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Sentient Beings, Hunting, and Respect*Animals and Inuit Cosmologies in the Canadian Arctic*

ABSTRACT Drawing on Canadian Inuit oral traditions from the 20th and early 21st centuries, this article discusses the roles of animals in Inuit cosmologies. In these societies, hunting remains an important activity, and animals are regarded as sentient beings. They are partners in life. They are at the core of social rhythms and the basis of society. They remain omnipresent in myths and practices. They have agency and are full-fledged actors in Inuit history. Their skins and flesh are shared within the community. The killing of animals is regulated by specific rules, and the Inuit know they have an obligation to hunt them, thereby demonstrating their respect. Conflicts with Westerners about how to preserve and treat animals are frequent. Animals remain anonymous beings, whereas humans, through their names (*atiit*) passed down from generation to generation, are connected to relatives and inscribed in a different temporality and life cycle. **KEYWORDS** Inuit, animals, ontologies, hunting cultures, oral traditions, perceptions

INTRODUCTION

In the West, the ontological and animalistic turns have radically altered the way we look at non-human animals, making them active subjects in their own right, and no longer merely objects. These trends break away from a five-century-old paradigm that took root with modernity. Today, so-called multispecies or interspecies anthropology has opened up new perspectives by looking at our entanglements with all forms of life, analytically and politically.¹ This represents a bold initiative to re-enchant the modern world, but it proves rather difficult to understand in worlds that have neither the same history nor the same conceptions as those of Westerners. Indeed, in non-Western worlds, there's often no need to attribute souls, emotions, agency, or perspectives to animals; this would be tautological. Inuit maintain a strong bond and intimate acquaintance with them.

In collectives where animism predominates, as defined by anthropologist Philippe Descola,² animals are never symbolically equal, and hierarchies still exist.³ Certain animals

1. S. Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography," *Cultural Anthropology* 31, no. 4 (2010): 464–492. See also the seminal work of Deborah Bird Rose, Thom Van Dooren, Anna Tsing, Eric Baratay, and Vinciane Despret, to name a few.

2. Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

3. Barbara Noske, "Speciesism, Anthropocentrism and Non-Western Cultures," in *Social Creatures: A Human and Animal Studies Reader*, ed. C. F. Flynn (Lantern Publishing), 77–87.

stand out. For example, the bear in the northern hemisphere is conceived as a subject set apart. Human-animal relationships are also understood differently depending on the context: whether shamanic, mythical, or of the hunt. In all cases, though, the transformation of humans and animals is a common phenomenon. In hunting contexts, Inuit juxtapose predators (humans, wolves, bears, etc.) with prey and they connect beings that share similar forms and behaviors.⁴

Here, I'd like to put forward two observations. The first concerns cosmological schemas. It seems that with Christianization and sedentarization, the Inuit animistic schema gradually declined in favor of the naturalistic one, which gained power through the strong Canadian assimilation program, via education, and the eventual acceptance of a form of governmentalization. This happened most particularly after World War II. Yet the analogical schema—referring to the capacity to connect different elements through analogies or correspondences—has tempered matters by preventing naturalism from predominating over other schemas. The analogical schema seems to be on the rise, especially through the importance of *Sila*, which is the order of things and the agency governing the universe. The second observation is that the place of the animal remains fundamental to the Inuit, primarily because of the persistent idea that animals have their own agency and must be hunted in order to regenerate themselves. For the Inuit, animal skins and meat are what make human society possible through sharing practices, and any hunter has to celebrate their first catch.

Yet, animals cannot be considered subjects in the same way as humans. They experience a regenerative life cycle, and have no names and no genealogical connections.⁵ What anthropologist Robert Brightman writes about the Rocky Cree of Manitoba is true for the Inuit:

The animals are endlessly regenerated and yet they are finite. I am more powerful than the animal because I kill and eat it. The animal is more powerful than I because it can elude me and cause me to starve. The animal is my benefactor and my friend. The animal is my victim and adversary; the animal is different from me, and yet it is like me, as much like me as its ancestors were in the earliest time of the world.⁶

I propose to revisit the history of the Inuit and their relationships with some animals in order to grasp Inuit human-animal dynamics and clarify contemporary conflicts. To begin, let us recall that since they migrated to North America from Siberia 4,000 to 5,000 years ago, the Inuit have always depended on the meat of the game they hunt. As anthropologist Vladimir Randa has clearly shown, Inuit distinguish between land animals, that is, “those that walk” (*pisuktit*), marine mammals, “those that breathe” (*puijiit*), birds

4. Vladimir Randa, “Qui se ressemble s’assemble. Logique de construction et d’organisation des zoonymes en langue inuit,” *Études Inuit Studies* 26, no. 1 (2002): 71–108.

5. Frédéric Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Hunters, Predators and Prey: Inuit Perceptions of Animals* (Berghahn Books, 2015); Frédéric Laugrand and Francis Lévesque, eds., “Bestiaire inuit à l’ère des changements climatiques,” *Études Inuit Studies* 41, nos. 1–2 (2017).

6. Robert Brightman, *Grateful Prey: Rock Cree Human-Animal Relationships* (University of California Press, 1993).

“those that fly” (*tingmiat*), fish (*imarmiutait*), small creatures (*qupirruit*) and domestic animals, which include their dogs (*qimmiit*) and those raised by non-Inuit.⁷ The terms *uumajuit/nirjutit* refer to the animals they eat, but they are not truly equivalent to the generic term “animal.” For convenience, however, they can be translated as such. In Inuktitut, Inuit prefer specific categories, and their relationships with these animals vary according to each category. Animals can also be deceptive and suddenly transform into other beings.

Today, elders continually point out that Inuit would not exist without the animals that offer themselves to humans, but this attachment is accompanied by perceptions that are gradually changing. The long history of the Inuit reveals continuities as well as ruptures in their relationships with these sentient beings. I propose to address this centrality of animals through four points, which are each presented below: (1) hunting is an obligation Inuit have to prey animals; (2) human life cycles and shamanism are intertwined with animal relations; (3) the adoption of Christianity and the rise of the Canadian state have changed how Inuit interact with animals; and (4) wildlife quotas and resource management approaches tend to conflict with Inuit traditions in fundamental ways.

I begin by exploring, through a series of myths, how in a world centered on predation, animals are partners, prey, or tricksters. I then examine how human-animal relationships have undergone major transformations in the last two centuries, due to the arrival of whalers, fur-trading networks, Christianization, and assimilation policies imposed by the Canadian state. The focus will be on breaking points, but also on continuities and resistance.

Since the 1970s, the Inuit relationship with animals has revealed areas of friction with biologists and ecologists, and these conflicts persist today, even if the Inuit have won important victories since the creation of the Nunavut territory in 1999. The current ecological catastrophe seems to be bringing Inuit and scientists closer together than ever before, particularly with regard to the idea that animals act as sentinels: they perceive what is happening, they adapt accordingly and act as messengers of the future. Their behavior is likely to inform humans.⁸ However, contrasting ontological perspectives remain. Inuit hunters believe that the more one hunts and shows respect for animals, the more animals will appear and be available as a food source.

