

## Mad dogs and (mostly) Englishmen: Colonial relations, commodities, and the fate of Inuit sled dogs

### Des chiens fous et (surtout) des Anglais: Relations coloniales, marchandises et sort des chiens de traîneau inuit

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#### Article abstract

The Qikiqtani Truth Commission was created by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association to examine events affecting Qikiqtanimit between 1950 and 1980. Paramount among these was the fate of Inuit sled dogs. Dogs, unlike the snowmobiles that have replaced them, had no exchange value in a market economy. They enabled existential relations dependent upon traditional and personal skills rooted in Inuit culture and personality. It is understandable that their fate was identified by elders as an important focus of the Commission. The loss of dogs was both real and symbolic of cultural transformations that concern Inuit elders. As Inuit relocated to settlements, sled dogs became a liability for the Arctic administration. The *Dog Ordinance of the Northwest Territories*, intended to protect people from attacks, was at the same time a tool in the totalising agenda of a Canadian State committed to assimilating Inuit to Canadian norms, values, assumptions, rule of law, and settlement living. As Inuit moved to town in the 1950s and 1960s, the *Dog Ordinance of the Northwest Territories* was used to redefine dogs—previously seen as essential to Inuit lifestyles, to keeping Inuit out of town, away from welfare and living independently—as liabilities and commodities. Their replacement by snowmobiles introduced Inuit to new commodity relations. As a commodity essential to hunting, snowmobiles pose a serious challenge to Inuit reciprocity and *ningiqtuq* (sharing) relations and *InuitQaujimagatuqangit* (traditional knowledge).

# Mad dogs and (mostly) Englishmen: Colonial relations, commodities, and the fate of Inuit sled dogs

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Frank James Tester\*

**Résumé:** Des chiens fous et (surtout) des Anglais: Relations coloniales, marchandises et sort des chiens de traîneau inuit

La Qikiqtani Truth Commission a été créée par la Qikiqtani Inuit Association pour examiner les événements qui affectèrent les Qikiqtanimiut entre 1950 et 1980. L'un des plus importants de ces événements fut le sort des chiens de traîneau inuit. Les chiens, à la différence des motoneiges qui les ont remplacés, n'avaient aucune valeur d'échange dans une économie de marché. Ils permettaient des relations existentielles selon les compétences traditionnelles et personnelles enracinées dans la culture inuit et la personnalité des individus. Il est compréhensible que leur sort ait été identifié par les aînés comme un axe important de la Commission. La perte des chiens était à la fois réelle et symbolique des transformations culturelles affectant les aînés inuit. Tout comme les Inuit relocalisés dans des communautés, les chiens de traîneau sont devenus une responsabilité de l'administration de l'Arctique. L'ordonnance concernant les chiens des Territoires du Nord-Ouest, destinée à protéger les gens de leurs attaques, représentait en même temps un outil dans le programme de l'État canadien d'assimiler les Inuit aux normes, valeurs, suppositions, prééminence du droit et vie sédentaire canadiens. Comme les Inuit se sont sédentarisés dans les années 1950 et 1960, l'ordonnance a été utilisée pour redéfinir les chiens comme des garanties et des marchandises alors qu'autrefois ils étaient considérés comme essentiels au mode de vie des Inuit, les maintenant hors des communautés, loin des allocations gouvernementales et leur permettant de vivre de façon indépendante. Leur remplacement par des motoneiges a fait entrer les Inuit dans de nouvelles relations marchandes. En tant que produit de base essentiel à la chasse, la motoneige constitue un énorme défi à la réciprocité inuit et aux relations de *ningiqtuq* (partage) et aux *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit* (savoirs traditionnels).

**Abstract:** Mad Dogs and (mostly) Englishmen: Colonial relations, commodities, and the fate of Inuit sled dogs

The Qikiqtani Truth Commission was created by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association to examine events affecting Qikiqtanimiut between 1950 and 1980. Paramount among these was the fate of Inuit sled dogs. Dogs, unlike the snowmobiles that have replaced them, had no exchange value in a market economy. They enabled existential relations dependent upon traditional and personal skills rooted in Inuit culture and personality. It is understandable that their fate was identified by elders as an important focus of the Commission. The loss of dogs was both real and symbolic of

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cultural transformations that concern Inuit elders. As Inuit relocated to settlements, sled dogs became a liability for the Arctic administration. The *Dog Ordinance of the Northwest Territories*, intended to protect people from attacks, was at the same time a tool in the totalising agenda of a Canadian State committed to assimilating Inuit to Canadian norms, values, assumptions, rule of law, and settlement living. As Inuit moved to town in the 1950s and 1960s, the *Dog Ordinance of the Northwest Territories* was used to redefine dogs—previously seen as essential to Inuit lifestyles, to keeping Inuit out of town, away from welfare and living independently—as liabilities and commodities. Their replacement by snowmobiles introduced Inuit to new commodity relations. As a commodity essential to hunting, snowmobiles pose a serious challenge to Inuit reciprocity and *ningiqtuq* (sharing) relations and *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* (traditional knowledge).

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## Introduction

Canada's colonial Arctic history says much about Enlightenment logic as a canon of ideas exercised on Inuit. These include free individuals, democratic pluralism, competitive markets, private property, and the rule of law. At the core are commodity relations and the movement of Inuit from an existential and culturally coherent cosmology to a world where property relations increasingly affect social, political, and economic affairs, threatening Inuit reciprocity and *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* (Inuit traditional knowledge).

