

# Inuit Identities, Language, and Territoriality

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## Article abstract

This paper provides a framework for understanding the social complexity of the linkages between language, identity, and territoriality (or attachments to place). Drawing on qualitative research among Inuit in the Canadian Arctic and in Ottawa, it discusses Inuit identities in relation to the role played by local, regional, national, and global processes in constructing Inuitness and the transformation of Indigenous identities nationally and globally. The paper argues that although Inuktitut is being supported by institutional and political structures in Nunavik and Nunavut, English and French have become increasingly important in daily Northern life. At the same time, Inuit migration to Southern cities has offered new challenges and established new priorities in the fostering of the plurilingualism necessary for urban Inuit life.

# INUIT IDENTITIES, LANGUAGE, AND TERRITORIALITY<sup>1</sup>

Donna Patrick

## Abstract/Résumé

This paper provides a framework for understanding the social complexity of the linkages between language, identity, and territoriality (or attachments to place). Drawing on qualitative research among Inuit in the Canadian Arctic and in Ottawa, it discusses Inuit identities in relation to the role played by local, regional, national, and global processes in constructing Inuitness and the transformation of Indigenous identities nationally and globally. The paper argues that although Inuktitut is being supported by institutional and political structures in Nunavik and Nunavut, English and French have become increasingly important in daily Northern life. At the same time, Inuit migration to Southern cities has offered new challenges and established new priorities in the fostering of the plurilingualism necessary for urban Inuit life.

Cet article offre un cadre pour comprendre la complexité sociale des liens entre la langue, l'identité et la territorialité (ou l'attachement au lieu). Reposant sur une recherche qualitative faite parmi les Inuits de l'Arctique canadien et d'Ottawa, j'y discute des identités inuites en relation avec le rôle joué par les processus locaux, régionaux, nationaux et mondiaux dans la construction de l'«*Inuitness*» et la transformation des identités indigènes sur les plans national et mondial. Cet article mettra en lumière que, bien que l'inuktitut soit soutenu par des structures institutionnelles et politiques au Nunavik et au Nunavut, l'anglais et le français sont devenus de plus en plus importants dans la vie quotidienne nordique. En même temps, la migration inuite vers les villes du Sud a présenté de nouveaux défis et a établi de nouvelles priorités dans la formation du plurilinguisme nécessaire à la vie inuite urbaine.

**Keywords:** Inuit identity, territoriality, urban Inuit, plurilingualism, indigeneity.

**Mots clés :** Identité inuite, territorialité, Inuits urbains, plurilinguisme, indigénéité.

IN THIS PAPER, I CONSIDER CONTEMPORARY INUIT IDENTITIES in relation to language and territoriality. Drawing on fieldwork with Inuit in Nunavik and Ottawa, I argue that Inuit language practices and the plurilingual identities related to these can be separated neither from sociohistorical attachments to place nor from the politicized nature of Aboriginal life in Canada.

The data presented in the paper come from qualitative, ethnographic research that examines language practices in historically constructed contexts of everyday life, where cultural 'difference' is articulated and maintained. In these contexts, the use of Inuktitut, French, and English function to construct linguistic and social-cultural identities, which have been shaped by broader processes of modernization, political economic change, and globalization.

These dynamic social and political processes speak to the need to situate analyses of linguistic and social identities in concentric global, national, regional, and local terms. Analyses also need to address the relationship between language and identity and between plurilingualism and linguistic continuity, and also to address transformations in the configurations of identity that have occurred in contemporary 'territorialized', 'deterritorialized', and 'reterritorialized' contexts. This last point about the 'territoriality' of identity is particularly relevant to the investigation of Inuit living in urban centres such as Montreal, Ottawa, and Edmonton, where, as we will see, new forms of identity are emerging.

