

The Canadian Inuit – past and present

Ing. Petra Volaříková

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Stern, Pamela, and Lisa Stevenson, eds. Critical Inuit Studies: an anthology of contemporary Arctic ethnography. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006.

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Mgr. Radka Sedláčková

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prof. PhDr. Vlastimil Švec, CSc.
děkan

L.S.

doc. Ing. Anežka Lengálová, Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na současný život kanadských Inuitů. Zabývá se závažnými ekonomickými a sociálními problémy, kterým musí Inuité čelit. Dále na základě historických souvislostí poukazuje na následky, jež zanechal vliv evropských přistěhovalců na tradiční kulturu Inuitů. Hlavní pozornost je však věnována asimilačnímu procesu, který proběhl v druhé polovině minulého století a postavení Inuitů v moderní kanadské společnosti na začátku 21. století.

Klíčová slova: Inuité, Eskymáci, arktický, kultura, tradice, hodnoty, osady, přistěhovalci, Nunavut, vláda, asimilace, bydlení, vzdělání, zdraví, zaměstnání, rozvoj, autonomie, postavení, výzvy

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis is focused on the current life of the Canadian Inuit. It deals with the most crucial economic and social issues the Inuit have to face. Based on the historical context, there are showed the consequences of the impacts caused by the influence of European newcomers on the Inuit traditional way of life. However, the main focus is concentrated on the assimilation process which took place in the second half of the last century and the status of the Inuit people in the modern Canadian society at the beginning of the 21st century.

Keywords: Inuit, Eskimo, Arctic, culture, tradition, values, settlements, newcomers Nunavut, government, assimilation, housing, education, health, employment, development, self-governance, status, challenges

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own and certify that any secondary material used has been acknowledged in the text and listed in the bibliography.

January 7, 2009

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INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis focuses on the current life of the Canadian Inuit. These indigenous people belong with the Indian and Métis population to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. According to the latest statistic data, there are over 50,000 Inuit living in Canada nowadays. The most of the Inuit population occupies the north regions of the Canadian Arctic. This area extending from northern Labrador to the Northwest Territories is called “Nunaat” in the Inuit language Inuktitut which could be translated in English as Inuit “homeland” because these peoples and their ancestors have lived here for thousands of years. Outside the Inuit Nunaat, there live about 11,000 Inuit, mostly in urban cities in the Canadian south.

The main aim of this bachelor thesis is to find out what the life of the current Canadian Inuit looks like. Before I started writing about these people, I had had only a slight idea about their way of life. As probably many other Europeans, I have seen some documentary films about the Eskimo’s traditional way of life which did not say too much about the current living conditions of the Canadian Inuit.

In order to understand the Inuit today, I have to get know their history. Therefore, the first part of this bachelor thesis describes the traditional way of life. In general, the Inuit were hunters who led a seasonal life according to the movement of hunted animals such as whales, seals and caribous. The family was the centre of Inuit culture and usually a group of extended family members created a hunting group in summer. In winter, they used to gather into bigger camps where the traditional knowledge about the Inuit history and culture had been passed down through generation by telling stories and legends.

Unfortunately, this peaceful way of life was disturbed by the arrival of the first European outsiders in the 15th century. The European explorers were gradually followed by whalers, traders, missionaries and federal government. Consequently, the Inuit life had been influenced in most ways by these newcomers who had mainly pursued their own interests in the Canadian North.

As a result of these impacts, the outsiders had on Inuit life during the past three centuries, the life of the Inuit underwent great changes which are discussed in the last part. There are also examined the possible ways of improvement of the poor conditions in which the Inuit live today. In the centre of my attention is the concept of aboriginal self-governance and issues concerning future culture and economic development.

1 TRADITIONAL INUIT IDENTITY

This part of my bachelor thesis will be focused on the Inuit traditional way of life in order to be able to understand how the people once had lived independently in the Canadian Arctic region. I would like to concentrate on the time before extensive contact with Europeans (approximately till the end of the 17th century), which will be discussed in the next two parts, because these indigenous people had lived here for thousands of years and had developed a remarkable culture. However there were many differences among the numerous Inuit groups (some the result for example of the local environment), the Inuit shared certain important ideas, beliefs, and ways of life no matter where they lived.

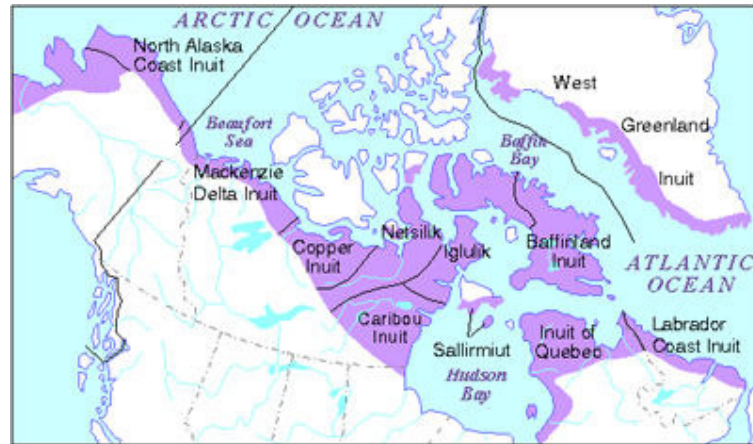
The word Inuit means “people” in the Inuit language (Inuktitut) and is also the general term for a group of culturally similar indigenous peoples inhabiting the Arctic coasts of Alaska, the eastern islands of the Canadian Arctic, Labrador, and the ice-free coasts of Greenland. The Inuit refers to the people formerly called Eskimos. The origin of the English term Eskimo is uncertain, but is widely believed that the word had derived from a name applied to the Inuit by Chipewyan Indians. The most commonly explanation of this word is an expression for “eaters of raw meat” which the Canadian Inuit find it today obnoxious and unacceptable (contrary to Alaska, where the term Eskimo is commonly used today). These Canadian people live in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec and Northern Labrador and they are one of the aboriginal groups to inhabit the northern regions of Canada.¹