HUNTING AS A MORAL OBLIGATION: PARTNERS, PREY, AND TRICKSTERS

Oral traditions, myths, and ritual practices show that the Inuit have always attributed consciousness, intelligence, and feelings to animals. They claim that animals have their own communities, and can sometimes take on human appearances. Famous ethnologist

7. Vladimir Randa, “Inuillu uumajuillu: Les animaux dans les savoirs, les représentations et la langue des Iglulingmiut,” PhD dissertation (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1994).

8. Birds, in particular, notify humans. See, for example, Ann Fienup-Riordan with Alice Rearden, *Nunakun-gguq Ciutengqertut: They Say They Have Ears Through the Ground* (University of Alaska Press, 2020).

Knud Rasmussen⁹ recorded the story of “owls who spoke and lived like human beings” and foxes who lived like humans and had their own shamans.¹⁰ Animals are indeed social beings like humans, but this sociality is understood in animal terms and has nothing to do with *human* sociality. Animals are anonymous beings destined to be killed by hunters; their natural cycle is one of regeneration.

Hunters, in contrast, pass on names that give human offspring an identity, obligations, and a social network, but also other ritual requirements. They are obliged to kill the animals who offer themselves so that both animals and Inuit can thrive. A myth recounted by Nunavik elder Tivi Etok sets out the moral obligation of the hunter. The story goes that a man once refused to kill a baby walrus because of his size and tiny tusks. Then the animal begged him, saying, “Harpoon me, because I’d like to drink some water.” Feeling rejected, the young walrus fled toward the walrus herd, to whom he shouted: “He doesn’t want us! He doesn’t want us!” At these words, the whole herd fled and disappeared. Then, all kinds of animals, including birds, heard the walrus and abandoned the area in their turn, causing a great famine in the region. The great hunter’s entire village perished from the famine. The narrator then explains the meaning of the walrus’s injunction:

When the infant walrus said: “Harpoon me, for I would like to drink a little water,” it was said to mean: “Accept me, so that there may be an abundance of game.” All creatures of Creation should be accepted. It was also said that the animals would return to the region when the Inuit began to show them more respect. These days, the region is not entirely devoid of game, but there isn’t an abundance of it either.”¹¹

In this story, which incorporates the Christian conception of Creation, the animal asks to be given a drink, a gesture that, in the past, hunters used to make once they’d killed their game. This gesture echoes that of the deceased who, in a dream, appears to a pregnant woman and asks for a drink, which she interprets as the transmission of the deceased’s name to her infant. In the hunter’s tale, this injunction does not herald life, but marks the necessity of animal death. However, the walrus’s future harvest will give life to humans and regeneration to the animals. Meat and skin will be shared and transformed into clothing and tools. Animals will feed human society, while their souls—*tarniq*—will be able to reincarnate. In this way, hunting enables animals to change their skins and come back to life. Peter Arnatsiaq, an Inuk (singular form of Inuit) hunter from the village of Iglulik, once told the story of an old bear who was recognizable by his multiple facial scars: “[He] would return to his being after his meat was all eaten up. . . . In those days any animal used to return after they had served their purpose to the human kind; this was

9. Knud Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, vol. 7 (pt. 1) of *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921–24* (Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1929), 269.

10. Knud Rasmussen, *The Netsilik Eskimos: Social Life and Spiritual Culture*, vol. 8 (pts. 1–2) of *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921–24* (Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1931), 306.

11. Jobie Weetaluktuk and Robyn Bryant, *Le monde de Tivi Etok: la vie et l’art d’un aîné inuit* (Éditions MultiMondes, 2008), 109–110.

known as ‘*angiraaliniq*.’”¹² These scars were, of course, the marks of the dog attacks he’d endured each time he’d been captured and cut up. Animals possess a perishable body but they have an immortal soul, wrote Knud Rasmussen.¹³

Like the pregnant woman, the hunter has little choice. When an animal presents itself to the hunter, he must accept the invitation. The hunter knows, however, that every time he kills an animal he is taking great risks, for as Inuk hunter Ivaluardjuk once confided to Rasmussen, the animals’ *tarniit* must be the object of propitiatory gestures, “lest they should revenge themselves on us [Inuit] for taking away their bodies.”¹⁴ In the past, rules of abstention were to be strictly observed, and if a transgression was committed, the situation could quickly degenerate. But there’s nothing worse for a hunter than refusing prey that is offered to him—the game may disappear, resulting in famine. So killing animals is not just an obligation to live or survive, it’s an obligation that the animals themselves impose on the hunters. Animals do not fear being killed, even if the hunter sometimes has to lure and seduce them.

Hunting is not a matter of choice, but a moral obligation from which humans cannot escape. Only through hunting do Inuit and animals alike prosper. Humans must therefore accept the risks involved. Human society is possible only through the consumption and sharing of game. The humanity of a human being is measured by their ability to share meat,¹⁵ while inhumanity is associated with selfishness. A stingy hunter is therefore not behaving like a true human.

If animals are hunting partners, other myths explain that they cannot successfully be taken as social partners of humans. Certainly, humans and animals share a common origin, as explained by an episode in the myth of the Woman of the Sea, which relates how all humans and spirits—Inuit, Indians, Whites, and *ijirait*—are the product of the union of a woman and a dog. But these same stories also suggest that there can be no good matrimonial alliances between humans and animals. The second episode in the myth of the Woman of the Sea, known as *Uinigumasuituq*, “the one who didn’t want to marry,” tells how the young woman made a mistake in marrying a petrel and how this relationship angered her father and ended catastrophically. The father cut off his daughter’s fingers when she refused to obey him, and when the fingers fell into the water, they became sea mammals, while the woman sank to the bottom of the ocean.¹⁶

These myths point toward a contrast, a difference: despite their common origin—animals are conceived of as former humans who have lost their humanity—they become prey for human predators. The Inuit cannot conceive of these relationships being

12. John Bennett and Susan Rowley, eds. and comps., *Uqalurai: An Oral History of Nunavut* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 44.

13. Rasmussen, *The Netsilik Eskimos*, 165.

14. Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, 56.

15. Mark Kalluak, in *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*, ed. Jène Rahm and Shirley Tagalik (Presses de l’université du Québec, 2024).

16. Frédéric Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *The Sea Woman: Sedna in Inuit Shamanism and Art in the Eastern Arctic* (University of Alaska Press, 2008); see also Bernard Saladin d’Anglure, *Être et renaître inuit. Homme, femme ou chamane* (Gallimard, 2006).

reversed, except in the context of shamanism. Indeed, the shaman and their spirits (*tuurngait*) can take the shapes of animals.¹⁷ Animals or their spirit masters (*inuut* or God) can always take revenge on humans for mistreatment or over-hunting, or for wasting and not sharing meat. Many stories illustrate such abuses. The elders continue to warn younger Inuit, and explain that non-humans can respond to their abuses and transgressions.