In what follows, I will offer a general discussion of the concept of identity and the interplay of global and national forces in the construction of indigeneity in Canada. I will then discuss the links between language and identity, drawing largely on my research in Nunavik (Northern Quebec). Finally, I will turn to some examples of emerging identities among urban Inuit in Ottawa and the relation between language, identity, and territoriality in urban centres. The aim of my analysis is a basic one: to construct a framework for understanding the social complexity of the linkages between language and identity, a task that also involves understanding identities as socially positioned in particular historical, cultural, and political contexts. Although a fuller analysis will inevitably require a more comprehensive discussion of what it means to be Inuit, this must be left for future research. This means that the following discussion is best seen as a preliminary step in understanding the links between Inuit identity, language, and territoriality.

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## Understanding Identity

I begin the discussion with the notion of ‘identity’, broadly conceived as a socially constructed phenomenon created through contingent, strategic, and positional processes (Hall, 1996). According to this conception, social, cultural, and linguistic identities are not always ‘there’, waiting to be ‘discovered’. Rather, they emerge in the context of specific discourses, social interactions, and political economic constellations. In the context of everyday life, subject positions establish temporary points of attachment to particular identities, which are produced within specific discursive formations and which encompass linguistic, ethnic/cultural, racialized, gendered, and socio-economic identities. Accordingly, we might think of individuals as having particular identity attachments at any given point in time and space. These identity attachments are acquired through complex processes of socialization and are self-ascribed and ascribed by others, shifting and contradictory, and always mediated discursively through social interaction (Barth, 1969; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Garrett, 2007). However, identity formation can also be conceptualized as a collective social project that requires investment by actors in specific temporal and spatial operating frames (Bourdieu, 1991; Calhoun, 1995). Such collective identities can coalesce around larger categories such as race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender, and also include belonging to particular professional or situational social groups, such as authors, teachers, social cliques or peer groups in schools (Johnstone, 2008, p. 151; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Articulations of identity are also social struggles in, through, and about space - struggles in which ideas of ‘race’, class, ethnicity, gender, and community are formed (Jacobs, 1996; Keith & Pile, 1993; Patrick, Tomiak, Brown, Langille, & Vieru, 2006).

### *Identity and Place*

From this perspective, multi-layered indigenous identities related to space can be seen as historically and culturally constructed, primarily through cultural continuity with ‘land’. This includes relationships not only with geographical areas, but with waterways, plants, animals, human beings, and the spiritual beings that navigate between them (Brody, 2000). Historically, these relationships have been complemented or transformed by new material and ideological practices, as introduced by colonial agents (such as missionaries and traders) and the state. While ‘place identities’ thus remain key to an understanding of indigeneity, this understanding also requires a recognition of the extent to which these identities have been shaped and reshaped by social and political processes. Similarly, language and various

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forms of plurilingualism have become intertwined with the processes that construct notions of indigeneity in Canada.

Accordingly, the notion of 'territoriality' as I understand it here encompasses both 'traditional' land-based beliefs and practices and the transformation of these through colonial contact and local, regional, national, and global processes. In the case of the Inuit of Nunavik, 'territoriality' involves attachments to the land and a sense of belonging to a 'place' or an Inuit 'homeland'. Significantly, language practices, including plurilingualism, are closely tied to these land-based beliefs and practices and have been transformed along with them. Language is thus linked to a notion of Inuitness itself, which includes the panoply of practices, beliefs, and attributes of 'being' Inuit.

In general, we can conceive of two territorial 'domains' in the Inuit communities of Northern Canada. One 'domain' is the settlement, and the modern housing and institutional structures that are fixtures there, which provide a sense of permanence as well as modernity. Here Inuit and non-Inuit interact in the day-to-day activities of social life and those related to teaching, counselling, nursing, and administration. In Nunavik, the 14 Inuit settlements function through the use of Inuktitut, French, and English. The other 'domain' is one that lies beyond the settlement, where Inuit livelihood and survival confront the more 'uncontrollable forces' of the natural and supernatural worlds (Gombay, 2005, pp. 422-423). Here, knowledge related to animals, the environment, and 'traditional' economic activities, such as the harvesting of food, is paramount. In Nunavik and the Eastern Arctic, the use of Inuktitut still dominates in this domain.