Commencing in 2008, the Qikiqtani Truth Commission conducted an enquiry into what happened to Inuit in the Qikiqtani (Baffin) Region from 1950 to 1975. This was a period of considerable environmental transformation in which sled dogs played a central role. The result was an era of traumatising social change, when Inuit were relocated from a predominantly hunting culture to the logic of high modernism in little more than 15 years (Tester and Kulchyski 1994). Central to this experience was an attempted cultural shift from relations based on hunting and reciprocity to commodity relations based on use and exchange value.<sup>1</sup> While reciprocity, what Wenzel (1991) identifies as *ningiqtuq*—the sharing of a wide range of subsistence inputs—cannot be explored in depth here, Wenzel (2000) raises important questions about snowmobiles as inputs to Inuit hunting and about their cultural impact.

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<sup>1</sup> The concepts of use and exchange value are as outlined by Marx in Part I of *Capital*. The utility of something makes its use value. When it can be used to acquire other things, it has exchange value. Exchange within an internally coherent system of reciprocity and mutual obligations is to be distinguished from market relations that involve money as an intermediary for, and representation of, a thing's value. Money makes relations with economic forces external to a hunting culture possible and, at the same time, invites cultural changes necessary to accommodate those relations.

This article focuses on the law, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the fate of Inuit sled dogs, and the introduction of snowmobiles into what is now Nunavut Territory. Much of the focus is on events in Pangnirtung. It is based on archival sources and the author's decades of experience living, working, and travelling in the eastern Arctic. For purposes of the paper, property refers to a broad category of social entitlements, only some of which are tangible. A commodity—a thing with exchange value and, in the case of snowmobiles, market value—is one form of social entitlement. In all societies social entitlements exist outside market relations (Hann 1998). For Inuit, dogs were a social entitlement with limited exchange and no market value. As argued in what follows, their loss and replacement by snowmobiles has complex implications for Inuit culture. It is understandable why the death of sled dogs and the RCMP's role in their fate were identified by Inuit elders as central concerns for the Qikiqtani Truth Commission.

Not all RCMP and Arctic administrators were Englishmen, but many were, as evidenced by their signatures (e.g., Jenkins, Johnston, Pallister, Ward, Wilson, etc.) on RCMP and other archival records from this period. Noël Coward's fabulously cheeky song "Mad Dogs and Englishmen" pokes fun at the colonial madness of men whose burden keeps them running about in the sun, "one of those rules that the biggest fools obey," when "even caribous lie down and snooze, for there's nothing else to do." It speaks to the urgency of a colonial agenda bound to impose its regime on Others regardless of their circumstances. Inuit sled dogs—and Inuit—suffered this agenda.

### **Theoretical perspectives: Totalising space and cultural practices**

Arctic history is largely about changing relationships to environmental resources. It cannot be understood without an understanding of normative human interactions to built social and/or natural environments, and to Others. No history merely recounts events. What happened to Inuit sled dogs in the eastern Canadian Arctic is a source of considerable debate and controversy, portrayed in a film by Sanguya and Gjerstad (2010) as a clash of two truths; that of the RCMP, informed by ideas about progress and the rule of law, and that of Inuit influenced by the importance of having dogs, even—and perhaps especially—in the presence of rapidly changing social and material circumstances.

I take it as axiomatic that the North American landscape has been colonised within the norms and *modus operandi* of capitalist relations of production and consumption. A useful starting point is the concept of need. Sartre (1976: 80) puts it this way: "Everything is to be explained through *need (le besoin)*; need is the first totalising relation between the material being (environment), man, and the material ensemble (tools, devices, constructs) of which he is a part."

A contemporary focus on needs and how they are met in hunter and gatherer cultures has been inspired by Marshall Sahlins (1972). However, some realities undermine the spatial and temporal assumptions underlying Sahlins' observations.

Peltro's (1973) examination of snowmobile technology and reindeer herding in the Sevetijärvi region of Finland illustrate the changing nature of needs through de-localisation (dependency on external material inputs to the local economy), techno-economic differentiation (impact of material things on how needs are met), and the way technology affects social distinctions and differentiation over time and space. The latter can be interpreted as the development of an Indigenous class system. In the anthropology of the North, much focus has been on ways in which modern technologies and opportunities have been adapted to facilitate cultural practices (Foote and Wenzel 2008; Wenzel 2008) and what Kulchyski (1992) calls "primitive subversions"; political and behavioural adaptations undermining attempts at assimilation. Social and material practices have often, as Kulchyski and Wenzel illustrate, been adapted to fit practices critical to cultural survival. But the impacts of things—material or otherwise—as well as internally generated cultural adaptations to changing material circumstances have considerable potential to undermine *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* and social relations. In refusing to stereotype Indigenous people as passive recipients of colonial agendas, this reality should not be overlooked, underplayed, or left undocumented.

In the modern period, how is the encroachment of capitalist logic and machines—including snowmobiles—made possible by particular relations of production and consumption that alter Inuit cultural practices and environmental relations? As Harvey (1996) argues, our history is a dialectic one where environments are transformed according to a society's laws (practices) and reflect values and assumptions that give rise to those practices. These practices give rise to commodities (the snowmobile) and experiential cultural products (e.g., Inuit participation in the opening of the 2010 Winter Olympics) that transform environments and how we perceive and relate to them.