Finally, some animals are considered to be tricksters and serious adversaries. For example, the Inuit have a difficult relationship with wolverines and wolves, except in the context of shamanism. The wolverine (*qavvik* or *qavvigaarjuk*) is an animal perceived as voracious and powerful.¹⁸ A predator, nomad, and scavenger, *qavvik* is also a thief, capable of endangering the humans he or she follows by destroying their meat caches. A sly trickster, the animal's cunning and determination make him or her a formidable adversary for other animals and humans alike. In Iglulik, in 1972, several Inuit accused a wolverine of killing and devouring a little girl, and this story shocked the village.¹⁹

While these characteristics have earned the wolverine a bad name in everyday life, they have also contributed to the wolverine's status as a powerful *tuurngaq*, an auxiliary spirit, in the shamanic world. The wolverine is an ambivalent being that arouses fear and dread among hunters. Their unique position derives from the fact that wolverines steal meat and are not edible themselves. They behave neither like prey nor like true predators, having an extraordinary ability to cunningly trick and steal, endangering adversaries and humans alike. In Inuit traditions, strength, determination, and snarling become useful qualities when acquired by a shaman from an animal. This is illustrated by the initiation of the shaman Niviatsian, who had to confront a wolverine.²⁰ Mariano Aupilaarjuk recalls receiving wolverine claws as amulets.²¹

In the shamanic language—the old language used by shamans across the Arctic—the wolverine is called *tulurialigaarjuk*, “the one with strong canine teeth,” explains Rankin Inlet native Felix Pisuk. According to Pisuk, the term *tulurialik* is used for the polar bear and *tulurialigaarjuk mikinnisqaq* for the ermine,²² showing that shamanically, these three predators are linked by the size of their canines. But these animals share another characteristic, that of having lived in primordial times with humans.

The Inuit have long cohabited with wolves.²³ With firearms, wolves no longer arouse fear. They are merely distrusted, perceived as large predators who compete directly with

17. David Turner, *Eye of the Shaman: The Visions of Piona Keyuakjuk* (Rock's Mills Press, 2018).

18. Frédéric Laugrand, “La perception du carcajou/glouton (*Gulo gulo*) par les Inuit du Nord canadien,” *Etudes Inuit Studies* 41, nos. 1–2 (2019): 243–264.

19. Jarich Oosten and Frédéric Laugrand, eds., *Travelling and Surviving on Our Land* (Nunavut Arctic College, 2001), 32–34.

20. Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, 121.

21. Jarich Oosten, Frédéric Laugrand, and Wim Rasing, eds., *Perspectives on Traditional Law* (Nunavut Arctic College, 1999).

22. Jarich Oosten and Frédéric Laugrand, *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Shamanism and Reintegrating Wrongdoers* (Nunavut Arctic College, 2002), 154.

23. Frédéric Laugrand, “‘They Taste Like *Tuurngait*’: Wolves and How Nunavut Elders See Them,” *Arctic Anthropology* 56, no. 2 (2019): 52–62.

humans and may take human form. Inuit elders preserve many stories about wolves. Hunters make links between the wolf and the killer whale, seeing both as great predators. This linkage is made by Inuk hunter Joelee Papatsie, from Pangniqtuuq: “the killer whales are the wolves of the sea.”²⁴ Wolves are known for speed, mobility, endurance, and physical strength. Humans tried to gain these qualities in the past through the use of amulets, which operated metonymically.

Strength and mobility make the wolf a hunter, and wolves are valued for fathering strong, sturdy dogs. Furthermore, the ability to destroy souls gives wolves a special place in shamanism. Shamanic rituals involving wolves are no longer practiced, but wolves, like wolverines and bears, are still associated with the spirit world, in particular with *tuurngait*.

According to some Inuit traditions, humans should not touch flesh that wolves have touched because such contact brings them metonymically into contact with the spirit world. This fact is sensed by dogs and is known to elders who have met wolves. Wolves may also harbor other entities—*tuurngait*, *kajjait*, and *ijirait*, non-human spirits that are prone to violence. Their souls require special treatment and may be controlled by shamans. These are all reasons for mistrust. The wolf is inedible, a sneaky attacker, carnivorous, cannibalistic, and a soul destroyer in shamanism. In the hunting context, wolves are blamed for declining caribou herds.

In contrast to wolverines and wolves are bears and dogs, thought of as playmates with each other (*illuriit*), and so close to humans. According to the Inuit, bears, like humans, possess *isuma*, intelligence, and are reputed to be excellent hunters, so much so that hunters draw inspiration from their techniques. In the past, bear cubs were sometimes adopted, housed in igloos, and then released. Nonetheless, bears are said to have lost their humanity and are no longer part of human society.

In shamanism, the bear is omnipresent in gestures, formulas, and images at every level of the symbolic universe.²⁵ From the smallest miniatures made by the Dorset people who migrated from Siberia to the giant (as illustrated by narratives of giant bears, *nanurluit*), the bear occupies a central place in Inuit traditions. In a seminal book, anthropologist Irving Hallowell showed that this bear complex was circumpolar.²⁶

Death rituals once associated with bears show that they are not like other animals.²⁷ In the past, when a bear was killed, the remains were shared and distributed among members of the entire Inuit community, and weapons were temporarily given to the bear. As the giver of objects (such as weapons and tools) and knowledge, the bear embodies an ancestral figure or a big brother. Straddling multiple frontiers, such as those of land and sea, and accumulating statuses and roles—predator and prey, human and

24. Carlos J. Idrobo and Fikret Berkes, “Pangnirtung Inuit and the Greenland Shark: Co-Producing Knowledge of a Little Discussed Species,” *Human Ecology* 40, no. 3 (2012): 405–414.

25. Vladimir Randa, *L'ours polaire et les Inuit* (Paris, Sela, 1986).

26. Irving Hallowell, “Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere,” *American Anthropologist* 28, no. 1 (1926): 1–75.

27. Franz Boas, *The Central Eskimo* (University of Nebraska Press, [1888] 1964).

non-human—the bear is a remarkable mediator capable of effecting transformations, often the most delicate of which is that of converting a man into a true shaman.

Women may turn into bears to take revenge on men, which led to the interpretation of bears as “super-male.”²⁸ If the bear’s masculinity is marked, it is however their ancestral humanity or fraternity that really distinguishes them from other animals.

The use of bear body parts in amulets reveals the extent of their powers. Bear amulets were used by men and women alike. Bear teeth and hair provided strength and endurance, and other amulets show the bear’s positive role in reproduction, hunting, and protection against evil spirits.

The bear’s humanity seems to be the most salient element, and this is what sets it apart from other animals. From this point of view, the Inuit consider that a person who has eaten human flesh during a famine is forbidden to eat bear meat, which is considered to be very close to that of humans and therefore likely to trigger insatiability for human flesh.

Contemporary bear hunts have changed extensively but require great care from hunters who have to avoid talking about their prey, as bears can understand human language and thought.²⁹ One Inuit story relates how the true identity of bears who appear in human form when visiting humans was once revealed. When an Inuk asked these bears what their names were, the bears could only reply “bear.” Unlike humans, bears can be killed and eaten precisely because they don’t have the same social identity as humans.