Of course, there is significant overlap between life on the land and life in the settlement, particularly with respect to Inuit practices linked to families and friendship networks (Patrick, 2003). Especially important here is the sharing of harvested food, a practice that seems to lie at the core of being Inuit. In Nunavik, this sharing, which proceeds along family and friendship networks, relies on the storage of game in communal freezers, which can be found at the centre of settlements. These freezers hold meat and fish obtained through the Hunter's Support Program, a product of the 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. Through this program, 'traditional' land-based practices and values have been incorporated into modern social structures and figure prominently in settlement life.

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Traditional language practices such as those associated with the bestowing of personal and geographical names also figure in Inuit settlement life. Personal Inuit naming practices often include notions of *atiq* and *sauniq* (Gombay, 2005, p. 421; Dorais, 1997; Brody, 2000; Joanasie Akumalik, personal communication, 2007). Briefly, *atiq* refers to the ‘soul’ of a person related to a name and *sauniq* to the person who has received the name. The newly named individual, or *sauniq*, is thus linked, via this name, to someone who has died, participating in the social relationships associated with that name, and the person who has died lives on in the newly named person, who inherits the deceased person’s set of kin relationships. Following these practices, a father might refer to a new child as ‘grandmother’ if the child is named after the father’s grandmother, and a female child can receive a male name and vice versa.

These naming practices are only one aspect of traditional Inuit naming. Another key naming practice links individuals to particular places by means of certain suffixes. Karla Jessen Williamson, a researcher from Greenland, notes that “as an Inuk, one usually identifies oneself as ‘of a certain area’ using the suffix ‘-mioq’ [which]... implies a strong sense of affinity with the dialect-group-identified area of *nuna*; it is an acknowledgement of one’s own relation to the land of birth” (Jessen Williamson, 2006, p. 19).<sup>2</sup> Significantly, she notes about the term *nuna* that while it “is usually translated as ‘land’... it can also mean ‘total habitat’ including the sea, the ice, the mountains, the air, the animals, fish, and even souls and memories of events and the people who live in the past” (ibid, p.19; see also Nuttall, 1992). The plural form of this suffix is *-miut*, which refers to the collectivity of people in a certain area. This plural form is the same in Inuktitut, so that, for example, the people of Kuujjuaq, one of the Inuit settlements in Nunavik, are the *Kuujujamiut*. Such names can be seen to link smaller groups, such as those of family or clan, to the larger groups that are related to settlements and still larger regional ‘territories’. In other words, one can see identity, including linguistic and ‘dialect-group’ identity, coalescing around settlements and the regions in which settlements are grouped. As such, transformations of space, including the mapping and naming of territories and the resettlement of people when new settlements were established or closed down by Canadian government intervention - such as the closure of Killiniq in Nunavik (Dorais, 1997) and the forced relocation of Inuit to Ellesmere Island (Tester & Kulchyski, 1994) - have overlapped with transformations of language and identity.

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### *Identity and Political Mobilization*

Significantly, recent transformations of Indigenous space have resulted not only from state policies of settlement and resettlement but from the political mobilization of Inuit, First Nations, and Métis - collectively known as the Aboriginal peoples of Canada - for land rights. These peoples have maintained for decades that “they owned lands before contact with Europeans, that they made treaties... to share the land, and that after contact they never gave up their claims of ownership” (Turner, 2006, p. 4). The politicization of Aboriginal peoples to advance this position in the legal domain intensified after the Second World War. In short, this politicization has been reflected in efforts to win title to land that was never ceded to the Crown, redress for treaty rights that had been infringed upon, and hunting and fishing rights. It is perhaps no coincidence that important revisions to the *Indian Act* - a complex statute that governed numerous aspects of First Nations life - were made in 1951, during a post-colonial era when rights discourses were on the rise internationally. These policy revisions included a lifting of some of the most culturally assimilationist and repressive measures in the *Act*, including the 1927 ‘prohibition on giving or soliciting money for pursuit of a claim’ (Miller, 2004, p. 255). As Miller notes, the lifting of this measure most “certainly facilitated the formation of First Nations organizations” (2004, p. 79), organizations that shaped new forms of collective identities.

