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<sup>12</sup> See Kennedy (2015) for more details on NGC economic ventures.

<sup>13</sup> Much of what occurred in southeastern Labrador began earlier in the Central or Lake Melville area of Labrador, as discussed in the work by Evelyn Plaice (1990, 1997, 2009, 2010). Plaice witnessed the early years of the LMA and the competition between it and the LIA for members. Depending on where people were born or on fortuitous kin connections, Central Labrador people either joined or were excluded from the LIA primarily because of their geographic origins.

*Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996) that Labrador Metis exhibited the historical rootedness essential to nationhood, the LMA changed its name to the Labrador Métis Nation (LMN).<sup>14</sup> In 2010, wanting to more closely reflect their Inuit heritage in their name, the LMN took an Inuttitut word, NunatuKavut, meaning “our ancient land,” and became the NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC). The NCC refers to its approximately 6,000 members as “Southern Inuit.” However, NCC members interviewed by Pace (2008), Kelvin (2011), and myself in 2013 appear more comfortable calling themselves Métis. In this rapidly changing political landscape, I use Inuit-Métis, a term that acknowledges both their mixed origins and their Inuit ancestry.

### **The 2013 fieldwork**

The 2013 fieldwork attempted to update my understanding of southeastern Labrador (Figure 2), including how people were managing identity politics.<sup>15</sup> In 2013, the total population of the region’s 11 communities was 2,217, down roughly 12% since the 2006 census. The devastating loss of the cod fishery also ended the eagerly anticipated seasonal moves to outside fishing communities (Kennedy 1996; 2006). Yet many people have a qualified hope for the future, based on the shellfish fishery, on seasonal work in fish plants, and on the possibilities created by the new road connecting their formerly isolated region to both the Strait of Belle Isle region to the south and Goose Bay to the north (see Kennedy 2015).

Any discussion of the contemporary culture of Inuit-Métis on Labrador’s southeastern coast needs to be prefaced by two facts. The first is what I call “Inuitness.” “Inuitness” refers to the use and knowledge of Inuttitut and cultural practices and beliefs that people of Inuit ancestry consider their own. “Inuitness” increases along a gradient or continuum as we move north along the Labrador coast. This continuum, like all generalizations, has exceptions, notably Fox Harbour, a southerly community near Battle Harbour where visitors usually encounter Inuit (Kennedy 2015). Generally, “Inuitness” increases as one goes north from Lodge Bay. The same pertains to northern Labrador, where “Inuitness,” if measured by quantifiable criteria such as Inuttitut usage, increases as one moves north. For example, roughly 200 (of 500) Inuit whose sole mother tongue is Inuttitut live in Makkovik and Hopedale, whereas about 300 (of 500) live in the northernmost community of Nain.

The second fact is that southeastern Labrador communities are home both to Inuit-Métis and to long-term residents without Aboriginal ancestry, today referred to as “Whiteman/men/women.” Historically, and especially prior to identity politics, people

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<sup>14</sup> With this name change, the LMN began accenting the word Métis.

<sup>15</sup> My 2013 research occurred in two phases. In April and May I visited seven of the eight permanent communities between Lodge Bay and Port Hope Simpson. Williams Harbour, the sole community not visited, had just 18 people and was considering resettlement. In September and October I visited Cartwright, Black Tickle, and Paradise River. For a further description of my methods, see Kennedy (2014b), and for details on economic and social change and current conditions in the region’s communities, see Kennedy (2015).

who are now NCC members and their “Whiteman” neighbours gave little thought to this distinction. They do today, especially in communities in the southern part of the region.