Unlike the bear, the dog has a name given by their master, which makes dogs full-fledged members of human society. As we will see later, this distinguishes the dog from all other animals, who remain anonymous beings destined to feed humans.

Whether they are described as competitors, tricksters, hunting partners, or companions, animals do not belong to human society. Yet, sometimes human and animal life cycles become intertwined. The famous myth of Arnaqtaqtuq tells of just such an event. In a version by famous Inuit storyteller Celestin Iqijjuk, a rejected and anonymous fetus is repeatedly reincarnated in different bodies and beings, such as a dog, a seal, a caribou, until it is finally reborn as a human.³⁰ This indicates how a soul can travel through different bodies. However, the story begins with an abortion, suggesting that such a transmigration of the soul happens only when rules are broken. There is no indication that this is a normal trajectory.

FOLLOWING THE ANIMALS, SHAMANISM, AND SOCIAL RHYTHMS

Prior to the sedentarization of the Canadian Arctic in the second half of the 20th century, Inuit were nomadic peoples. They followed the migration rhythms of animals

28. Bernard Saladin d’Anglure, “Nanook Super-Male: The Polar Bear in the Imaginary Space and Social Time of the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic,” in *Signifying Animals: Human Meaning in the Natural World*, ed. R. G. Willis (Routledge, 1990), 178–195; Chris Trott, “The Gender of the Bear,” *Etudes Inuit Studies* 30, no. 1 (2006): 89–109.

29. George Wenzel, “Inuit and Polar Bears: Cultural Observations from a Hunt near Resolute Bay,” *Arctic* 36, no. 1 (1983): 90–94.

30. Xavier Blaisel and Jay Arnakak, “Trajet rituel: du harponnage à la naissance dans le mythe d’Arnaqtaqtuq,” *Etudes Inuit Studies* 17 (1993): 15–46.

and moved with them. Anthropologists Marcel Mauss and Henri Beuchat have highlighted the main patterns that mark Inuit social morphology. They describe a time for nomadic life in winter, marked by large ceremonial gatherings, and a time for a more sedentary life in summer, with groups scattered in small camps across the tundra.

When commercial whaling started at the beginning of the 18th century, Inuit adapted to the new technologies and collaborated closely with the whalers. Shamans were often invited to join the crews.³¹ The overkill of whales by American whalers in Eastern Arctic waters meant the end of a long tradition of whaling in most Canadian Inuit communities. Many elders still remember the whaling of the past, and in their testimonies the great value attached to whaling comes to the fore. During the 20th century, whaling was prohibited by the Canadian authorities to ensure the survival of whales in Arctic waters.

In addition to whaling, Inuit took part in extensively killing foxes, wolves, bears, ermines, and many other animals for the fur trade. Why did Inuit so readily participate in these activities? The answer is rather simple: they needed this predation to live and improve their daily lives by having access to firearms, sugar, flour, and so on. Therefore, these activities didn't generate cognitive conflicts; rather, their needs started changing. Moreover, as game is always a gift due to the virtuous behavior of hunters, abundance of game must, therefore, be accepted. Descriptions of mass killings of caribou exist in several historical sources, including in Rasmussen's accounts.

Inuit hunters have a remarkable knowledge of animal ecology and movements. This knowledge was particularly crucial for caribou, who hunters awaited in precise locations and tried not to spook. In the past hunters thus respected numerous prohibitions concerning the trails used by these animals (*nabluit*), as they would wait for them and spear them either on the land or from their *qajait* (kayaks). Before firearms were introduced through trade with *qallunaat* (White settlers), they would even hunt them collectively, building cairns of stones to funnel them in a certain direction so that part of the herd could be killed with bows and arrows. Before the hunt, games and rituals would be performed, but these soon disappeared with the arrival of guns in the 19th century.

Sea game, though, remains accessible all year round, especially seals. However, hunters and their wives had to use ingenuity to obtain these meats. They often manipulated lures and did their best to seduce the animals, combining these two techniques. *Uutuq* refers to imitating seal movement on the ice. By *avaala*, singing to the seal, they would attract their game. Walrus hunting was particularly dangerous and involved hunters working together. The meat would be stored for months under stones in order to make *igunaq*, meat for feasting.

For a human being, major stages punctuate the life cycle with specific implications with respect to animals. For a man, the first game—or “ritual of the first time”—was, and still is, a fundamental step, and can be seen on the Facebook account “Inuit hunting stories of the day.”³² The young hunter must share his catch with his elders and,

31. Dorothy Eber, *When the Whalers Were Up North: Inuit Memories from the Eastern Arctic* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).

32. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/inuithuntingstoriesoftheday/>

sometimes, his *sanaji* (midwife), and refrain from eating it himself. Sharing rules are complex as some parts of the animal are prohibited to certain people. Obligations apply to every animal and mark milestones in the making of a great hunter. For a woman, important rules also existed during her menstruation and when she gave birth to a child. Women had to refrain from touching meat, or incur the wrath of the animals or their *inuut*, the master spirits. The aim was to avoid bringing the blood of procreation into contact with that of game, at the risk of attracting famine and misfortune. These rules, however, fell away when shamanism gave way to Christianity at the end of the 19th century in Nunavik, in the 1920s on South Baffin Island, and in the 1930s on North Baffin Island.

Shamanic knowledge was invaluable to locate animals. Many hunting problems were attributed to Sila, the spiritual force of the universe. The oldest shamanic traditions are therefore often focused on hunting, according to oral traditions.³³ The shamans of the past were said to be able to transform themselves into animals, or to cajole the Woman of the Sea into releasing animals to hunters. During *nakkajuq*, for example, the shaman would send their soul or their auxiliary spirits (*tuurngait*) to the bottom of the sea. At *tivajuut*, the winter solstice celebrations, shamans mimed a raven clawing at the earth to make it fertile for the coming hunting season (*nunagiksagtug*).

Certain animals, such as the raven and small bugs (*qupirruit*), remain deeply associated with shamanism (*angakkuuniq*). The raven is considered a creator of light who is essential for hunting and shamanism. *Qaumaniq*, the shamanic light, is what enables a shaman to see what is hidden, but it is also vision and knowledge. Interestingly, this relation between light and knowledge is still emphasized in modern concepts such as Inuit *qaujimajatuqangit*, “traditional knowledge that is still useful today.” Another form of light is provided by the *qulliq*, the lamp owned by women that lit the igloo and often seems to be connected to the *tarniq*, the small miniature image of a being that could be hidden in the lamp. The raven is not directly associated with the *qulliq*, but is covered with the soot produced by the lamp. Ravens thus appear to encompass the beginning of light and the end product of the lamp, just as they encompass day and night by setting up their alternation.