Mobilization, as reflected, in particular, in land claims struggles, intensified after the federal government’s 1969 *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*. This policy document, widely known as the ‘White Paper’, sought to abolish the *Indian Act* and the special status of First Nations, and gave rise to widespread protest by Aboriginal groups and others, who called for its withdrawal. One early result of this increased political mobilization was the 1975 ratification of the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*, which created Cree and Inuit territories in Northern Quebec, thus providing the territorial basis for what came to be known as Nunavik. At about the same time, another land claim had also begun, involving what would later become the Inuit territory of Nunavut. This claim was finally ratified in 1993, and Nunavut, carved out of the Northwest Territories, officially came into being in 1999. These and other redefinitions of traditional land bases, including those of the Inuvialuit in the Northwest Territories and of the Nunatsiavut in Labrador, have allowed new geographical imaginings to come into play, as geopolitical boundaries within Canada became legally redefined to include Indigenous claims.

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The period in which land claims were being negotiated also witnessed growing recognition of the need to maintain and revitalize Indigenous languages and cultures. This has led to calls to incorporate Indigenous languages into school curricula (see e.g., Patrick & Shearwood, 1999) and to have these languages recognized at the federal level (see e.g., Patrick, 2007a). These concerns have also led to recent appeals, most notably in the report of the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (2005), for funding to protect and promote these languages.

These political and legal struggles have thus gained momentum at the national level, but they have also gained momentum internationally. Even as neoliberalism dominated Canadian public policy in the 1980s and 1990s, leading to the retreat of the welfare state, there was a growing globalization of discourses that endorsed Indigenous rights and the recognition of these rights within nation-states. These discourses also fostered solidarity networks to combat the marginalization and low standards of living of Indigenous peoples and unwanted economic ‘development’ on Indigenous land, and enriched notions of indigeneity by introducing new forms of collective identity for Indigenous groups. For example, new forms of Inuitness have been constructed through supranational organizations such as the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). Founded in 1977, the ICC charter offers a supranational form of Inuit identity. Accordingly, the Inuit are “indigenous members of the Inuit homeland recognized by Inuit as being members of their people and shall include the Inupiat, Yupik (Alaska), Inuit, Inuvialuit (Canada), Kalaallit (Greenland) and Yupik (Russia)” (ICC, 1998).

These new territorial identities constitute particular discursive formations, which can articulate with local subjectivities - ways in which “individuals come to know themselves” (Garrett, 2007, p. 235) - and subsequently can shape (but not determine) local identities and social interaction. These discourses also dovetail with the articulations of Indigenous identity found in United Nations covenants and declarations, including the *International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries* (1989) and the *United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (1994) (see Niezen, 2003). Language practices, as already noted, are seen to be integral to these Indigenous identities, and language rights have been promoted through international declarations such as the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (1992) and the *Draft International Convention on the Protection of the Diversity*

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of *Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions* (2005), and through international movements to secure 'linguistic human rights' (see Patrick, 2007b, pp. 120-121). Such efforts appear to have had a significant effect on this aspect of Indigenous identity within Canada as well as beyond it.

We can summarize the above discussion as follows. The articulation of Indigenous identity in Canada and elsewhere in the latter half of the twentieth century has been greatly influenced by local and national efforts by Indigenous groups to maintain continuity with land and culture. However, Indigenous identities have also been shaped by global discourses, as reflected in Indigenous solidarity movements to improve the lives of Indigenous peoples and to confront neoliberal economic expansion and the destruction of the environment, among other issues. With the global promotion of indigeneity, the value and place of Indigenous languages and the need to 'protect' and promote them has meant that Indigenous languages like Inuktitut have received institutional and ideological support, not only as a marker of Indigenous identity, but as an important link to place and territory.