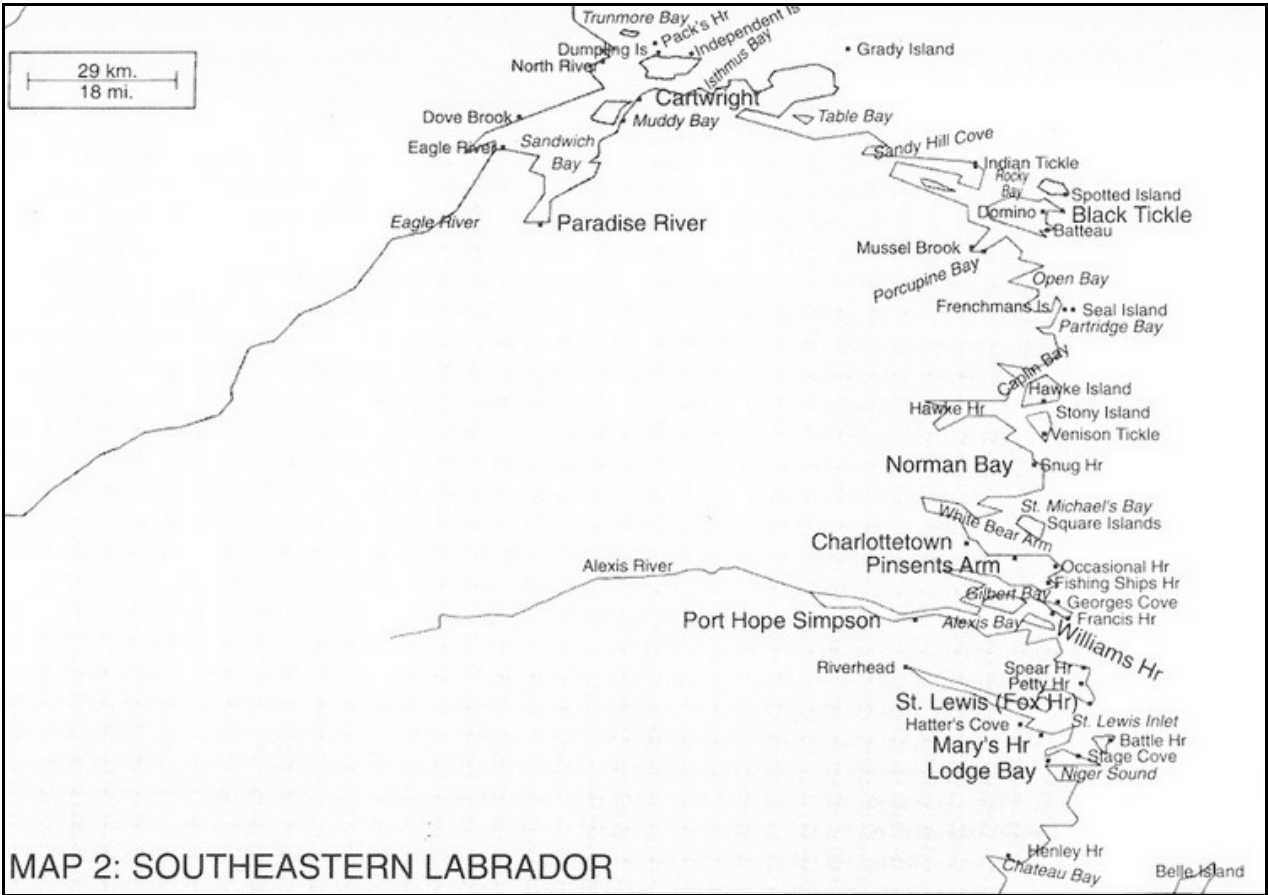


Figure 2. Map of southeastern Labrador. Map by Peter Ramsden.

Culture

While culture has many meanings, I will use it to refer to learned behaviour, concepts, beliefs, practices, and assumptions shared by a social group or a people at a particular place and time. Inuit-Métis and their “Whiteman” neighbours share a hybrid way of life encompassing both Inuit (and, to a lesser extent, Innu) knowledge and practices and those of European origin. For example, before snowmobiles replaced dog-team traction in the 1960s, everyone harnessed dogs to *komatiks* and used Inuit-derived directional commands. Women (and in some cases men) used *ulus* to cut and then sew waterproof sealskin boots. On the other hand, vernacular English spoken in the region has many words and concepts of West Country or Newfoundland origin (e.g., *barking* [drying nets], *cuddy* [enclosed space in boat bow], *killick* [anchor], *nish* [tender], and others), some of them being unique to particular Labrador communities.

Consistent with the notion of a continuum of “Inuitness” introduced above, one finds a richer legacy of Inuit-derived culture in the northern part of southeastern

Labrador than further south. At Spotted Islands, for example, harp seals regularly congregate briefly each fall and spring during their annual migrations, a fact that explains the area's popularity with Inuit, whose presence there was recorded by numerous early European chroniclers (see Kennedy 2014b; 2015). Until the provincial resettlement program in the 1960s, Spotted Islands had a population of over 100 people, some of strong Inuit background. One former resident whom I call "Annie" recalled her childhood use of Inuttitut words to describe various things within a social milieu where Inuit origins were denied because of their stigma. Annie and her playmates snacked on edible plants such as *kuannnik* (kelp) and *tulligunnait* (rose wort). She loved *kuak* (frozen meat, especially caribou) and *nipko* (dried seal meat), and her grandfather cut out the hard-textured pupils of fish eyes as a treat for her and her playmates.<sup>16</sup> Within the confines of Spotted Islands society, Inuttitut was the language Annie and her playmates learned to describe their surroundings. At the same time, the stupefying blanket of stigma led Annie's mother and grandmother to deny they had Inuit ancestors. Local sensitivity about the area's Inuit legacy may have affected how locals interacted with the Newfoundland fishers who came each summer to fish cod. Spotted Islands folk considered themselves distinct from the visitors (Penny 2010), whom they called "Shouthooks," whereas the visiting fishers called locals "Natives" (Hussey 1981). Annie said that local women commonly smoked pipes but quickly hid them when the "Shouthooks" came to visit. Several other former Spotted Islands residents recalled the name "Shouthooks," but like Annie, were uncertain of its derivation.<sup>17</sup>