The raven is not a migratory bird, so is conceived as the one who marked the land. In many North American myths, ravens are tricksters associated with the origin of the world and their role has been marvelously studied by Russian folklorist Eleazar Meletinsky.³⁴ In the Eastern Arctic, we find the masked raven in the Sedna feast, either as the masked dancer creating pairs of men and women or as the *nunagiqsagtut* who cleanses the land and leaves imprints on it. The motif of the raven claw as a tattoo suggests an analogy with the raven imprints on the land. The imprints of the raven claws cleanse the land for hunting just as they mark married women for childbirth. The raven is involved in crucial

33. Frédéric Laugrand, Jarich Oosten, and François Trudel, *Apostle to the Inuit: The Journals and Ethnographic Notes of E. J. Peck* (University of Toronto Press, 2006).

34. E. M. Meletinsky, “Typological Analysis of the Paleo-Asiatic Raven Myths,” *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 22, nos. 1–2 (1973): 107–155.

temporal transitions: the annual renewal of the land for hunting and the transition of a girl into a young woman.

Ravens also play an important part in another process of transition: the birth and development of the hunter. Raven *aarnguat* (amulets) were worn by mothers on behalf of their sons and by young boys to protect them and make them good hunters. *Aarnguat* established lasting relations between the boys and the raven, who could protect them in times of need. *Irinaliutiit*, powerful words derived from the raven, also gave protection and strength. The raven also shows places where caribou can be found. In many respects, ravens are responsible for society without being really part of it, as seen in contemporary conceptions of the bird as a scavenger and eater of dirt and excrement.

Qupirruit, little bugs, have long been a source of fascination for the Inuit, who point out the need to respect them or risk punishment. On the tundra, these creatures—mosquitoes, beetles, and others—exist in great numbers. The term refers less to a zoological taxon than to a heterogeneous category, comprising a multitude of diverse creatures whose relatively small size is their common denominator. All *qupirruit* are related to each other, changing appearance and passing easily from one form to another. The size of insects is deceptive, since they can grow at will, taking advantage of their smallness to penetrate bodies, or appear as giants capable of modifying Sila, the universe, or, like worms, shake *nuna*, the earth.

These variations in scale perhaps induce a form of perspectivism, to use Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's term, where the point of view of the subjects, their perspective, varies from body to body, revealing a multiplicity of natures. Moreover, the physical characteristics of *qupirruit* are marked in descriptions in oral narratives and carved representations. They appear with their tails, winged bodies, numerous legs, stingers, and antennae. Humans, who perceive them as miniature beings on the scale of the soul, or *tarniq*, still fear their contact today.³⁵

Qupirruit are the opposite of consumable animals. They circulate everywhere, in the sea as well as on land, in the sky as well as underground, on and in the bodies of others, non-human and human. They transform what they touch or devour, hence their role in shamanic initiation, and their presence among the powerful, protective, and healing spirits of shamans. *Qupirruit* escape social life. They never die. To further underline their vitality, their bodies are often marked as hairy and as containers (abdomen or stomach). In this way, *qupirruit* consume bodies, and recycle flesh, multiplying infinitely. Some practices are fascinating, such as the use of lice to cure blindness. Difficult to see, lice easily disappear and were said to regenerate the blood of the body.³⁶ These abilities and the absence of precise boundaries make *qupirruit* ambiguous, unsocial entities that strike fear into the hearts of the living. For Inuit, the arrival of new insect species in the Arctic due

35. See, for example, Amanda Althoff, "Powerful Worms: Insects in 19th Century Yup'ik and Inupiaq Material Culture," *Archeology Review from Cambridge* 39, no. 1 (June 2024): 157–174.

36. Michèle Therrien and Frédéric Laugrand, eds., *Interviewing Inuit Elders*, vol. 5 of *Perspectives on Traditional Health* (Nunavut Arctic College, 2001), 200.

to global warming only reinforces old representations at a time when shamans are no longer available to make sense of them. As a result, these little beasts have lost much of their prestige and usefulness, namely their healing and protective powers, to become nothing more than malevolent or harmful entities. Nevertheless, they continue to inspire artists and fuel our imaginations. *Qupirruit* possess all the attributes of non-social beings: they are violent and frightening, attack by surprise, see without being seen, remain anonymous, appear and disappear unexpectedly, even defying death, which they do not fear. Their dominant feature seems to be their power of constant rebirth, in other words, their ability to pass from life to death, to link the world of the living to that of the dead, to which they belong but, nevertheless, escape.

Apart from *qupirruit*, most animals are consumed by the Inuit, who explain that they get everything they need from animals: food, of course, but also technology, care, and healing. Inuit believe all animals have to be respected, especially when it comes to hunting. Numerous stories tell of humans being transformed into animals, or animals being transformed into other animals as a result of human mistakes. Ivaluardjuk's tale of the ptarmigan's origin is illuminating.³⁷ It tells of an old woman who so frightened her child that the latter metamorphosed into a snow bunting. And as the woman then cried endlessly, she, in turn, was transformed into a snow bunting. Concerning whales, some Inuit hunters claim that they can become narwhals if they are improperly harpooned, or sea scorpions if killed in their sleep. These conceptions have not disappeared. Isa Koperqualuk, from Puvirnituk, a village in Nunavik (Quebec), explains: "You must never attack a polar bear by surprise, otherwise the bear may turn into a fox or, even worse, a ptarmigan."³⁸ This hunter added that ringed seals must be warned before they are killed, precisely in order to prevent the animal's transformation. It was for this reason that when hunters sang or played music to lull their prey (often seals) to sleep, they had to whistle beforehand to wake them up and warn them of the impending shot.

The Inuit predator ethic may be summed up by the following injunction: "Kill only what you need and share it with others." Indeed, when an animal was killed, meat and hide had to be shared, so that a stingy hunter was considered not to behave like a true human.³⁹ Animals are never afraid of being killed; they only fear that their remains will not be treated properly.

Inuit emphasize that, as human beings, their sociality is neither free nor acquired forever. It depends on their scrupulous observance of social rules and shamanic or Christian ritual injunctions. In a world where humans are so closely related to the animals with whom they communicate and interact, it is only by respecting the social rules and rituals inherited from human ancestors that people can preserve their social nature and identity. Bestiality is outlawed. Bones should not be burned, meat should not be wasted, and so on. But animals, themselves, have no taboos to follow.

37. Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, 164–165.

38. Avataq Cultural Institute, Northern Quebec Inuit Elders Conference (Avataq, 1984), 165.

39. See Imaruituk in Oosten, Laugrand, and Rasing, *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, 138.

CHRISTIAN CONVERSION AND SEDENTARIZATION: TRANSITIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS, AND RESISTANCE

The adoption of Christianity by the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic always preceeded the coming of missionaries. Through the distribution of Bibles and catechisms at trading posts, Christian ideas spread rapidly in the early 20th century. In several regions of North Baffin Island, Inuit adopted new practices and organized their own conversions. They enjoyed adopting new Christian names.⁴⁰ During his visit in 1922, archaeologist Therkel Mathiassen observed that the Inuit appreciated a crucifix of Jesus and converted without delay. Umik, a local leader, took charge of evangelization, and the first converts had to actually shake hands with dogs.⁴¹ This detail has often been used to denigrate the Inuit of the time, accusing them of sticking to a very literal reading of the Bible, whereas shaking hands was a very old Inuit practice. But knowing the position of the dog in cosmology, a true animal socialized by a name and attached to a master, these gestures say something quite different.