The question that these observations naturally raise, however, is what status Indigenous languages have in Indigenous communities where such languages are actually spoken - and, more specifically, how the bilingualism and plurilingualism of Indigenous communities like those in Nunavik figure in the construction of modern Indigenous identities. Answering this question requires an investigation not only of broad political and economic processes that shape language use in a community, but also of the practices of and attitudes behind day-to-day linguistic interaction. I will offer the results of both kinds of investigation in the following section.

### **Languages and Language Practices in Nunavik**

A crucial starting-point in seeking to understand the status of Indigenous languages in Canada is the recognition that these languages, when they are still spoken at all, must compete with French and English for power and status in Indigenous communities.

As it happens, Nunavik is one region in Canada in which traditional Indigenous practices and language use have remained strong, despite the onslaught of colonialism and changing economic and social relations in settlement life. There are a number of possible reasons for this. One is the fairly late arrival of English- and French-language schooling to the region: the late 1950s and early 1960s for the former and even later for the latter.

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Another is the availability of Inuktitut-medium instruction. The current school system, established in the late 1970s, introduced Inuktitut-medium instruction in the 1970s, with Kindergarten and Grades 1 and 2 classes conducted entirely in Inuktitut, after which instruction was either in French or in English (Patrick & Shearwood, 1999). A third possible reason is the relatively high Inuktitut literacy rates among Inuit in the Eastern Arctic, which were at least partly the result of the easy-to-learn system of syllabics, established through Anglican missionary work of the late nineteenth century (Shearwood, 2001). However the strength of Inuktitut is best explained, it remains the case that Inuit in this region still use the language in a broad range of contexts. This has meant that fluency in Inuktitut remains important for anyone wishing to be locally accepted as ‘Inuk’ – that is, to maintain legitimacy as an ‘authentic’ member of the Inuit community. (Arguably related to this is the fact that Inuit artists are able to promote Inuit filmmaking, music, and visual art, both within and beyond their own communities.) ‘Modernized’ or standardized forms of Inuktitut have also become important in the new language economy, to express concepts associated, for example, with new technologies and with contemporary political, legal, and social institutions. This has created a need among people working in this economy, including translators, interpreters, educators, and journalists, to develop new vocabulary to express these concepts.

It is also true, though, that French and English have also become important languages for speakers (see Patrick, 2003; Taylor, Wright, Ruggiero, & Aitchison, 1993; Dorais, 1997). In particular, employment in local Nunavik economies often requires English or French as well as Inuktitut. In addition, English and French retain their hegemony as official state languages through all levels of government bureaucracy, and remain especially important for such matters as taxation and pension benefits. These languages are also dominant in schools and the media – in the latter case, at least in part because of recent cutbacks to Inuktitut television programming – and in other forms of Southern culture.

Although English and French are both important in the Nunavik language economy, it is English that maintains prominence in the broader institutional, economic, and cultural spheres. It is also the language generally seen as necessary for engaging with state legal and political systems, in order to assert Aboriginal land rights,<sup>3</sup> to help to rectify past assimilative practices, and to win greater local institutional control – including, paradoxically, the need to implement more Indigenous language instruction. What is more, despite increasing access to French in Nunavik, and its increasing presence

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in provincially-run offices and local businesses, the language is still not widely spoken among Inuit, and many who are already bilingual in English and Inuktitut have not mastered it. As one Inuk woman noted during interviews that I conducted in one Nunavik community (Patrick, 2003, p. 133):

*“ Since I’m Inuk, English is my second language. The English came here and they wanted us to learn how to speak English. I really want to understand very much English. I have nothing against French; if I ever need a translator my son will translate for me.”*

This excerpt suggests something significant about the role of English in Nunavik: that this language’s long-standing presence in this region has given rise to new forms of ethnolinguistic identity. It also suggests that Inuit who do not speak French have been adopting a strategy for gaining access to French resources: namely, to have a child enrolled in the French stream in school, so that ‘someone in the family’ can communicate in the language should the need arise. In fact, this was a strategy that I frequently observed during my fieldwork (Patrick, 2003) and it has been playing a role in the creation of new plurilinguistic identities in Nunavik.