Traditionally, the Inuit were hunters and gatherers who moved seasonally in small bands from one camp to another. Each band was roughly identified with a locale and named accordingly - there are eight tribal groups: the Labrador, Ungava, Baffin Island, Iglulik, Caribou, Netsilik, Copper and Western Arctic Inuit (recent immigrants from Alaska). The Mackenzie Delta Inuit have been mostly replaced by the Western Arctic Inuit, because their population had been decimated by a series of smallpox and influenza epidemics by 1900 (diseases brought by European newcomers). The Sallirmiut people, the

¹ John Stephen Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, in *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience*, edited by Bruce R. Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson, (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1995), 84.

inhabitants of three islands in Hudson Bay, had suffered the same fate and died out early of the 19th century.²

Map 1: Native People: Arctic³



1.1 Inuit Ancestors

Considering the Inuit history and ancestors, the Inuit culture has maintained a continuous and consistent way of life for thousands of years in the Arctic regions of Alaska, Canada and Greenland. Canadian Inuit share the arctic region with other indigenous cultures such as Yupik and Inupiat of Alaska and Russia and with the Inuit of Greenland. These people have adapted to harsh conditions, developing a unique culture that will be closely examined in this part. To begin with I have to briefly point several dates and events out from the history which had been crucial for the Inuit people and formation of their culture.

According to the Scholastic Inuit history, about 4000 years ago, a group of peoples known as the Pre-Dorset culture, came to Alaska crossing the Bering Strait from Siberia. By this time, ice sheets had retreated from the Arctic coast and an ice-free corridor between the Laurentide Ice Sheet and the Cordillera Ice Sheet allowed this migration. The Pre-Dorset people then spread eastwards through the central and eastern Canadian high Arctic in order to find new hunting and fishing territories. This culture was very mobile, living in

² The Canadian Encyclopedia, "Native peoples, Native tribes, Inuit", Historica Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0004040>.

³ The Canadian Encyclopedia, "Native People: Arctic Inuit", Historica Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0009066>.

small settlements including only few families. They used small, delicate, stone tools to hunt caribou, fish, seal, bears and other arctic animals.⁴

The Pre-Dorset culture was replaced by the Dorset culture about 800 B.C., named from evidence of its culture found in present-day Cape Dorset. During the Dorset period, the communities consisted of three to fifteen homes living in skin tents in the summer and subterranean houses in the winter.⁵ According to some of the Inuit legends told today, they are called Tuniit or Tunirjuat. Here is one of the most well-known traditions concerning Tuniit that describes the hunters carrying small lamps on expeditions to seal breathing holes. “The men would sit on a snow block, peg their long jackets to the snow, and rest the lamp on their knees. When a seal came to breathe, the hunter rose to harpoon the seal, spilling hot oil on his stomach.”⁶

About A.D. 900, one of the new whale-hunting cultures coming from Alaska displaced the Dorset culture. Known as the Thule culture, its people were the direct ancestors of the modern Inuit. During a period when the climate became warmer, they spread eastwards along the Arctic coast and reached northern Greenland. The Thule people had dogs to haul sleds or to carry packs, used boats such umiaks and kayaks, and in general were better equipped than Dorset people had been. Where whales were available they continued to hunt them but all other wildlife was also used.⁷

This culture of “Eskimo” survived until about A.D. 1750. In that time there was a spell of very cold climate, known as “The Little Ice Age”. This weather forced many people to change their way of life because the increase in ice on the sea kept the whales away and made boating more difficult. Smaller groups of people began to rely more on nomadic way of life hunting caribou and seal. This change was the end of Thule culture and the beginning of the modern Inuit culture.⁸

⁴ Scholastic, “Inuit History”, Scholastic Inc. 2008-1996, <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4613>.

⁵ Scholastic, “Inuit History”, Scholastic Inc. 2008-1996, <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4613>.

⁶ John Bennett and Susan Rowley, eds. and comps., *Uqaluraiit: an oral history of Nunavut* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 144.

⁷ Keith J. Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 17.

⁸ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 18.

1.2 Inuit Culture

Today, no matter where we choose to travel, hunt, and camp, we find the traces of our ancestors. From these, we have come to understand that our life is a continuation of theirs, and we recognize that their land and culture has been given to us in trust for our children.⁹

In the past, Inuit history was preserved by telling stories and legends by the elders to the young Inuit. The Inuit recognize the importance of maintaining the oral tradition not only as a part of their culture but also as an excellent way of learning by young Inuit today, of what it means to be Inuit. Therefore, if I want to understand the Inuit in the present and their way of life, I will have to go back to the past and learn how the Inuit ancestors once had lived in the special environment conditions.

In the first instance, I will concentrate on the traditional Inuit culture before the fundamental changes (wage employment, the move to permanent communities, and schools) took place in Inuit life since the 1950s. Those transformations made by the Canadian government badly damaged not only the chain of oral transmission but also many other aspects of the Inuit traditional way of life.