### **Dogs in the environmental history of the Canadian Arctic**

Dogs were not pets but draught animals that assisted Inuit in moving from one location to another. They were essential to hunting seal, muskox, and polar bear and to camp relocation. They were assistants and companions on long and arduous hunting trips. They played a role in spiritual life, with some Inuit having animals as helping *tuurngait* (spirits). *Punnguq* ('spirit dog') could be used to help find animals, to find one's way home in a blizzard, or to help an *angukkuq* ('shaman') find a *kiglorittuq* ('bad or terrible spirit') and chase it away (Peter Irniq, pers. comm. 2010). Dogs were named after deceased dogs or living people. What happened on the land was affected by the relationship between a hunter and his dogs. In hunting camps, dogs bonded with family members and were little threat to anyone's safety. The care given to pups and the essential role of dogs in Inuit culture is well documented (MacRury 1991). Dogs were sometimes given as gifts to demonstrate friendship or familial solidarity. Their position was an ambivalent one, making trade possible while contributing to the preservation of non-market values and relationships at the heart of Inuit culture. Inuit dogs have a long history, perhaps dating back 2,400 years and even 4,000 years (*ibid.*:

5-10). Prior to European contact, the Inuit likely had one to five dogs, used primarily as pack animals and for locating and bringing animals to bay (Jenness 1922; Rasmussen 1927). Archaeological evidence suggests that dogs became a draught animal in the Thule period about 800 years ago (MacRury 1991).

The eastern Arctic environment and wildlife populations began to change when Scottish whaling fleets came to Cumberland Sound, Baffin Island, in the 1840s. The introduction of rifles, nets, and steel harpoons dramatically altered the importance of and ways in which sled dogs were used. The new technology made it easier to procure food—seals, walrus, and caribou—for people and dogs. Commencing in the 1860s, seals gained commercial value in the face of the economic decline of whaling. Dogs played an important role in this commercial activity (Stevenson 1997). Just prior to World War I, commercial whaling in the Canadian Arctic came to a halt.

In 1911, the first Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) post in the eastern Arctic opened at Kimmirut (Lake Harbour). The Inuit economy was redirected from whaling to the fox fur trade, an activity requiring substantial dog-teams. This history of fur exploitation redefined the Arctic environment in significant material and conceptual ways, including the introduction of the *Northwest Game Act* in 1917; an attempt to prohibit muskox hunting and to restrict caribou hunting. In 1926 an Arctic Islands Game Preserve was created, and the Thelon Game Sanctuary established in 1927. Within the preserve, the number of trading posts was restricted, the concern being that independent traders were reducing the number of pelts available to Inuit trappers and that the slaughter of game put Inuit at risk of starvation. More importantly, these developments implied increased dependence on government relief. Independent traders were also a threat to the hegemony of the HBC (Kulchyski and Tester 2007). Restrictions were lifted in response to economic pressure on State regulators during the Great Depression of the 1930s. In the late 1940s, the State moved with renewed force to regulate Inuit caribou hunting (Usher 2004). The claim was made that dog-teams were too large and that feeding them was contributing to the decline of caribou herds (Kulchyski and Tester 2007). These relations of production and consumption impacted game populations and their distribution by drawing cultural boundaries, by regulating and controlling space, and by changing relations between hunters and animals.

### **The law and Inuit sled dogs**

The law on sled dogs evolved in response to the move of Inuvialuit and Dene into settlements in the Mackenzie region (Northwest Territories), commencing in the 1920s. In the territory now known as Nunavut, Inuit moved, or were relocated to, settlements starting in the mid 1950s, a process not completed until the late 1960s. The law was to apply to all dogs in the Northwest Territories and was not targeted at Inuit sled dogs. In the eastern Arctic, trade in Arctic fox pelts and the importance of sled dogs grew rapidly until the end of World War II. Thereafter, changes to the fox fur trade, the Inuit economy, and the role of dogs were brought about by events unfolding thousands of kilometres away in the fashion centres of Paris and New York. As white fox fur trim on

women's coats fell from favour and as synthetics replaced natural furs, the single item and fur-dependent Inuit economy collapsed. The vagaries of fashion, war debts, and relations of both production and consumption centred elsewhere became important factors contributing (as did schooling and health centres) to Inuit migration to settlements. Inuit roles and relationships to dogs changed. Inuit were prepared for the new economy with compulsory schooling, training—predominantly in operating heavy equipment and in building trades—and, commencing in the late 1950s, a social order centred on the institutions, norms, and edicts that accompany settlement living. The Inuit relationship to land changed. It was now something that could be taken away, not necessarily theirs; a resource defined within market logic from which surplus could be extracted. It was something Inuit had to struggle to reclaim.

How the physical landscape of the Arctic is seen, felt, and experienced was tied to relationships between Inuit and their dogs. Dogs are sensitive to changes in environmental conditions, like hummocks of ice, thin ice, the presence nearby of polar bear or other Inuit, and “good dog teams were able to track their way back (to camp) almost as if they had a homing device in their heads” (Akulukjuk 2004: 284). There is a huge difference between finding one's way home with a dog-team, and attempting the same with a snowmobile and GPS, where one reads a proxy (numbers from a satellite) rather than the surrounding landscape.