What the foregoing observations indicate about the role of Inuktitut, English, and French in Nunavik is not only that all three languages have become important resources in the construction of local Inuit identities in the region, but also one’s ability to speak Inuktitut can hardly be thought of as synonymous with ‘being Inuk’. Instead, bilingual and trilingual Inuit identities, associations with kin - based and regional groups, and attachments to land and territory all come into play in the construction of Inuitness.

### **Urban Inuit, New Forms of Territory, and ‘Inuitness’**

In previous sections, we saw how important a role place has in Inuit identity formation, where the place in question was Nunavik. Urban settings, however, are just as important in investigating the relation between language, identity, and place, particularly since over half of the Aboriginal population in Canada already live in cities, and this number is rapidly growing (Siggner, 2003). This section explores the emergence of Inuit identities in Southern cities, such as Ottawa, where over 1,000 Inuit reside. Here, state processes overlap with local cultural and social practices to shape and reshape social institutions, networks, communities, and identities.

In this discussion, a rather abstract, non-geographically-bounded notion of ‘community’ is at play. Based on a number of informal and formal

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interviews in Ottawa, we have documented how the urban Inuit community is constructed through social interaction in social networks, cultural practices, and institutional landscapes, similar to other urban Indigenous communities (Patrick et al., 2006; Patrick & Tomiak, 2007; Lobo, 2001). For Inuit, however, connectedness with the 'territorial' North is also a part of urban identities. This is because Inuit have, historically, geographically, politically, and legally, been imagined and positioned - and imagined and positioned themselves - as a distinct Northern people inhabiting the Canadian Arctic. Through land claims and political-legal processes, including the recognition of Inuit rights in section 35.2 of the 1982 *Constitution Act*, Inuitness is now often defined in relation to the traditional land bases of Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, Inuvialuit, and Nunavut. This means that urban Inuit have often been sidelined in these geographical imaginings, not only with respect to national bodies dealing with Inuit, but in the public imagination as well.

Yet, the complex and multiple processes occurring in urban settings have been redefining, expanding, and enriching notions of Inuitness, making these urban identities a significant part of contemporary Inuitness. In the context of urban Inuit identities - but similarly for Northern Inuit identities, as suggested earlier - these generative practices can be emergent, hybrid, and local (c.f. Bucholtz, 2002, p. 538), where these terms are used to characterize new ethnicities).

Given the continued connectedness of urban Inuit to the territorial North, as just noted, it is no surprise that traditional forms of linguistic and cultural capital, which originate in Northern communities, continue to play a role in the construction of urban Inuit identities. Thus, for those who have been raised in the South particularly - either as the children of Inuit who came South or as children adopted into Southern families - access to Inuktitut and Inuit place-based knowledge becomes important for Inuit identity.

This desire to be linked to the territorial North seems to be a common aspect of Inuit life in the South, judging from the findings of Patrick et al. (2006). There, we documented how Southern Inuit identities emerged as the political-legal climate in Canada changed, driven largely by constitutional recognition of Aboriginal rights and Aboriginal claims to traditional territory. The experiences of one Southern-raised Inuk woman, as recounted below, clearly reflect a growing desire for knowledge of, and a connection to, traditional Northern Inuit culture:

*"I didn't know much about the Inuit culture, my childhood home was filled with artefacts that I took for granted and did not inquire about. I didn't*

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*know the first thing about igloos or sled dogs, hunting or sealing, carving or throat singing. So when people did find out about my Inuit heritage and asked questions, I just made things up.*

...

*As an adult, I am striving to learn the more tangible cultural traditions. A good friend of mine is teaching me to throat sing and as my children hear and absorb everything around them, they are learning too.*

...