At the other end of the cultural continuum from Spotted Islands are the majority of Inuit-Métis, who describe their culture with generalizations such as "we had to live off the land," "we was born here," or "hunters only took what they needed." The central component of Inuit-Métis at this end of the continuum is their new willingness to acknowledge their part-Inuit ancestry, a heritage either unknown or closeted during my earlier fieldwork. While the identity of Inuit-Métis remains a "work in progress," the fact that people are discussing it is a gigantic change since my earlier fieldwork. Except for people like Annie then, for most Inuit-Métis it is their professed identity rather than their culture that distinguishes them from their "Whiteman" neighbours.

## Identity

The 2013 research suggests that acknowledgment of Inuit ancestry and a new curiosity about roots are gradually replacing the shame many Inuit-Métis previously felt about being dark or "Skimo." One man of obvious Inuit appearance characterized his identity this way, "I know all my life I was Aboriginal, but I didn't know what it was all about. A lot of people, a good many first when the Métis was starting up, didn't

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<sup>16</sup> For a longer list of Inuttitut words from Spotted Islands, see NCC (2010: 241).

<sup>17</sup> While acknowledging its reference to visiting fishers, one former Spotted Islands man said that the word "Shouthooks" also referred to a scraper used to remove fat from sealskins so that it would not get on the socks worn inside the boots.

want to hear talk of it. My father's side, come down [from] Inuit [...] my mother's side they come from Newfoundland [...]." One woman characterized her identity with the words, "When I define myself now, I simply say I am a person of Aboriginal ancestry. I don't say Inuit-Metis, and I don't say Inuit. I just say my ancestry is Inuit." Another man recalled becoming conscious of his own aboriginality. In his words, "We [were] a different breed. They tell you that the old people, the ancestors, great grandfather, he come across [from Europe] and got in with a Native woman, Indians, we used to call 'em Mountaineers [...]." Another Inuit-Métis man put it this way, "I'm no different than I always was but I'm Métis [...]. My wife is not Métis [...]. We [Inuit-Métis] get to set our salmon nets a week before other [White] people [...]."

This last informant touched on what appears to be a rift between Inuit-Métis and their "Whiteman" neighbours caused by unequal access to salmon. Atlantic salmon have long been a resource of immense economic and cultural importance, greatly missed since the federal government closed the commercial salmon fishery in 1999. Protests by the LMN led to an Inuit-Métis food fishery in which members were allowed to net six salmon per household annually, three more than "Whitemen" households. Some people told me that LMN memberships spiked with news that members could net six salmon per household, although I was unable to verify their claim. I heard about this issue in nearly every household I visited in the southern part of the region, both from Inuit-Métis and from their "Whiteman" neighbours. While the LMN and some locals worked very hard to secure the Aboriginal food fishery, the resulting schism explains why some Inuit-Métis would like to return to a time of greater equality. Like the reconsideration of identity currently occurring, notions such as an Aboriginal food fishery are new and perhaps not completely understood. Hard feelings about unequal rights to salmon may explain why it appeared to me that members do not flaunt their membership, although in fairness all of them probably know who is and who is not an NCC member.

## Discussion

Aboriginal organizations and identity politics have fundamentally changed the lives of people we call, and who sometimes call themselves, Inuit and Inuit-Métis. The invitation by Inuttitut-speaking Inuit to their northern Labrador Settler neighbours to join the LIA exemplified both generosity and *realpolitik*; the invitation was a reasoned response to federal directives and the competitive threat of the NANL. Once Settlers accepted the invitation to join the LIA, long-term demographic and linguistic trends made it obvious that they would dominate the LIA and, after settlement of the land claim, Nunatsiavut. The possibility that Inuttitut-speaking Inuit might become a minority in their own organizations has been known for many years. In an interview I conducted in 1993 for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the LIA president used the analogy of the tail wagging the dog to describe growing Settler clout and then said "hindsight may show that the LIA made a terrible mistake, allowing in the Kablunângajuit. The real Inuit will have dug their own grave." Just how Inuttitut-speaking Inuit consider their position within Nunatsiavut today is unknown, although

my research in one northern Labrador community in 2000 revealed that Inuktitut-speaking Inuit felt marginalized within the new polity that Settlers increasingly dominated. Indeed about this time another researcher told me that some Inuktitut-speaking Inuit considered (I believe facetiously) reviving the word “Eskimos” to describe themselves.