According to oral tradition, conversions took place by ingesting the meat and entrails of sea game, usually forbidden for consumption in the shamanic system and now cut into small pieces and swallowed in the manner of the Eucharist. These practices, known as *siqqitirniq*, a term that designates a difficult passage over the foreshore, marked the transformation of Inuit into Christians and the formal abandonment of shamanism as an institution. The adoption of Christianity enabled many Inuit to free themselves from numerous prohibitions related to diet and the treatment of animals (*tirigusungniq*). Conversely, new prohibitions were adopted, such as abstaining from hunting on Sundays, and praying in church before hunting. New animals also appeared among their shamanic spirits, such as lions and snakes. So, while the adoption of Christianity led to transformations, in terms of the underlying logic, continuities were still very much at work.

Yet, the Inuit also put up resistance, as they did in the face of numerous attempts by the Canadian state to introduce and develop reindeer herding in their region, mostly during the first half of the 20th century. Many missionaries and government agents were convinced that reindeer and caribou farming would put an end to the great famines. However, Inuit hunters showed little enthusiasm for these initiatives.

In the early 1920s, for example, when the Canadian government tried to introduce reindeer farming to South Baffin Island by importing animals and Saami herders from Norway, the venture quickly turned into a fiasco. After three years, the reindeer herd was decimated and the Saami herders returned home.⁴² Several conclusions can be drawn from this colonial experience. A first observation is the refusal to substitute herding for hunting. There are some exceptional cases of Inuit taming animals.⁴³ The Inuit, though,

40. Regitze Margrethe Soby, "Naming and Christianity," *Etudes Inuit Studies* 21, nos. 1-2 (1997): 43-78.

41. Therkel Mathiassen, *Material Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, vol. 6 of *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921-24* (Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1928), 235.

42. Frédéric Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, "Les rennes d'Amadjuak. Eleveurs saamis et chasseurs inuits en terre de Baffin (1921-1925)," *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec* XLV, no. 1 (2015): 59-74.

43. Simon Tookoome, *The Shaman's Nephew: A Life in the Far North* (Stoddart Kids, 1999).

are uneasy about controlling the sexuality of animals, who have their own agency. The idea of managing animals, therefore, posed cognitive and ontological problems.

A second observation concerns the Inuit attachment to caribou. Inuit make distinctions between reindeer and caribou; the latter are not considered domesticable because they are closely associated with non-humans. Before Christianity came, caribou were considered to belong to a spirit, or associated with the *ijirait*, the mountain spirits, or with mother earth, *nuna*, insofar as the shamanic language refers to them as *kumar-juat*, “the lice of the earth.” In fact, hunters say that reindeer meat tastes like water compared to caribou meat. And the movement of caribou herds always carries a cosmological connotation, and an association with thunder.⁴⁴ As for caribou bones, in the past, they were required to be treated with respect, meaning that they should not be broken for marrow or removed by women from certain places, such as fords, as they contain the soul of the animal.⁴⁵

Today, as in the past, caribou and seals remain the game of choice, the embodiment of country food par excellence, and part of Inuit identity.⁴⁶ Seal hunting is still the most common hunt on Baffin Island, and it is no longer subject to many taboos.⁴⁷ Seal blood is also of incredible value, not only because it cures many ailments but also because it warms the body.⁴⁸ In the 1930s, theological debates occurred regarding whether seals could be eaten on a Friday, like fish (since seals primarily eat fish), and whether they could be used for the Eucharist.

Even though hunting has changed radically since the end of true nomadic life after World War II, an attachment to this practice remains. Contrary to Canadian government officials who were convinced that hunting would soon disappear with sedentarization and schooling, Inuit never abandoned hunting. Quite the contrary, in fact. Skidoos, houses, and churches only enabled new practices, and with the creation of the Nunavut territory in 1999, one of the first decisions taken by the new Inuit administration was to reopen the traditional whaling hunts. In the 1950s and '60s, however, the Canadian government, which had implemented a policy of assimilation, feared the process was taking too long. To speed it up, its agents organized the mass slaughter of thousands of sled dogs, convinced that they were now unnecessary with the adoption of snowmobiles and a sedentary lifestyle. Further, officials considered dogs a nuisance in communities where Whites complained of the dangers of strays.

In 1999, Inuit elders described to Pita Aatami, president of Makivik Corporation, how the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) had killed their dogs in the 1950s and '60s. An elder stated: “It looks like there was an attempt at

44. Natacha Thorpe, *Thunder on the Tundra. Inuit qaujimajatuqangit of the Bathurst Caribou* (Tuktu and Nogak Project, 2001).

45. Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, 56–57.

46. Louis-Jacques Dorais, “Maqainiq et kiinaujaliurutiit. Un village inuit dans le Québec d’aujourd’hui,” *Globe* 4, no. 1 (2011): 53–70.

47. David Pelly, *Sacred Hunt: A Portrait of the Relationships Between Seals and Inuit* (Greystone Books, 2001).

48. Kristen Borre, “The Healing Power of the Seal: The Meaning of Inuit Health Practice and Belief,” *Arctic Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (1994): 1–15.

genocide when our dogs were killed, an attempt to annihilate us.” The killing⁴⁹ of the dogs was experienced as an attack on the Inuit population itself. This accusation of genocide is understandable given that dogs have names and belong to a human master (*inuua*). Dogs were named after other dogs or after living people, and the name gives them a name-soul (*atiq*) like humans. In the past, a very close relationship existed between humans and dogs in which they were conceived as close partners. This partly explains why killing a dog is perceived as a direct threat to the animal’s owner. A recent DNA study shows that Inuit brought their own dogs with them when they migrated from Siberia across Bering Strait to North America, about 4,000 to 5,000 years ago.⁵⁰ In the past, dogs were used to carry humans’ objects, hunt seals, and find fresh *agluit*, seal holes. Dogs could also be used for healing purposes. Today, they are now very popular in the context of dogsled competitions.

DEALING WITH HUNTING QUOTAS AND BIOLOGICAL CONTROL: ANIMALS FEEL EVERYTHING

Even if they have to be stalked, seduced, and tricked, animals act with generosity, willingly offering themselves to hunters as long as the latter respect them. Hunting is a controversial matter since Inuit do not accept that animals can be managed or their agency limited. Geographer George Wenzel brilliantly studied the conflict over seals.⁵¹ The film *Angry Inuk*⁵² also illustrates how seal hunting is not so much a problem of economy as a question of civilization. Conflicting views about bears also plague Inuit relationships with *qallunaat*, White settlers.⁵³ The case of the whale offers another significant example of disagreement as whale hunting was banned for a long time by the Canadian government.