*At sixteen I worked for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and at eighteen I worked with the summer youth program at the local Inuit Centre. I have since been a part of the Inuit Community in Ottawa, volunteering, working, living, playing, and raising my children."*

(Patrick et al., 2006, pp. 15-17)

Similar sentiments are reflected in the narrative of another Southern-raised Inuk woman, whose sense of Inuitness and connection to traditional Inuit culture were fostered by involvement in Inuit organizations:

*"Upon graduation [from university] I moved to Ottawa. I started working as an employment counsellor, helping Inuit find jobs. Soon I moved on to the Inuit Head Start [preschool programme], where I stayed for several years. It was like regaining the childhood I should have had. We taught the children their language, their culture, everything to instil in them that they should be extremely proud to be Inuk. " (ibid., p. 18)*

In the interview excerpts just given, two Inuit women describe how working in Inuit-related spheres enabled them to seek out the Inuit linguistic and cultural capital necessary to define their own sense of Inuitness. Significantly, however, neither of these women actually acquired Inuktitut; their sense of 'being Inuk' was instead linked to particular practices and community networks, as well as to blood relations to Northern 'territorial' Inuit. In this sense, the processes that these Inuit describe can be seen as examples of a 'reterritorialization' of their 'deterritorialized' identities.

This process of 'reterritorialization', however, is not without tensions. These revolve around the linguistic and cultural diversity found among Inuit-identified urban dwellers, and the division which emerges between those raised in the North and those raised in the South. Arguably, such tensions arise from the distinct forms of symbolic capital that each group possesses: linguistic and cultural knowledge that defines 'authentic Inuitness', in the case of Northern-raised Inuit; and fluency and literacy in English, French, or both languages and the social capital necessary for urban life, in the case of Southern-raised Inuit. While these differences in linguistic and cultural

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knowledge and skills can create a boundary between community members with different territorial orientations, this boundary is neither fixed nor impossible to cross. Nevertheless, almost all urban Inuit we talked with desired some form of language instruction for themselves or for their children. Thus, despite the fact that community-based processes tend to unify Inuit as an important and recognizable force on the urban Aboriginal landscape, Inuktitut language practices remain salient in constructing Inuitness.

Of course, this basic division between Northern-raised and Southern-raised Inuit obscures various other sources of diversity within the urban Inuit community. During the course of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ottawa between 2004 and 2006, our research team observed a number of distinct linguistic and territorial identities among the members of this urban community, which shape both urban Inuit senses of self and individuals' ability to thrive in Southern cities. A key factor in the maintenance of such territorial identities is a financial one, related to the cost of travel to and from the Arctic. For many Inuit in Ottawa, especially those without high-paying government jobs and those from smaller Arctic communities, this has meant less direct contact with their home communities. Despite these financial and geographical constraints, however, many urban Inuit still maintain close ties to their home communities by communicating with members of these communities by telephone or through the Internet. Some also maintain contact with their home communities by interacting with Inuit visiting Ottawa to receive medical attention. Thus Inuktitut and its maintenance remain important for many Inuit in cities.

Notwithstanding this territorial dislocation, then, communal ties continue to be an important aspect of imagined geographies for urban Inuit, with English and Inuktitut figuring in these relationships. Moreover, urban Inuit social networks may be based not only on gender and culture, but also on geography. For instance, people with relatives from particular regions tend to be identified with these locales, and people may at times coalesce around these geographical identities.

Of course, communal ties are also maintained to access valued traditional resources. Accordingly, one finds in this urban environment an increased reliance on social (often kin-based) networks, with an informal economy often developing to allow access to 'country food' such as caribou or fish from the North, which is distributed based on traditional Inuit values of sharing. The same informal economy can regulate childcare and provide income through crafts production and the like. In short, symbolic resources,

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including friendship, support, and solidarity networks, become vital in the use of familiar social strategies, imported from the North, to form new networks in the city.

It is worth noting that English use has increased in urban environments and is part of all of the practices just described. Thus, parents who are fluent in Inuktitut upon arrival in the South are not always successful in passing the language on to children being raised in the South. This claim finds support in the interviews that we have been conducting with Inuit parents in Ottawa, who have noted the need for Inuktitut language instruction in pre-school and after-school classes for their children. Inuktitut has become a key cultural resource in Southern environments, not only for defining Inuitness, but also for providing access to valued Northern resources, including connections to family, heritage, and place. As more Inuit move to Southern cities, more effort will be devoted to maintaining ties to the territorial North.