Nevertheless, the Inuit had been influenced by other cultures long before. The first encounters between Europeans (Norse) and Inuit took place about 800. The second period of European-Inuit contact began in the East in the late 1400s and subsequent arrival of explorers, whalers, traders, missionaries, scientists and others began irreversible cultural changes. The Inuit themselves participated actively in these developments (for example the Inuit supplied the European explorers and whalers with game; they worked as guides on many expeditions; or trapped furs for European traders). In spite of adjustments made by the Inuit over the past three centuries and the loss of some traditional features (closely described in the part two), Inuit culture managed to persist through their language, family and cultural laws, attitudes and behaviour, and through their acclaimed Inuit art.¹⁰

⁹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanapami, "Inuit History and Heritage", ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/5000YearHeritage.pdf>.

¹⁰ Scholastic, "Inuit History", Scholastic Inc. 2008-1996, <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4613>.

1.2.1 Land

The Inuit were people who willingly chose to make their home in a land (in the Arctic region) many others would have considered harsh and inhabitable. This was the first thing which amazed me a lot about the Inuit. However, since I started getting know these people and their way of life better, I have understood that they not only had managed to survive under such hard conditions but also had lived contentedly, had learned how to obtain from the land, the sea and each other all the makings of a full and rich life.

The Inuit made remarkably successful adaptation to the life in the northerly parts of Canada and surely no human population has ever engaged in a more demanding adaptation than have the Inuit. The Canadian North has two main landscapes – the taiga and the tundra or barrens. The first is the forested country, where the taiga vegetation of the Subarctic grows such as spruce trees, fir, tamarack and some other vegetation. To the north of this land lies the Arctic – the coldest region of Canada where the forest changes and the vegetation thins out and disappears. Farthest north poor soil, ground frost, and winter winds defeat the trees, and open tundra stretches north. The area where the taiga vegetation gives way to open tundra or barrens is called the tree line. In general, the Inuit are considered to be people of the barrens and the coast.¹¹

Despite harsh living conditions, the Inuit people respected and loved the land and the sea, because everything they needed came from them and eventually everything returned to them. They believed that offences committed against the land led to poor plant growth, bad weather, illness, and other catastrophes. The land was celebrated through songs that evoked images of seasons or distant places. When people had been living in one place for too long, they could sense the land changing and they needed to move for the health of the land and the animals. Some locations were recognized by the Inuit as sacred places and required special behaviour of the people passing through – several of such places were special domain of shamans.¹²

For example, *Inukshuk*, the mysterious stone figure, can be found throughout the circumpolar world (*Inukshuk* means “in the likeness of a human” in the Inuit language). This monument was made of unworked stones and was mainly used by the Inuit for

¹¹ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 19.

¹² See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurai: an oral history of Nunavut*, 111-120.

communication and survival, because the traditional meaning of this word was “Someone was here” or “You are on the right path”. However, the Inuit made these figures in slightly different forms for variety of purposes: as navigation, to mark a place of respect or memorial for a beloved person, or to indicate migration routes where fish could have been found.¹³

Picture 1: Inukshuk¹⁴



The Inuit people felt that they belonged to their land and named themselves accordingly – each group referred to themselves as the –miut (people) of that region, for example the Amitturmiut, the Ahiarmiut, the Inuinnait, and many others. Each of this group occupied a particular territory which led to differences in dialects, clothing styles, hunting techniques, and beliefs. During the mid-nineteenth century, about forty-eight –miut groups lived in Nunavut.¹⁵

Considering the Inuit way of life, the Inuit were nomadic people who moved over the Arctic landscape in yearly rounds which were determined mostly by the migration patterns of the species hunted. Essential to navigation was the system of place names and the knowledge of astronomy. During the summer and spring months, the most important sources of food were seal, caribou and birds. Even though caribou meat was considered a

¹³ Inukshuk Gallery, “What is an Inukshuk?”, Inukshuk Gallery/Gallery Indigena 2006 <http://www.inukshukgallery.com/inukshuk.html>.

¹⁴ Inukshuk Gallery, “What is an Inukshuk?”, Inukshuk Gallery/Gallery Indigena 2006 <http://www.inukshukgallery.com/inukshuk.html>.

¹⁵ See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 339-341.

delicacy, the Inuit preferred sea mammals and fish, partly because of their higher fat content. Among other hunted animal belonged Polar bear and muskoxen.¹⁶

The most common techniques of hunting used by the Inuit were following ones:

- pears, bows, and arrows were used to kill birds;
- three-pronged fish spears, holes made in the ice or hooks were favorite methods used for fishing;
- dogs served as hunting animals and were used to locate seals under the sea ice or to hold bears and muskoxen at bay.

Nevertheless each region had a varied ecology and hunting techniques were developed to take advantage of these differences.¹⁷

Hunting and food sharing were necessary for the physical and social welfare of the Inuit society. The typical traditional meal included fresh, boiled, fried, or grilled meats, organs, and soft bones and was served on the ground outdoors or on the floor of the shelter. When hunters returned with fresh game or fish, the meat was communal and was shared, distributed first within the community and then within the household. Everyone was expected to eat until hunger subsided. The Inuit ate the meat of seal and other marine mammals usually fresh (because uncooked meat was rich in protein) and were prepared a short time after the animal had been captured. They also used to drink warm blood and ate livers because it warmed the person's body and restored health and well-being. Nothing was wasted. Organ meats were eaten or fed to dogs. Intestines were saved and outer covering chewed. Seal oil was prepared by pounding the fat and then stored in a seal bladder. Caribou meat was prepared in ways similar to seal and was also cut into pieces and hung to air-dry for storage.¹⁸

According to the Inuit tradition, all objects, animate or inanimate, contained an *inua* or inner soul. When an animal died, its *inua* returned to its village and the animal was reborn. Inuit believed that animals had given themselves to the people but only to those, who lived good lives and respected the animals. "In the old days Inuit were not allowed to brag about their catch because the animal's spirits were listening... You weren't allowed to brag about

¹⁶ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 86.