For centuries, whale hunting has been and still is an integral part of Inuit culture, often involving the whole community. It provides opportunities to build individual prestige and requires sharing of *maktak*, whale skin and blubber. Traditional whaling was firmly embedded in a cosmological framework connecting whaling and shamanism. Men and women played parts in the whale hunt and their collaboration was essential to its success. The whale is still associated with the idea of a whole, involving and encompassing the community in the hunt and its celebrations.

49. Francis Lévesque, “Les Inuit, leurs chiens et l’administration nordique, de 1950 à 2007: Anthropologie d’une revendication inuit contemporaine,” PhD dissertation (Université Laval, 2008); Francis Lévesque, “Le contrôle des chiens dans trois communautés du Nunavik au milieu du 20^e siècle,” *Études Inuit Studies* 34, no. 2 (2010): 149–166.

50. C. Ameen, T. R. Feuerborn, S. K. Brown, A. Linderholm, A. Hulme-Beaman, O. Lebrasseur, . . . and A. Evin, “Specialized Sledge Dogs Accompanied Inuit Dispersal Across the North American Arctic,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 286, no. 1916 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2019.1929>

51. George Wenzel, *Animal Rights, Human Rights: Ecology, Economy, and Ideology in the Canadian Arctic* (University of Toronto Press, 1991).

52. Film by A. Arnaquq-Baril, ONF, 2016, 1 h 25 min.

53. George Wenzel and Martha Dowsley, “The Time of the Most Polar Bear: A Co-Management Conflict in Nunavut,” *Arctic* 61, no. 2 (2008): 177–189.

The famous whale hunt organized in 1994 to provide Noah Piugaattuk, an Inuk elder from Iglulik, with a taste of *maktak* before he died, played an important part in triggering the revival of whaling in the Canadian Eastern Arctic. Inuit who participated were convicted of breaking the law banning hunting, but most Inuit approved of the hunt and advocated for a resumption of whaling. After 1999, with the creation of Nunavut, the Inuit resumed whaling with great energy and enthusiasm. The revived whaling traditions show many features that were characteristic of the traditional whaling complex. Thus, whaling is still a matter involving the whole community, and even the region, as meat is shared among communities. Whaling is firmly embedded in a Christian religious context. Thus, a whale cannot be caught on a Sunday and any whale hunting has to be preceded by prayer and religious services. Today, many hunters believe that whales, like other animals, belong to God, who is their real owner. The idea that the whale is a conscious and sentient being is very much alive among hunters. Hunters in the Canadian Arctic emphasize that whaling connects Inuit to the past, and is closely entangled with the dynamics of Inuit traditions and knowledge, “Inuit qaujimaqatungit.”⁵⁴ In 2008, when the community of Kangiqsuaq in Nunavik got its first bowhead in a century, hunter George Anautaq Pirlurtuut clearly expressed this feeling of reconnecting with the past when he stated, “It makes us proud; we’re back with our ancestors.”⁵⁵

The killing of a whale is a key moment in the hunt: it brings great joy to hunters and to all those who depend on them for their survival. Simonie Akpalialuk of Pangnirtuuq put it this way: “A whale gives itself; it’s an animal you can feel completely, it’s something that gives itself to you and this point is so important in our beliefs.”⁵⁶

Despite the modernization of the hunt (use of a harpoon with an explosive head, etc.), continuities can be observed: hunters share and consume whale skin (the *maktak*), and the harpooner sometimes smears his head with whale blood. One of my PhD students, Emmanuel Luce, observed this detail in the summer of 2015 at Pangnirtuuq.⁵⁷ Now, the meaning of this gesture is offered to us by Rasmussen, who wrote 80 years earlier: “The more one could smear oneself over with blood and blubber when a whale was being cut up, the better, for this would please the Mother of the Sea Beasts.”⁵⁸

With the creation of Nunavut, Inuit regained some of their rights. They still challenge the biologists’ procedures and calculations. The situation applies not only to whales, but also to belugas, caribou, and polar bears. The case of the bowheads is interesting as the

54. Milton Freeman, Lyudmila Bogoslovskaya, Richard A. Caulfield, Ingmar Egede, Igor I. Krupnik, and Marc G. Stevenson, *Inuit, Whaling and Sustainability* (AltaMira Press, 1998), 60.

55. Frédéric Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, “‘We’re Back with Our Ancestors’: Inuit Bowhead Whaling in the Canadian Eastern Arctic,” in *Arvik! In Pursuit of the Bowhead Whale*, ed. R. Fréchette (Avataq Cultural Institute, 2013), 83–95; and “La préfiguration: une clé pour comprendre le rôle du chamanisme dans la chasse à la baleine (Arctique de l’Est canadien),” in *Hommage à Roberte Hamayon*, ed. N. Lucas, K. Buffettrille, J.-L. Lambert et al. (Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines, 2013), 234–260.

56. Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Hunters, Predators and Prey*, 353.

57. Emmanuel Luce, personal communication, 2016.

58. Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, 188.

hunters won the battle against biologists, who had to acknowledge their errors in the estimates they provided.⁵⁹

Today, another conflict concerns the polar bear, as the Inuit consider that this animal is not endangered but likely to adapt to new climatic conditions⁶⁰ and, unfortunately, is less and less afraid of humans.⁶¹ Hunters are demanding hunting rights, and are coming up against deep ecology head-on.

In short, for the Inuit, it is through hunting that human society takes shape and develops. This awareness that the well-being of animals depends on that of humans—and, conversely, that the well-being of humans depends on that of animals—is essential. The Inuit cannot be Inuit without animals. Being Inuit is not just an identity constructed by people, it is made possible by animals themselves. This conception explains why Inuit are so critical of biologists, ecologists, and wildlife officers who impose quotas and claim to know and manage the animals. In this respect, Inuit are completely opposed to zoos.

In Inuit worlds, humans are aware that the boundaries between human beings, spirits, and animals remain permeable and liable to disappear depending on the context, as transformations can occur between all these categories. For this reason, it is essential to maintain these boundaries through ritual. The alternative is entropy, the very end of society.

For the Inuit, a human being is a moral and social being by virtue of the names they have been given, which insert them into social networks. Animals enable humans to live, and like other non-humans, they can also punish those who don't abide by the rules. Living together means hunting animals and sharing their flesh, while respecting certain mores.

Today, in Nunavut, it is with the cunning notion of Inuit *qaujimajatuqangit*, “the knowledge of the past that is still relevant,” that the Inuit assert the precedence of their ideas, perspectives, and values. Against the perspectives of deep ecologists, Inuit wish to protect their environment at a time when the Arctic is undergoing major socioeconomic development (e.g., mining, tourism, shipping) by continuing their hunting activities.

Inuit hunters oppose severe restrictions to hunting. They also oppose the practice of tranquilizing and radio-collaring animals. They believe these disrespectful practices will make animals flee. Progress has been made by Inuit, and both federal and provincial governments, to find common ground, for example, through co-management ventures. However, Inuit still consider their lives to be entangled with animals.