The points raised in the foregoing discussion suggest that the very notion of Inuit identity needs to be reconceptualized, to encompass bilingual and plurilingual Inuit identities and the linkages between language and identity for Inuit. For a relatively small number of people – approximately 1,000 in a city of 1,000,000 – the Inuit population of Ottawa displays highly differentiated linguistic abilities, cultural knowledge, and socio-economic status. Nevertheless, as documented in other urban Aboriginal settings,<sup>4</sup> individuals coalesce around common activities and a common heritage. Urban Inuit also coalesce around a common sense of connectedness to the territorial North, even if physical ‘connectedness’ to this North is absent (Lobo, 2001; Howard-Bobiwash, 2003; Proulx, 2003; Weibel-Orlando, 1991). Seen in this light, linguistic pluralism and identity formation are as much issues for Southern Inuit as they are for Northern Inuit, and Inuktitut, English, and French are all important linguistic markers of what it means to be an Inuk in the twenty-first century.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to describe Inuit identities in relation to the transformation of Indigenous identities in Northern Quebec and Canada, and shown how local, regional, national, and global processes play a role in constructing Inuitness. These processes need to be taken into account in order to understand how people become attached to particular geographical configurations and how these are transformed across time and space. While

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Inuktitut is being supported by institutional and political structures in settlement life, the use of English and French have become increasingly important in daily Northern life. At the same time, however, Inuit migration to cities has offered new challenges and established new priorities in the fostering of the plurilingualism necessary for urban Inuit 'survival'.

As I have shown, the research reported in Patrick et al. (2006) on urban Inuit has documented strong links to the territorial North and the desire for the linguistic and cultural capital which would facilitate the maintenance of these links. Since Inuktitut linguistic capital is difficult for Southern-raised Inuit, some Inuit opt for the more 'tangible cultural traditions' which are more easily accessible. Nevertheless, global, regional, and local discourses emphasize the importance of Indigenous land and language rights and the role of these in marking indigeneity. These larger discourses on Indigenous rights, language, and culture have shaped what it means to be Inuit in new ways, and many urban Inuit now wish to access Inuktitut linguistic and cultural resources through community-based programs and activities (Patrick & Tomiak, 2007). The desire for Inuktitut language resources, in particular, highlights the importance of this as a symbolic marker of Inuit identity, since English and, to a lesser extent French, are the languages valued and more widely used in the city. Inuktitut, in this case, becomes a significant medium in social interaction; it not only serves as a valued symbolic resource in defining Inuitness in a general sense, but is used to discursively link Southern Inuit to the territorial North. Thus, despite the deterritorialization of urban settings, and relative ease with which Inuit reterritorialization can be achieved through cultural practices, the links between language, territoriality, and Inuit identities remain strong. This leaves the door open for more research on Inuit plurilingualism in urban settings, as new forms of language practice emerge, as Inuit migration and community-building continue to expand in cities.

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## **Biography**

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Although Jessen Williamson writes about Greenland and Greenlandic, the same naming practices apply to Inuktitut, which is closely related to Greenlandic.

<sup>3</sup> The idea that knowledge of dominant languages has become important in the fight for Aboriginal land rights can be seen in the biography of Frank Calder of the Nisga'a First Nation, who was specifically encouraged by his family to seek higher (English-medium) education in order to take the Nisga'a land claim to court. The Canadian Supreme Court's 1973 *Calder* decision was a crucial one in the fight for legal recognition of Aboriginal title in Canada.

<sup>4</sup> According to Lobo (2001), for instance, new conceptions of Aboriginal space and place are being formed in urban centres. Urban Aboriginal communities emphasize participation, shared community activities, and networks of cooperation. While these communities are linked to rural spaces and traditions - links which can often be conceptualized as extensions of rural territories - the particular nature of these linkages vary among people and communities.

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