¹⁷ See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 50.

¹⁸ Solomon H. Katz, ed., "Inuit", *Encyclopedia of Food & Culture*, vol. 2. Gale Cengage, 2003, eNotes.com. 2006, <http://www.enotes.com/food-encyclopedia/inuit>.

your catch of any wildlife, or even talk while eating, and you always had to share your catch with another.”¹⁹ Through close observation, the Inuit became familiar with the natural habit of animals which helped them not only in their hunts but also in potentially life-threatening situations when an animal attacked their camp.²⁰

Gathering was the domain of the Inuit women who used a variety of plants for cooking food, bedding, insulation, fire starters, and medicines. Especially berries added variety to the diet. Plants such some types of lichen, kelp, willow leaves, blueberry blossoms, fireweed flowers, or mountain sorrel, were not only enjoyed during times of plenty but could have made the Inuit survive during famine when people were going trough a period of no food. On the rocky shorelines, the Inuit used to gather seaweed and shellfish (clams and mussels).²¹

1.2.2 Social Organization and Social Control

Based on information from several sources about the Inuit life, I came to a conclusion that the Inuit social system had been completely a practical one. Most of the Canadian Inuit lived during the warmer half of a year with their family members and congregated into larger groupings in autumn and winter months. Thus the leader was either a family member - usually the father or grandfather, or a competent person who was a wise-decision maker, a good hunter, and an exemplar of Inuit values.

The Inuit bands, each with its own name, could be considered as the level of social organization, even though they were also the smallest and the most unstable in terms of membership. The Inuit people would have congregated together at certain times of the year and then split into smaller groupings (even individual nuclear families) at others. Membership in the bands was not stable – individuals and families were free to move from one to another at will.²²

Each band had its own leader, but that person had little real authority. In the Inuit language *Inuktitut*, such leader was called *isumataq* which means “the one who thinks”. One part of leader’s role was to inspire people to work well together because the well-

¹⁹ Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 43.

²⁰ See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 41-49.

²¹ See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 78-85.

²² See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 88-90.

being of a camp depended on how well its members cooperated and shared among themselves and with other camps.²³

The roles among the Inuit were limited. Other than those of leader or shaman, they recognized either hunter or spouse of hunter. Of course there were some differences between individuals, but there was also a high degree of conformity.²⁴

Certain individuals who worked hard to gain knowledge of the ways in which the cosmos works, our part in the scheme of things, and an understanding of their rightful purpose – to serve the higher power by bringing order to the myriad things of creation – were able to become shamans.

Anna Ataqtsiaq, Tununirmiut, Arreak 1990:4²⁵

The second specialized position in the Inuit band was that of the shaman. This person was someone able to cross the boundary separating the physical from the spiritual. With the aid of a helping spirit the shaman communicated with the supernatural forces that influence the lives of people. The men and women who were attracted to the shaman role were possibly the most creative members of their society and this role gave them greater freedom for personal expression.²⁶

Healing was perhaps the primary task for shamans and the key to a shaman's power were their helping spirits. In their rituals some shamans used a vocabulary different from that of everyday speech. Shamans were seen the same way we see doctors and gave certain restrictions similar to doctors giving certain orders. There existed a strong link between sickness, accidents, or bad weather conditions and violation of taboos. To Inuit nothing occurred by chance – every such event had a cause, so the people tried to live according to a system of restrictions, or taboos. Another role of shamans was the role of a good entertainer. The public performances such as acts of healing were theatrical events that entertained as well as reinforced commitment to common beliefs and values.²⁷

²³ See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 95-98.

²⁴ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 91.

²⁵ Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 176.

²⁶ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 92.

²⁷ See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 176-195.

Even though the Inuit did not have any authorities and institutions such as police, they were able to maintain social control using mechanism provided by their culture. To be able to survive, members of the bands could have not afforded open conflicts between themselves. Therefore, elders discouraged behaviour that caused uncertainty – gossiping, lying, stealing, laziness, and unpredictable behaviour. The Inuit had variety of techniques which they used to solve quarrels such as games of strength or song duels. In some serious cases that could not have been resolved, the band could have abandoned a troublemaker and moved to another location, or to execute the person who continued to be a threat.²⁸

1.2.3 Family

Considering the signification the family represented for all Inuit, it was the main source of happiness, stability and security in their hard life. As I already mentioned, families lived separately from each other at least half of a year. Therefore, members of the certain family had to rely only on themselves and could not afford serious quarrels which would have threatened their lives.

In other words, the family (including the nuclear family, nearby relatives, and relations by marriage) was the most significant social and economic unit for the Inuit. The family unit was based on a decided division of responsibilities among all household members, including children and elderly relatives. In the Inuit traditional culture, marriages were nearly universal and usually monogamous - a man married and lived with one wife (occasionally there occurred some cases when more wives lived and worked together in one man's household). Sometimes they were arranged by the elders and usually took place in early adulthood. Staying close to the parents of one or the other spouse was a typical feature for the young couples. The marriage was based on strict division of labour – men built houses, hunted and fished, and women cooked, dressed animal skins, and made clothing.²⁹

Children were highly valued by the Inuit and each child was considered unique. The hard conditions of life in the Northern Canada meant children were few and many died in infancy. In particular, boys were treated specially not only by their parents but also by all

²⁸ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 96-97.