The history of sled dogs in relation to Inuit settlements and the State's role, represented in the behaviour of the RCMP and other State agents, is a cautionary tale about essentialising colonial rule. The diversity of ideas as to the desired fate of Inuit in the eastern Arctic during the period in question shows, at one level, a profound lack of unity and sense of purpose within the Canadian State, even during an era of high modernism imbued with the idea of progress and technical mastery of nature and social relations. There was no question over the ultimate objective: a totalisation with capital accumulation at its core. The question was rather how to get there efficiently at historical moments when various commodities might be best served by different cultural forms and relations to production. “The primitive” was thus both celebrated and denigrated, as when the RCMP encouraged Inuit camp life and travels, and lived and ate like the “Other” or, conversely, found Inuit relations to their dogs, once they had moved to town, to be anathema to modern living.

One element in a totalising logic is the law. As Inuit moved to settlements, regulating sled dogs was seen as essential to health and safety. *An Ordinance Respecting Dogs*, assented to on January 20, 1949, repealed earlier legislation on dogs in the Northwest Territories, including Ordinances dated December 28, 1928, June 18, 1937, and an *Ordinance to Amend the Dog Ordinance*, assented to on January 28, 1946 (Department of Resources and Development 1951). In the 1950s and until the late 1960s, Inuit had no elected representatives in the legislative assembly of the NWT. They had little to no appreciation of the legislation in question, apart from explanations offered by the RCMP, most of whom did not speak Inuktitut. There appears to be no archival evidence suggesting that the *Dog Ordinance* was translated into Inuktitut or made available to or explained to Inuit in any systematic way.

The legislation prohibited owners from allowing their dogs to run at large within any area defined by the Commissioner or contrary to by-laws made by local authorities (section 6). The law gave authorities power to seize a dog from any offender and specified conditions for the animal's return to its owner (section 9). The Ordinance gave authorities permission to sell the dog if possession had not been restored to the owner within five days, thus introducing, via the law, the concept of dogs as commodities. It gave officers permission to destroy dogs seized under section 9 if the dog was injured or should otherwise be destroyed for humane reasons or for safety. In such circumstances, section 9(6) gave the officer permission to destroy the dog as soon after seizure "as he sees fit." Any offender was liable to a fine, upon conviction, of not more than \$25 or imprisonment for a term not to exceed 30 days. In the late 1940s, many Inuit had incomes of only several hundred dollars a year, depending on relief and family allowance payments to meet basic needs. The Commissioner was given power to make rules and regulations for the purposes of the Ordinance. Amendments were made in 1950, 1951, 1953, 1955, 1966, and 1969.

In 1950, an amendment repealed section 3 and under section 3(1) gave the Commissioner the power "to appoint persons to be officers for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of the Ordinance." Subsection 2 made RCMP officers "*ex officio* officers" (Northwest Territories Ordinances 1950). Section 3(1) was subsequently used in many Qikiqtani settlements, including Frobisher Bay, to hire local Inuit as dog control officers. The motivation can be interpreted in a number of ways. Having Inuit enforce the law was preferable to having the RCMP do it, as it drew criticism and anger over the killing of dogs away from the RCMP. At the same time, the position can be seen as providing Inuit with employment and as a move toward the devolution of responsibility to Inuit and their communities, as well as addressing problems of language and communication. However, Inuit dog control officers were still operating with legislation and within norms not of their making.

A further amendment in 1950 resulted in the insertion of a new section 9A(1): "Where an officer is unable to seize a dog that is running at large contrary to the provisions of this Ordinance or of any order, rule or regulation made hereunder, he may destroy the dog" (Northwest Territories Ordinances 1950). This section is critical as it gave the RCMP or a designated person further authority to shoot dogs running loose in settlements. Subsection (2) allowed that no compensation be given where a dog had been shot under subsection (1). Here again, the law viewed dogs as a commodity. There was to be no compensation for the monetary value of dogs that had been confiscated and shot. Further amendments permitted local municipalities to make and enforce their own by-laws.

Amendments made in 1966 were matters of clarification. In the original Ordinance, in the definitions section (2), subsection (e), a dog "running at large" (and therefore eligible to be shot) meant "to run off the premises of the owner either when the dog is not muzzled or when the dog is not under the control of any person" (Northwest Territories Ordinances 1949). The 1966 amendment clarified the intent by a slight change in the wording. It now read: "For the purpose of this Ordinance a dog is



running at large if it is off the premises of its owner *and* is not muzzled *or* is not under the physical control of any person” (Northwest Territories Ordinances 1966). In both versions, any dog off the premises of its owners had to be either muzzled or under someone’s control. Particular attention should be paid to the concept of “owner’s premises.” It suggests a condition—that of a home and territory surrounding it as the defined property of the occupant(s)—fitting nicely with attempts, in the 1960s, to introduce Inuit to concepts of private property and home ownership. The law, as a totalising and colonial tool, imposed changes in the ways Inuit were to define and relate to space.