Identity politics offered bilingual people in northern Labrador new possibilities, as the following two examples suggest. Back in 1971-72, prior to the beginning of identity politics in northern Labrador, one fluently bilingual man, whom I shall call Jack, once said to me, “Who am I? Sure, my mother was an Eskimo and my father a white.” Jack had lived and acquired a skilled trade in Goose Bay. He married a Settler woman, and was very accustomed to life outside the small community where our conversation occurred. Jack knew his roots but was equally prepared to live in the world beyond northern Labrador. The beginnings of the LIA only a year or so after our conversation offered Jack new opportunities. He would be elected as an LIA leader and gravitate toward the Inuit side of his mixed heritage. Fast-forward one generation. Jack’s uncertainty about his identity before the LIA would resolve in the case of his son, who openly identifies as Inuit.

Another similar case, also from northern Labrador, concerns a fluently bilingual man I shall call Bob. Bob’s mother was a unilingual Inuktitut speaker and his father was fluently bilingual. Bob’s family was relocated from further north and as a child experienced prejudice from local Settler children while growing up. Prior to identity politics, Bob gravitated toward the white world beyond Labrador. I knew Bob shortly after his marriage to a white woman, and they were preparing to move to Newfoundland where Bob hoped to enter a trades school. As events unfolded, the trade school lacked a seat for Bob, forcing him to remain in Labrador where he worked at seasonal jobs, fished, and hunted. As with Jack, identity politics fundamentally changed Bob’s life. Bob would be elected as an LIA leader and help guide the organization through its formative years. Identity politics enabled both men to resolve who they were, to utilize their bilingual skills, and to enjoy new opportunities.

In recent years approximately 100 residents of Sandwich Bay (and several more people further south) have become Nunatsiavut beneficiaries, motivated primarily by the Non-Insured Health Benefits available to beneficiaries (Kennedy 2014b). It is important to reiterate that these individuals were able to become Nunatsiavut beneficiaries because they or their parents had been born within the geographic limits claimed by the LIA. Thus, although legally Inuit under the land claim, none of these Sandwich Bay beneficiaries I spoke with during my 2013 fieldwork self-identified as Inuit. Like their English-speaking counterparts further north, Sandwich Bay Nunatsiavut beneficiaries appreciate the benefits now available to them but would not call themselves Inuit, especially in front of an Inuktitut-speaking Inuk.

Finally, I briefly note that during the several decades covered by this paper, the socio-economic context in which identity politics plays out has changed from the familiarity of village life to a more migratory pattern of distant employment amongst

strangers. People today often work far from their home communities, in mining, in offshore fisheries, and on various construction projects. This new economy has fundamentally changed the relationship many people have with each other and with their home communities. Coastal people from Postville and Port Hope Simpson working at Voisey's Bay or on the Lower Churchill project mingle daily with strangers. This presents a completely different arena for management and expression of identity than was the case in their parents' or grandparents' villages. Work away from home communities occurs on a stage where some Inuit-Métis and English-speaking Nunatsiavut beneficiaries may self-identify as Inuit. I would also predict that the very meaning of being Inuit in Labrador will change. My prediction is based on several facts already discussed, as well as the aging and shrinking number of Inuttitut speakers in Labrador (Andersen and Johns 2005). In the future, the term "Labrador Inuit" will increasingly refer to the English-speaking Inuit-descendant majority of Nunatsiavut's population (see Kennedy 2015). The future for Inuit-Métis is less certain. Mega developments like the Voisey's Bay mine have expedited settlement of land claims, and if some as yet unknown development were to occur in southeastern Labrador and if the outstanding NCC land claim were to be settled, Inuit-Métis might finally achieve equality with their Inuit-descendant relatives further north. Also possible is that the resolution of court cases currently under appeal, such as the Daniels case, may have positive consequences for Inuit-Metis (see Kennedy 2015: 323-324; 340). Whatever the future holds, Aboriginal organizations, identity politics, and self-government continue to move Aboriginal people away from their colonial past and toward new ways of being and becoming Inuit.

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