²⁹ MSN Encyclopedia, "Inuit", Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2008, http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761561130_2/Inuit.html.

people in the camp. We can see this on the example when a young boy learning to hunt was feted when he made his first kill of each game species. Part of the reason in doing that was to help the youngster to become a successful hunter, because the security of the whole family and community depended first and foremost on hunters. According to the Inuit tradition, a boy stayed with his parents and provided food for the whole family, even when he married, but a girl moved to her husband's camp after her wedding and she no longer belonged to her mother and father.³⁰

Young Inuit were expected to learn by example and their gender determined the nature of education. Boys tried imitating their older relatives, learned the skills of the outdoors: hunting, travelling, making tools, and so on. Girls learned from their mothers and other female relatives the complementary skills of the home: cooking, preparing skins, making clothing, and the like. Many of the values and beliefs of the Inuit society were demonstrated implicitly in behaviour; e.g., the constant sharing of food and other commodities was a manifestation of the value of generosity and co-operation. Children used to listen to these lessons contained in stories that the elders enjoyed telling.³¹

A modest person would play down his accomplishments, be overjoyed and thankful for his catch, and would not gossip about his fellow human beings in his songs. This type of person is the kind who followed the advice of his grandparents and parents.

Donald Suluk, Paallirmiut, 1987:31³²

Of course, not all Inuit liked following these recommendations and rules. The reason for that is quite simple and could be applied to all ages - "the present generation dislikes the next generation, and the next generation always lives differently from the passing generation, because time changes."³³

³⁰ See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 11-42.

³¹ The Canadian Encyclopedia, "Native people, Arctic, Traditional culture", Historica Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1SEC883642>.

³² Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 39.

³³ Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 35.

1.2.4 Religion

A myth is usually defined as a poetic attempt to explain some phenomenon of nature or ancient tradition that cannot be understood rationally. A legend is a story handed down by tradition but loosely based on history. Both these forms are widely used by preliterate societies. The Inuit were just such a society until the mid-20th century.³⁴

As demonstrated on the quotation, many of the religious beliefs of the Inuit were lost after contact with missionaries when large numbers of Inuit people converted to Christianity. Fortunately, most of the information on Inuit religion was collected by the early Arctic anthropologists. Inuit religious beliefs reveal a rich cosmology and mythology and were central to their culture.

Inuit myths and legends perform a useful function by answering many puzzling questions concerning their survival in a hostile Arctic environment and explaining the wonders of the world such as the creation, birth, love, hunting and sharing of food, murder, incest, death and many others.³⁵

Inuit religion has been called animistic because Inuit believed that all objects and living beings had a spirit. Those spirits were much like humans, with emotions and intelligence, and could be offended if not treated properly. Inuit rituals and taboos were closely connected with beliefs in spirits that could have affected people's lives. The person best equipped to control spirits by magical charms and talismans and to journey in trances and in dreams was the *angakuk* (shaman). Many of the Inuit rites centered on preparation for the hunt and were observed to avoid offending animal spirits. Animals killed for food must have been handled with prescribed rituals.³⁶

Seals, being saltwater dwellers, were thought to be always thirsty. Therefore, before a seal was butchered, it was offered a drink of fresh water. In this manner the seal was thanked and respect was shown to all seals.³⁷

³⁴ The Canadian Encyclopedia, "Folklore, Inuit Myth and Legend", Historical Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1SEC822501>.

³⁵ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 98-100.

³⁶ MSN Encyclopedia, "Inuit", Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2008, http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761561130_2/Inuit.html.

³⁷ Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 54.

The supernatural world of the Inuit was not limited to spirits attached to animals and places in the landscape such as the sea mother, the moon man, the earth mother who had domination over lesser spirits. These indwellers organized the forces of nature and were responsible for all of life. Each of them had own domain and was jealous about maintaining its boundaries; for example the most serious violation of taboo was to eat land and sea food together. The more mundane spirits were known as *tornat*, and they owned the objects or bodies to which they were attached.³⁸

1.2.5 Language – Inuktitut

Language belongs among the most important features of every society because it reflects the cultural identity of its speaker and also helps to maintain the culture. Even though the Inuit did not use any writing system, they possessed an extensive oral literature handed down from generation to generation. Through their language Inuktitut, they could have shared moments of joy and pleasure when they played, sang or listened to the myths and tales during winter night performances in the *gaggig*, the community ceremonial igloo.

Inuktitut belongs to the Eskimo-Aleut languages spoken across the entire northern span of North America – in all areas north of the tree line, including parts of the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, to some extent in northeastern Manitoba as well as the territories of Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and traditionally on the Arctic Ocean coast of Yukon. The Inuit language forms a linguistic chain which means that each dialect is easily mutually intelligible with its neighbours and therefore is treated as a single language.³⁹

The main role of Inuktitut might be seen in helping the Inuit people in the adaptation process which have permitted the Inuit to survive in the Arctic environment. One of the most obvious specificities of the Inuit language was the great number of words use to designate snow such as *qanik* (falling snow), *qanittaq* (recently fallen snow), *aputi* (snow on the ground), *maujaq* (soft snow on the ground), *masak* (wet falling snow), and other twenty terms indicating various types of snow. The multiplicity of animal names in

³⁸ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 98-100.

³⁹ Native Languages of the Americas: Amerindian Language Families, “Inuktitut (Eskimo/Inuit Language)”, Native Languages of America website 1998-2007, <http://www.native-languages.org/inuktitut.htm>.