Other amendments went further. Subsection 7(1) was repealed and the following substituted: “No person shall leave a dog in harness within any settlement or within one-half mile of any settlement in the Territories unless the dog is muzzled or is under the custody and physical control of a person over sixteen years of age who is capable of ensuring that the dog will not harm the public or create a nuisance” (Northwest Territories Ordinances 1966). This section resembled a regulation from 1946 that stated: “No person shall drive a dog or dogs in harness within any settlement or within a half-mile of any such settlement in the Northwest Territories unless each dog is muzzled” (Northwest Territories Ordinances 1946). It was introduced after a young girl had been attacked by a dog-team driven by a 10 year-old boy near Fort Smith in the Mackenzie District. A team of dogs hitched to a sled outside a HBC post while the owner was inside trading was defined as “dogs running at large” if not muzzled. If attended by a youth less than 16 years-old, they were still defined as dogs running at large and eligible to be shot. That childhood lasted until 16 was an imported assumption from Qallunaat culture. Inuit boys in their early teens had already hunted caribou and seal and had likely participated in polar bear hunts.

### **The death of sled dogs and the formation of Pangnirtung**

Until the early 1960s, the RCMP enabled traditional camp life, fearing the presence of Inuit in town would contribute to rising welfare rolls and the creation of “post Eskimos”; the equivalent of what were seen as dependency relations among First Nations people living around trading posts elsewhere in the country. As agents responsible for doling out relief and accounting for increases, the RCMP encouraged Inuit as long as possible to live subsistence lifestyles, for which dog-teams were essential. On the other side of the ledger, clergy, educators, and administrators concerned about Inuit as citizens, free to live wherever they chose and committed to modernisation and assimilation, did not discourage Inuit from moving to town. Their conviction was that camp life was over. The fate of sled dogs in the Cumberland Sound region of Baffin Island—an intersection of a natural disaster with economic circumstances and colonial objectives—constitutes the most important event in the environmental history of that area since the advent of whaling in the 1840s.

The deaths of sled dogs and the development of Pangnirtung have been briefly summarised by Damas (2002). The deaths occurred in the winter of 1961-1962. An

RCMP report of the area at the time indicates a population of 564 Inuit and about 800 to 900 dogs (Alexander 1962: 1). By early March there were about 270 dogs left in the region, the result of the spread of distemper with the subsequent migration to Pangnirtung of most Inuit living in Cumberland Sound. Pangnirtung consisted of an Anglican mission and mission hospital, an RCMP post, and an HBC post. A few Inuit, employed by the mission, the RCMP, or the HBC lived in tents and *qamaq* (sod huts) nearby.

On November 7, 1961, Peter Murdoch of the Department of Northern Affairs and the RCMP in Frobisher Bay reported the case of a dog that, on November 3, was seen walking in circles and acting strangely. On November 7 the dog was shot by an Inuk (presumably employed as a “dogcatcher”). About the same time, an Inuk by the name of Charlie Akpalialuk journeyed to Frobisher Bay with relatives and three dog-teams. Several years earlier, Akpalialuk’s wife Annie had been hospitalised in Weston, Ontario with tuberculosis. In the spring of 1961 Akpalialuk had traveled north from his camp in Kimiksuk, across Cumberland Sound, to Pangnirtung and while there, had told RCMP Constable Calvin Alexander and Special Constable Joanassie Diala that he wanted to go to Frobisher Bay to see if someone would take him to visit his wife. He was told there was no way he could get from Frobisher Bay to Weston, Ontario. Furthermore, by the time he made the trip, Frobisher Bay was under quarantine due to the outbreak of a dog disease (Calvin Alexander, pers. comm. 2008).

On the way back to Kimiksuk from Frobisher Bay, the dogs in two of Akpalialuk’s three teams died. Akpalialuk then took his team to Pangnirtung for resupply. *En route* he visited camps on the south shore of Cumberland Sound before crossing and heading up into Pangnirtung Fiord. This resulted in the transmission of distemper to dogs in the Sound. Dogs started dying in December and by early February, reports from camps made it clear that an epidemic was rapidly killing most of the dogs. Peter Murdoch, the Inuktitut-speaking Director of the Rehabilitation Centre in Frobisher Bay, was sent to Pangnirtung.<sup>2</sup> He visited the camps and, using penicillin from the Frobisher Bay hospital, inoculated as many animals as possible—approximately 340. He left additional penicillin and relief supplies with camp leaders. Kimiksuk, with a population of 121 Inuit, had by early February only 21 dogs left. Other camps had similar experiences. Penicillin alone is of very little use in dealing with distemper and is more effective in combination with tetracycline. Dogs continued to die.

Dogs were essential to life in Cumberland Sound, seal meat being the principal element of the Inuit diet. Camps were located on the shore of the Sound. Inuit would travel daily to hunt by the floe-edge, which could be as far as 15 to 50 km from camp. Dogs made possible the geographical distribution of Inuit and the intimate knowledge the Inuit had of Cumberland Sound, especially in March and April when accumulations of snow made travel difficult. Dogs were indispensable to carrying seals back to camp.

<sup>2</sup> All following information on the camps is taken from Zuckerman (1962a). The rehabilitation centre had been established to assist Inuit returning to the North following treatment for tuberculosis in the South. Many were so debilitated that they were deemed unable to return to the rigours of camp life. The centre also accommodated other Inuit with mental and physical disabilities.

The Arctic administration thus feared that without dogs Inuit in Cumberland Sound would be at risk of starvation. The epidemic affected 12 camps in Cumberland Sound: Kimiksuk, Kepesak, Iglutalik, Nowyakvik, Erkalulik, Immilik, Bon Accord, and another five camps that Murdoch was unable to visit: Nunatak, Avatuktu, Twapait, Sukpevesuktu, and Tugakjuak. Without dogs, camp residents had difficulty not only hunting, but also travelling into Pangnirtung for supplies. Kepesak residents reportedly told Murdoch that their difficulties had convinced them to move to Frobisher Bay by boat that coming summer.