The example of narwhals is instructive and shows how, not without some paradoxes, evangelical movements have provided strong support to Inuit hunters. In fall of 2008, the winter freeze-up trapped about 629 narwhals near Pond Inlet, in North Baffin Island.

59. “New bowhead numbers show Inuit are right. DFO [Department of Fisheries and Oceans] population estimate now 15 times greater,” *Nunatsiaq News*, the local journal of Nunavut, 14 March 2008.

60. See, for example, Anonymous, “Sanikiluaq Hunters Can't Get International Exports for Polar Bear Hides: MLA,” *Nunatsiaq News*, 17 March 2023.

61. Film by Zacharias Kunuk and Ian Mauro, *Qapirangajuq, Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change*, 60 min. <https://www.isuma.tv/fr/inuit-knowledge-and-climate-change/movie>

Normally, narwhals would have migrated to their wintering area in Baffin Bay, but for unknown reasons they became trapped and doomed to starve or drown when their last breathing holes disappeared. With the authorization of the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, and local elders, the Mittimatalik Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) spent two weeks killing the narwhals and pulling them out of the water to harvest the meat. This massive catch gave the hunters an occasion to teach the younger generations how to kill and harvest whales, and it was the largest bounty in decades.

Although the hunt did not endanger the estimated 20,000 narwhals of the Eclipse Sound area, in North Baffin Island, the successful catch sparked a bitter debate between Inuit leaders and an environmentalist group, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS), which called on the government to send an icebreaker to save the narwhals. Its leader, Paul Watson, called the killing a “war crime” that could have been prevented. On the SSCS website, Watson described the killings as a “bloody massacre” where “Inuit killers roared and laughed barbarously as they inflicted torturous death upon these gentle creatures.”⁶² Terry Audla, the executive director of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, responded to these racist tropes by pointing to Watson’s ignorance of Inuit culture.

In a hunting society, a catch is a cause for enjoyment and hunters will express their joy as a token of respect to the animals they kill. Watson is not interested in Inuit values, and he even challenges the very existence of Inuit culture by implying that the Inuit, by adopting modernity, have forgone their right to be different from other people. This position contrasts sharply with the evangelical church, which is more consistent with Inuit views and values. An evangelical leader defended the Inuit of the community, who made good use of a “humane” harvest. Like the Inuit themselves, he highlighted God’s role and immediately contrasted the two conflicting views, the two religions, opposing a “religion of environmentalism” and the religion of the Inuit that acknowledges the Creator as “the one who provides for people in every part of the earth.” Inuit consider that as long as they have great respect for the animals, the Creator will give them the animals they need to have a good life. Animals must be celebrated for giving themselves.⁶³ But they have their own agency, they cannot be ruled or managed by humans. When they give themselves, humans have to acknowledge the gift and accept it.

Today, many conflicts are developing around the opening and development of mines that will have major impacts on animals and hunting. Inuit communities are divided about what to do, some supporting modernization, others supporting animals and hunting activities. In some places, however, such as around Clyde River, a village of North Baffin Island, ecologists and Inuit hunters are allied against the big mining projects and seismic testing in their waters, stating that it endangers marine life.

62. Paul Watson, “The Canadian Slaughter of the Unicorns,” Sea Shepherd Australia, 1 December 2008. <https://www.seashepherd.org.au/latest-news/the-canadian-slaughter-of-the-unicorns/>

63. Frédéric Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, “The Religion of Nature. Evangelical Perspectives on the Environment,” *Etudes Inuit Studies* 32, no. 1 (2010): 71–90.

According to Inuit traditions, animals are like sentinels; they know better than humans what is going on, they hear everything. With the growing concern about global warming, Inuit and scientists are watching animals carefully. Inuit also blame *qallunaat* (people from the South) and their economy, as they are the ones polluting and disrespecting Sila. Hunters possess extensive knowledge about the beings they are in contact with, though less so with invisible beings such as microorganisms, which can be a threat to human health. In that respect, Inuit are willing to collaborate with scientists, and they know that such a collaboration can be very fruitful. Yet, they maintain some of their views about animal mobility and conservation. Conflicts still happen on a regular basis about caribou, bears, and other animals.

CONCLUSION

Hunting knowledge underwent significant transformations in the 20th century as a result of at least three major phenomena that contributed to Westernization: (1) the intensive trade that resulted from the presence of Whites (whalers, fur trade) and technological changes, such as the use of firearms, which had a great impact; (2) Christianization, which generated changes in conceptions and rules of life, including ritual prohibitions; and (3) sedentarization, including the arrival of the State in the region, which brought further upheavals in the political, educational, and social registers (e.g., mass killings of dogs in the 1960s). New practices such as the adoption of dogs and cats as pets are clearly visible today.

And yet, the strength of Inuit cosmologies is considerable. Even if many Inuit now refer to “God” as the master of the animals, their true owner, an examination of sayings and practices reveals that, on the cosmological level, continuities prevail. The analogical schema plays a part, Inuit connecting ecological disasters to human misbehavior. Sila, the cosmic spirit, is still seen as responsible for the order of the world, as a powerful spirit able to punish human beings. When humans do not behave properly, the weather might discipline them. Despite the transformations of the Inuit world, ancient conceptions continue: the giving of names and practice of eponymy, the adoption of children, and the idea that animals remain essential for human beings. Hunting fosters respect and allows animals to regenerate themselves.

Human beings are linked to their ancestors by their names, whereas animals (except dogs) have no such connection and must live in a cycle of continual reincarnation. Yet, the same figure is at the origin of both animals and humans: the Woman of the Sea, or today’s God figure, or a mixture of the two. Bill Nasogaluak’s magnificent carving from 2006 depicting a sea woman crucified like Jesus, *Sedna on Cross*, illustrates the point.⁶⁴

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s perspectivist theory offers an interesting approach to understanding Inuit cosmology, including the role of animal bodies and the existence of scales. However, it is only partially applicable with respect to Inuit. We find no evidence in Inuit stories, or other accounts belonging to them, that animals see themselves as

64. See <https://www.inuitartfoundation.org/lite/iaq-online/collectors-choice-bill-nasogaluak>.

human. On the contrary, although humans and animals reproduce and share many common traits, they are not subject to the same rituals or cycles, but they coexist and live in a kind of fascinating symbiosis. Inuit would easily adopt the expression of Temple Grandin, “Animals make us human,”⁶⁵ but in a slightly different way, since respecting them means killing them properly.

In Alaska, anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan also observes that these relationships between humans and animals are at the very foundation of social life among Arctic peoples. Fienup-Riordan understands ritual as creating a passage between human and animal worlds, just as cultural rules keep them separate. The distribution and sharing of food, and the giving of gifts, therefore, remain at the heart of Yup’ik—a group of Arctic people from western Alaska—as well as Canadian Inuit social life.⁶⁶ ■

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65. Temple Grandin, *Animals Make Us Human: Creating the Best Life for Animals* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009).

66. Ann Fienup-Riordan, *Boundaries and Passages: Rules and Ritual in Yup’ik Eskimo Oral Tradition* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).