Inuktitut showed the importance of hunting. If, in English, any seal was called as seal, in Inuktitut, it might have been a natsiq (ringed seal), an ugjuk (bearded seal), a qairulik (harp seal), etc.⁴⁰

At a deeper level, Inuktitut reflected basic logical categories which are based on a binary structure. The Inuit seem to have conceived of the universe in which they lived as being organized for example along pairs of opposites (big/small) which means that they would have spontaneously distributed any set of elements into two groups.⁴¹

1.2.6 Housing, transportation, and clothing

Another three issues I am going to deal with in this part will be housing, transportation and clothing which all played an essential role in the Inuit traditional way of life. I have chosen these issues because they show the best how the Inuit people had adapted to the special living conditions life in the Canadian arctic regions.

To begin with I will describe the Inuit housing. The Canadian arctic landscape was changed by the Inuit in many ways - by building homes, caches for storing food and supplies, and *inuksuit* (stone cairns) for making special locations. The most important materials used to construct such features were snow, stone, sod, bone, wood, and skin. The sizes and composition of the Inuit camps and dwellings changed dramatically during a year because of the nomadic way of life and the season.⁴²

In a simplified way, Inuit homes are of two kinds: skin tents for summer and sod/bone houses or snow houses for winter. In summer time, camps broke into smaller units which often consisted of only a single family. In winter, people used to live together in larger camps in *garmat* (sod/bone house) or in *igluit* (snow house). Both these dwelling types could have accommodated more family members and were very flexible in that additional rooms could have been added. Inuit used to build passages between their houses, sometimes an entire camp was connected, so that anyone could have visited without going outside. *Qaggiit*, a large building used for feasting and dancing, was built practically at every camp.⁴³

⁴⁰ Dirmid R. F. Collis, ed., *Arctic Languages: an Awakening* (Paris: United Nations 1990), 204-207
http://portal.unesco.org/culture/fr/ev.phpURL_ID=31024&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html.

⁴¹ See, Collis, *Arctic Languages: an Awakening*, 204-207.

⁴² See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 226-261.

⁴³ See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 226-261.

The transportation will be the second theme I will concentrate on because it belonged among the most crucial matters for nomadic people. The Inuit traditional means of transportation were dogsleds and skin boats. Two varieties of boats were used: the *qajait* (single-person craft used primarily for hunting) and *umiaq* (large boat that could carry upwards of twenty people and used for whaling expeditions or to transport families and goods). Sledges pulled by dogs were used during most of the year because the land was covered with snow and the seas were frozen. They were made of wood and had a solid framework of two runners separated by a series of crossbars.⁴⁴

The last topic will be focused on the Inuit style in clothing. Traditionally, the Inuit women made clothes and footwear from animal skins (toughened by chewing), sewn together using needles made from animal bones and threads made from other animal products. Clothing and skin preparation had a special meaning for the Inuit because they believed that the clothing patterns had provided spiritual protection and even the stitching had imparted future abilities to the child. For example, symbols of predators sewn into the pattern of the parka guided the hunter in his quest. Clothing styles varied regionally, so by choosing to wear a particular item of clothing, the person identified himself/herself as a member of a particular group (the same was true of hairstyles and tattoos).⁴⁵

Clothing styles also marked different sexes, life stages, social status as well as individual preferences. Women spent most of their time around camp, so their clothing needs were fewer than men's and skins used in making them were usually thinner such as caribou does. The most typical piece of a woman's clothing was the *amauti*, a parka cut to include a pouch for carrying an infant or young child. On the other hand, men were responsible for obtaining meat and they had to be dressed in appropriate clothing for hunting trips in the cold weather (caribou and polar bear hairs provided excellent insulation, whereas sealskin was thinner but waterproof). The boys wore *akutuinnaq* (a parka that was cut straight across at the bottom with no slits on either side of parka), while the *qiapaujaq* (with slits on both sides of parka) was for older men. In general, every Inuit required two sets of clothing (one for summer and another for winter) and each set

⁴⁴ MSN Encyclopedia, "Inuit", Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2008, http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761561130_2/Inuit.html.

⁴⁵ See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 315-336.

consisted of boots, pants, underwear, a parka, and mittens (winter set had both inner and an outer parka and pants).⁴⁶

1.2.7 Arts and Crafts

The Inuit culture and art had been developing for thousands of years; therefore, I cannot ignore the fact that the Canadian Inuit and their culture had been closely connected with the culture and art of the Katladlit people from Greenland and of the Yuit people who are known as the Asiatic Eskimo and Eskimo of western and southwestern Alaska. Among all these cultures, a strong relationship exists between the art forms in their image and content, indicating a common ancestry.

The prehistoric period of the Inuit art history covers the cultures of the Pre-Dorset, Dorset, and Thule people. The Pre-Dorset civilization came from Siberia and only a few art objects of this period seem to have survived, particularly tools like harpoon heads and lances. They were fashioned from carefully selected materials (stones) and are considered to be art even though they were made not for imagistic but functional purposes.⁴⁷

The Pre-Dorset culture lasted of more than one thousand years and was replaced by the Dorset culture. The Dorset people lived across Arctic Canada to eastern Greenland and south to Newfoundland. Their art was closely connected with shaman practices and hunting. Most pieces were small scale objects representing animal and human figures or amulets which were carved out of ivory and bone. These objects usually represented several supernatural meanings such as a kind of ritual form or as an instrument for magic-religious purposes. Many useful tools were finely decorated probably to give them the favors of the spirits for successful hunting. For example, the points of the harpoon heads became the bear heads and the polar bear have still remained an eminent figure in contemporary Inuit art which would be discussed afterwards.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See, Bennett and Rowley, *Uqalurait: an oral history of Nunavut*, 315-336.