The Northern administration had good reason to fear the possibility of starvation. In the winter of 1957-1958, starvation struck Inuit who had relocated from Ennadai Lake to Henik Lake in the Kivalliq Region (Tester and Kulchyski 1994), a tragic episode partly due to the neglect and flawed logic of government officials. The department was determined not to have a similar experience develop in Cumberland Sound. Harold Zuckerman, the Area Administrator, decided to evacuate Inuit to Pangnirtung following a second visit to the camps by Peter Murdoch in early March. It was considered impractical to fly enough supplies into camps in the region in order to keep them viable, given weather and landing conditions, costs, and the availability of suitable aircraft. Some Inuit carried out the evacuation using their remaining dogs. "The Pangnirtung Eskimos (also) volunteered their assistance and put all the local dogs at the disposal of the camp Eskimo to assist them in their move to Pangnirtung" (Zukerman 1962a: 5). Many were evacuated by plane. Also used was the first snowmobile introduced into the Arctic and owned by Abe Opik, an Inuk social worker employed at the rehabilitation centre in Frobisher Bay. The snowmobile was soon to have a lasting impact on the environmental history of the Sound. The relocation was a substantial undertaking. The Inuit had to be fed, employed, and housed, and their health and other needs met by an unprepared community and infrastructure. They were initially accommodated in snowhouses furnished with a duck-cloth inner lining to make them habitable for the duration of the winter.

Not all Inuit were keen to relocate, despite their difficulties. The following observations about Tuakjuak residents come from the area administrator's report following Murdoch's second trip to the Sound.

[...] The members of this camp have always shown a great independence and have preferred to live away from the settlement. For this reason there may be some difficulty in persuading them to come into Pangnirtung in the event that their dog population has been depleted by disease. For this reason we feel it would be advisable, when attempting to make a landing at this camp, to bring as much food and ammunition as possible to be left in case the people decided to stay. [...] Should these people agree to move into Pangnirtung, there would be no possibility of getting them back to their camps during the summer. Weather conditions around Cape Mercy would prevent our being able to use the Police Peterhead to return them to their camp. It has been suggested that these people might be able to camp at Brown Harbour close to Pangnirtung during the summer, and if the dog situation improved, return to their camp during the fall of this year (Zukerman 1962a: 5).

There is also a note in Zukerman's report that gives some clues as to the fate of Charlie Akpalialuk, subsequently held responsible by many Inuit for introducing distemper to the region. He writes:

[...] Charlie was the leader of the party which came to Frobisher Bay in the fall and returned carrying the dog epidemic. It appears that this has affected his mind and become very withdrawn and moody (sic). The men reported that his condition had deteriorated to such a point that he required continuous supervision. On the return trip to Frobisher Bay Mr. Murdoch called into this camp to evacuate Charlie. It was found that the Eskimo men had secured Charlie using ropes. He was tied hand and foot and was tethered to the sides of the house. Charlie's young son was also tied so he could not escape. Both Charlie and his son were taken aboard the plane and evacuated to Frobisher Bay. Cpl. Alexander accompanied Mr. Murdoch on the return trip to Frobisher Bay to assist in this evacuation. It would appear that the Eskimo people did blame Charlie and the others for bringing the epidemic to Pangnirtung. Their attitude toward Charlie and his son was most antagonistic and it is felt that this has much to do with the mental condition of Charlie. The child, aged approximately 3 years was also said to be insane, however his condition was not apparent upon evacuation (Zukerman 1962a: 5-6).

The archival records provide many other details of life in Pangnirtung after this relocation. Clearly, the dogs were important and their loss significant, to the extent that the loss drove Akpalialuk insane. This outcome was probably related not merely to awareness of the economic loss brought on by his actions, but also to the cultural and spiritual implications. Initially, the Department of Northern Affairs expected and encouraged Inuit to return to their camps, fearing the welfare dependency that might otherwise develop in the community. Dogs were purchased by officials acting on behalf of the department from Kuujjuak, Arctic Quebec, and from Pond Inlet to replace those lost in the epidemic. They also died, most likely from distemper.

The anxiety among Pangnirtung Inuit was likely considerable. The snowmobile was not yet seen as a replacement for dogs, and being relocated to Pangnirtung without any means to return to familiar hunting areas left Inuit vulnerable and dependent upon Qallunaat and their institutions. While some families returned to their camps, many stayed in the settlement. Evidence presented at the Qikiqtani Truth Commission hearings suggests that the RCMP, fearful of the spread of distemper from land-based camps to Pangnirtung, shot dogs in some camps before families migrated to the community. Because the RCMP officers did not speak Inuktitut and were unaccompanied by a special Inuk constable who could explain their actions, the result was to cause considerable confusion and distress among the families affected. By 1966 those families that had returned to camp life had relocated back to Pangnirtung.

In settlements, the relationship with the RCMP changed. What happened depended on the attitudes, values, and inclinations of individual officers, most often posted to a settlement for two years. Inuit relocated to communities with their dogs. While some Inuit were able to purchase snowmobiles for the remainder of the 1960s, dog-teams, while declining in number, remained important for hunting and travel. Ironically, snowmobiles (costing between \$1,000 and \$1,500 in the mid 1960s) were most

affordable for those who earned wages in Arctic settlements and thus had the least time for hunting.

Sled dogs and community life collided. Inuit were poor. In Pangnirtung, income for those relocated was a major concern. Discussions with former RCMP officers about how Inuit were to be supported reveal that Qallunaat officials were fearful of creating dependency relations and undermining the work ethic if they were too generous. But it was not a work ethic that governed Inuit relations at the time. It was an ethic of reciprocity and sharing; one that government officials did not want extended to the resources of the State. A well-intended objective of supporting people (minimally) in dire circumstances was also an opportunity to introduce the logic, rationale, and rules of a colonising culture. In a memo on the matter, Regional Administrator Harold Zukerman referred to “our discussions”—presumably involving himself, Peter Murdoch, and Pangnirtung RCMP Constable Calvin Alexander—in which it was concluded that a sum of \$20 (presumably per week/family, although not stated) would be sufficient if an inexpensive source of meat was available (Zukerman 1962b: 6). The suggestion was made that the department might have to fly in “a supply of surplus pork product”<sup>3</sup> for distribution, and that it not be handed out for free, but be paid for by reducing the price paid for crafts by the HBC.

In the same memo, the Area Administrator suggested ordering an “autoboggan” similar to the one used to assist “organised hunts” to obtain seal meat for the community. It was suggested that it might take four to five years before the dog population had increased to the point where dogs could again be used for transportation. However, it was also suggested that the autoboggan might replace large dog-teams as a means of transport. Although without support for his statement, Zukerman (1962a: 9) wrote that: “This in itself would be a good aid in game conservation as the large number of dogs requiring food in the Cumberland Sound Area has done much to deplete the seal population.”

Feeding and maintaining a healthy dog-team required considerable physical effort, getting out to the floe edge, and providing a team with at least one seal a day. In the camps, dogs were free to scrounge for food. In settlements, they were supposed to be chained, but the Inuit were reluctant to do so as there were implications for the physical health and strength of the dogs. The Inuit often had little choice but to let their dogs run loose in town, as they could neither afford to purchase dog food nor easily travel from town to distant hunting grounds in order to provide a team with seal meat. In some cases, the HBC was ill prepared and their stores did not sell chains with which to tether dogs. It was not something that, at the time, could be flown into settlements at a moment’s notice. Supplies often had to wait until the next sealift. Chain was expensive and not easily affordable for many Inuit. In the early 1960s, a yearly earned income of \$400 was not unusual. To live in settlements, the Inuit had to buy, heat, and pay for the

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<sup>3</sup> Later identified in a report by Constable Alexander as “Jamo,” canned pork that was in the Department of Northern Affairs warehouse in Frobisher Bay, and that would be sold to Inuit for \$5 for a case of 24 12-ounce tins (Alexander 1962: 3).

electricity of “matchbox” housing. In the early 1960s, a \$1,500 plywood “matchbox” cost \$10 a month, with heating costs being as high as \$40-\$50 a month (Tester 2006).

The presence of loose dogs in communities generated considerable conflict with the RCMP. It also generated conflict among Inuit, as loose dogs destroyed meat caches and sometimes attacked and injured Inuit children. In some cases, RCMP officers were sensitive to the problems Inuit were having adapting to settlement life. In other situations, RCMP officers were utterly intolerant of loose dogs and enforced the ordinance, which allowed them to shoot loose dogs and dogs in harness under the above-mentioned conditions. A team in harness sitting unattended outside an HBC store was vulnerable. Oral testimony before the Qikiqtani Truth Commission included accounts of dogs being shot in harness.

Between 1966 and 1968, the RCMP killed many sled dogs in Pangnirtung. In 1967, Constable Jack Grabowski (1967) filed a report indicating that he had killed about 250 dogs in the settlement. His report is cited and glossed over by the RCMP (2006) in their investigation into Inuit claims about the killing of sled dogs:

The dog population decreased rapidly over the past year. Some Eskimos disposed of their own dogs when they were able to purchase ski-doo's, while a good number were destroyed in contravention to [sic] the Dog Ordinance. Referring to the latter, numerous requests were made by myself and members of this Detachment to the Eskimos to keep their dogs adequately tied, or penned. When these requests went unheeded I gave instructions that all dogs at large were to be shot, and in the period of slightly over one year, I would estimate that some 250 dogs have been shot. This too, does not seem to have the desired effect, as almost daily, dogs are still seen at large. A new approach to the apparent passive resistance of the Eskimo has been taken, whereby the owner will be sought out, and he will be prosecuted. There are at present, an estimated 400 dogs in the Pangnirtung-Cumberland sound [sic] region, with an estimated 200 in the Broughton Island Padloping Island area. Dog teams are used in Broughton Island only as a last means of transportation (Grabowski 1967: 4).

## **Discussion**

The snowmobile that increasingly replaced dogs in the 1960s was, compared to sled dogs, a “thing”; a mystification made elsewhere by unseen hands in unknown circumstances. As Peltó (1973) argues, the snowmobile delocalises inputs to production, tying Inuit to social and cultural forces, as well as circumstances beyond their control. Subsequently, the price of snowmobile parts and fuel, unlike dog-teams and the resources necessary to operate them, comes to play a role in the economic, social, and cultural logic of hunting. Cash is needed more than ever in order to hunt. Cash can be found by increased participation in Qallunaat institutions, whose logic and relations challenge those of reciprocity within Inuit hunting culture.