⁴⁷ The Canadian Encyclopedia, "Art, Native Art, Inuit Art", Historica Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1SEC910006>.

⁴⁸ Inuit Art Zone, "*Inuit Art History*", Inuit Art Zone – Eskimo Art & Eskimo Art Gallery, Inuit Soapstone Carvings, Inukshuk, Drawings, and Artists. http://www.inuitartzone.com/en/about/about_ia_history.html.

Picture 2: Miniature Mask

Soapstone miniature mask, Igloodik region, NWT, Dorset Culture (courtesy NMC).⁴⁹



The Dorset culture suddenly disappeared and according to oral Inuit history they fled from new comers from northern Alaska, the Thule people. Thule culture began to influence the Canadian Arctic after 1000 AD and reached eastern Greenland by 1200 AD. This culture seems to have been the most uniform of the Eskimoan cultures (covering the entire Arctic of the western hemisphere, including an eastern tip of Siberia) which gave the Eskimos the appearance of homogeneity for a long time. Nevertheless this opinion was revised by the new generation of archeologists and is only true for Thule culture artifacts.⁵⁰

While the Dorset art related to male images and had hardly any stylistic similarities to contemporaneous Alaskan art forms, the Thule art was concentrated on female images in almost every detail and was strongly dependant on the Alaskan artifacts. The most frequent artifacts for the Thule culture in Canada were utensils such as combs, needle cases, bodkins and pendants which were obviously women's practical and decorative equipment. Furthermore, "swimming figurines" such birds, spirits and humans were also either female representation or related to them in their shape. These special objects may have had some ritual function as amulets.⁵¹

⁴⁹ The Canadian Encyclopedia, "Art, Native Art, Inuit Art", Historica Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1SEC910009>.

⁵⁰ The Canadian Encyclopedia, "Art, Native Art, Inuit Art", Historica Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1SEC910010>.

⁵¹ The Canadian Encyclopedia, "Native Peoples, General, Thule Culture", Historica Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1SEC829105>.

Picture 3: Comb

Walrus tusk comb, Pelly Bay region, NWT, Thule culture (courtesy Eskimo Museum, Churchill).⁵²



The demise of the Thule culture and the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century marked the transition from a purely Inuit centered art production to the trade production. This historical period of the Inuit art, before the art objects changed from decorative tools and shamanistic amulets to a trade commodity, lasted till 1940s.

1.3 Conclusion

In my point of view, the history of the Inuit nation is essential for an understanding of current events taking place in the Canadian Arctic region. Therefore, in this part I have focused on describing the Inuit culture and way of life in the pre-contact period (before the extensive contact with non-natives – outsiders of mainly European origin such as explorers, traders, and settlers and later Canadians).

It is necessary to realize that the traditional Inuit culture had been developing for thousands of years but have changed dramatically during the last three centuries (from the 18th till the 20th century). Unfortunately for the Inuit, the changes have had mostly negative impact on their way of life and their land. This time of the contact-period providing insights into the relationship between these indigenous Canadian people and the newcomers will be analyzed in the next two parts.

⁵² The Canadian Encyclopedia, “Native Peoples, General, Thule Culture”, Historica Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1SEC829105>.

2 INUIT IN THE CONTACT-TRADITIONAL PERIOD

In this part of my bachelor thesis “Inuit in the contact-traditional period” I will concentrate on describing the main changes in the traditional Inuit way of life which had been influenced by the arrival of newcomers from Europe and America during the 18th, 19th and the first half of the 20th century. Explorers, traders, and missionaries belonged among these first strangers and their diverse impacts on the Inuit life will be more closely discussed further in this part.

In the center of my attention will be also the role which the Canadian government played in the Inuit life. According to information from several sources, throughout the early 1900s the Canadian government took more interest in the north and slowly increased certain services in several areas such as preservation of wildlife, education, medical care and control over the land by setting police posts in some parts of the northern lands (the Royal North West Mounted Police and later the Royal Canadian Mounted Police). However, the Inuit were not “subject to the Indian Act”⁵³ which meant that they had been left relatively alone and had retained control over their own decision-making.

In general we can say that this era of the traditional contact among the Inuit and the non-natives had a quite big impact on the Inuit way of life in many aspects – they replaced bone with wood, stone with copper and iron, they started using European clothing, glass, weapons and other materials and conveniences brought by Europeans. Nevertheless “their culture and society had been modified as a result of contact with outsiders, they had to a large extent been able to manage that change and continued to live in most respects as their ancestors had done.”⁵⁴ Contrary to this opinion about the European’s impact on the Inuit life at that time, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (the national Inuit organization in Canada representing most of the Canadian Inuit) wrote: “The whalers, the fur traders that followed the whalers, the missionaries, and then the government all wanted something from us in return for what they were prepared to give. As a result, many but certainly not all of the traditions, values, skills and knowledge that bound us together as Inuit gave way in

⁵³ The Canadian Encyclopedia, “Native peoples, Native tribes, Inuit”, Historica Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1SEC908628>.