In considering the change from dog-teams to snowmobiles and other imported commodities, the relations of production and consumption that accompany them should

not be underplayed. As noted by Wenzel (1995), sharing among hunters has been affected over time by changes in the value of products from the hunt and the impact of anti-sealing campaigns on the market for sealskins, as well as the necessity of wage employment. These changes have generated “a considerable undercurrent of conflict [...] between those who work and have equipment but no time and those who are unemployed and have time but lack fuel or gear” (*ibid.*: 54). This accords with similar observations made by the author in Gjoa Haven, Naujaat, Kinngait, and Arviat. Also illustrative are Wenzel’s (1995) observations on demand sharing in Clyde River and the emergence of counter strategies to avoid the losses of capital equipment experienced by subordinate lenders within *ningiqtuq* relations. The author’s experience is that the exchange value of an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) or snowmobile can generate considerable resentment, e.g., the case of a nephew who spent considerable time repairing a machine, only to have his uncle sell the refurbished machine and pocket the money without acknowledging his nephew’s labour. While it is true that new relations of production, consumption, and commodification can be accommodated within existing patterns of reciprocity, doing so often has limits.

The relationship between people and things is a dialectic one, things being adapted to meet human needs, and people changing their habits in reaction to the material objects in their environment. Using one’s human relation skills with a snowmobile has no effect on its performance. Mechanical skills are required as opposed to skills of personality and persuasion (and admittedly, often force) passed down for generations from one Inuk to another (Cummins 2002). A snowmobile comes with a price and can be sold for one. In the face of disaster, its body provides neither warmth nor sustenance. It requires no feeding, and hunting is limited to the skills needed to feed a family, and not also a team of dogs. Thus came to an end in the early 1960s, along the south coast of Baffin Island, the yearly cooperative walrus hunts undertaken to procure meat for dog-teams.

The speed and access afforded by snowmobiles lessened the need to build igloos for overnight accommodation. Inuit could travel in one day the same distance that took three days by dog-team. Once relocated to settlements, the Inuit hunting culture would have been difficult to maintain without snowmobiles. At the same time, the cash required to operate one made wage employment necessary, resulting in less time to hunt. Over time, small wooden or “matchbox” houses were moved by snowmobiles onto the land to accommodate hunters and families wanting to stay in their camps. Knowledge of snow conditions and the skill required to build igloos for extended hunting trips were affected accordingly.

The snowmobile has brought a different mentality. Its speed and capacity can give rise to an attitude of domination over landscapes and physical barriers to travel, rather than one of working with and around environmental conditions. In the spring, as the ice melts along the shore, some young Inuit now try to skim their machines across open water to reach the shore by approaching this gap at high speeds and skipping over the water’s surface. A number of deaths have resulted. The intimate knowledge of ice, land forms, and conditions essential to working the land with a dog-team have been replaced

among young people, to some degree, with an attitude of mastery over the environmental conditions encountered in travelling on land and sea. It is an attitude similar to those of extreme snowmobilers in mountainous parts of Canada whose attempts to conquer mountain slopes have also caused a number of deaths. Writing about Sami perceptions of weather and the environment, Ingold and Kurtilla (2000: 188) note that contrary to dogs, which are sensitive to ice conditions, in the use of snowmobiles, “any failure to judge surface conditions correctly can carry very real dangers for machine and driver alike.” Ingold and Kurtilla go on to state that people can come to see weather less through immediate bodily experiences and more as a matter of how it affects the performance of their machines. This observation accords with conversations young people have had with the author over many years about their snowmobiles, their attention being focused on how the snowmobile performs at different temperatures and in different snow conditions.

## **Conclusion**

The formation of Arctic settlements, as illustrated by the history of Pangnirtung, clearly involves a tangled and complex web of events and relationships, including the problems faced by Inuit in transitioning from camp life to towns and from dog-teams to snowmobiles. A focus on events risks obscuring relations that are key to understanding the forces, logics, and assumptions shadowing them. These relations include tenets and assumptions underlying the modernist and Enlightenment logic of a Canadian liberal and semi-welfare state. To appreciate the environmental and social history of the Canadian Arctic, we must also appreciate the replacement of sled dogs by snowmobiles.

Commodity relations are essential to understanding changes in not only use, but also the mental images that accompany changing interactions between the Inuit and the Arctic environment. At the same time, there is resistance. Some Inuit have kept and still promote the use of dog-teams and are anxious to see a younger generation acquire the skills and sensibilities required to work and travel with dogs.

Inuit are moving from a world impregnated with ritual, relationship, and meaning to one of impersonal, secular commodity relations. This transition explains why the fate of Inuit sled dogs matters so much. Understandably, Inuit elders made the fate of sled dogs a central concern of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission. The replacement of the sled dog with the snowmobile—what Sartre would call a “practico-inert” manifestation of dead (expended), and in this case imported labour—was as existentially significant an act, imbedded in the totalising relations of a Western, colonising and capitalist culture, as one could imagine. More broadly speaking, by comprehending such elements of social and environmental history, we may better understand the future of the Canadian Arctic.



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Note: LAC = Library and Archives of Canada

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