⁵⁴ Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 104-105.

response to the demands placed on us from the outside. Slowly, we started to lose control over the destiny of our culture and our lives.”⁵⁵

2.1 Explorers

The first contacts between the Inuit and Europeans (explorers) began in the late 1500's, if we ignore the fact that the first Europeans, Vikings, had regularly travelled from Greenland to Baffin Island to trade with the Inuit ancestors during the tenth century. The main intention of these explorers on their sea journeys was to find a northwest passage for trade between Europe and Asia (to find a route to the riches of Asia). Instead they reached the waters of Davis Strait, Hudson Strait, and Hudson Bay and met the Inuit for the first time. Since then more Europeans have been interested in voyages of exploration of the Arctic region which were often guided by the Inuit people.⁵⁶

Here I would like to mention two of the most famous explorers – Martin Frobisher and Sir John Franklin. Between the Frobisher's voyage in 1576 which marked the beginning of British explorations of Arctic Canada, and Franklin's last expedition in 1848, about 22 explorers entered the Inuit territory. Even though the meetings between the Inuit and explorers were usually friendly, there were also some cases of fighting - Frobisher as well as Franklin had to fight the Inuit when they tried to attack their boats.⁵⁷

Based on information from several sources, these encounters between the Inuit and European explorers did not really change the Inuit way of life. There was a little trading between them, but mostly the Inuit served as guides because without their help many explorers would have died or failed on those dangerous expeditions. The legendary couple of Inuit who assisted and rescued European explorers were Joe (Ipilkvik) and his wife Hannah (Tukkolerktuk) who were invited to visit England and dined with Queen Victoria.

The positive thing for the Inuit was the introduction of new and very useful materials such as iron, timber and some others which gradually replaced the traditional materials

⁵⁵ Inuit Tapiriit Kanapami, *Inuit History and Heritage*, ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/5000YearHeritage.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Robert M. Bone, *The Geography of the Canadian North: issues and challenges* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press Canada, 2003), 50-51.

⁵⁷ Inuit Tapiriit Kanapami, *Inuit History and Heritage*, ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/5000YearHeritage.pdf>.

(bone and stone). On the naval ships they also had a chance to see pet cats and dogs, tobacco, and other novelties for the first time.

On the other hand, these foreigners brought diseases with them which often resulted in many epidemics among aboriginal people throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Before the arrival of Europeans the Inuit knew no smallpox, influenza, measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis or typhoid fever. Therefore their bodies were not able to resist many of these illnesses and members of the whole Inuit families, even bands, died. In the conclusion of this part I am going to concentrate more closely on the Inuit population and its changes because they were caused by all Europeans coming to Canada, not only by explorers.

2.2 Traders

Another issue I want to discuss was the influence of European traders on the Inuit traditional life. The traders can be divided into two main groups: the whalers and the fur traders. The impact of these two was much greater because they prolonged their stay during the winter in the Inuit territories or even started establishing permanent posts at places along the Arctic coast to which essential supplies could have been more easily delivered. Besides these traders there also existed a little trading between the Inuit and explorers and the Inuit and missionaries.

2.2.1 Whalers

As I have already mentioned, English, Scottish, and American whalers coming to the Arctic waters made major impact on the Canadian Inuit. Many Inuit people were hired as guides, pilots, crewmen, seamstresses and hunters for several months when the ships wintered over. In return European doctors offered medical aid to the Inuit and the crew members invited them aboard to attend religious services and variety of European festivities (e.g. Christmas).⁵⁸

It is necessary to point out some facts about whaling. The first whaling ships came to the Davis Strait in the seventeenth century, but the whaling period peaked between 1820 and 1840 when more than a hundred ships were involved in this trade. The most popular hunting areas were Baffin Bay and Hudson Bay in the eastern Arctic. Western whaling was

⁵⁸ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 102-105.

located along the Alaskan coast (e.g. Bering Strait fishery or whale-hunting north of the Mackenzie Delta). The whale-hunting had become a very profitable business because two or three large whales could have provided enough fuel, food, and also baleen (used for making springy corsets worn by women in Europe) to pay for the cost of the whole ship including some profit. However, it did not last forever. The beginning of the 20th century was the end of commercial whaling in the Canadian Arctic for variety of reasons: whales were almost all gone, petroleum replaced whale oil, and a plastic substitute was found for baleen.⁵⁹

In spite of some fights between whalers and the aboriginal people, the Inuit did not generally object to the arrival of whaling ships and sailors. The impact on the Inuit life was enormous because many Inuit families had become dependent upon whalers and goods brought by them from Europe. During the whaling period skin kayaks and umiaks were replaced by whaleboats which with the rifles changed the traditional hunting methods – whales and seals formerly harpooned where shot and many Inuit hunters killed in excitement more caribou than they could eat or sell. In exchange for the European products, the Inuit supplied the sailors with game which finally led to the disappearance of the most hunted animals such as caribou, musk-ox, and walrus in the popular whale-hunting areas.

In my opinion the Inuit paid too much for this new life where they could use ammunition, matches, tea, and so on. Unfortunately, the negatives had beaten the positives. The introduction of alcohol led to violence and caused many murders among the Inuit but the most negative impact was probably frequent epidemics of European diseases. The traditional nomadic way of life was gone for people who had experienced the new life around whalers and with the end of whaling they “had to turn to fox trapping which was an uncertain business, or to hunting, in a land where animals had become scarce.”⁶⁰

2.2.2 Fur traders

At the collapse of the whaling period many of the Inuit who had worked for whalers found it impossible to return to their former independent life and were looking for new sources of livelihood. Unfortunately there were not many options for work in the Canadian Arctic, so

⁵⁹ See, Bone, *The Geography of the Canadian North: issues and challenges*, 61-62.

⁶⁰ Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 109.

majority of them learned fox trapping. This business became very profitable between 1920 and 1930 because the fur of arctic fox was extremely fashionable in Europe at that time.⁶¹

It is necessary to say that there was a great competition between two companies operating in the Canadian fur trade – the British Hudson’s Bay Company and the French North West Company. Finally in 1821 these two companies merged and the Hudson’s Bay Company dominated the Canadian fur economy for over the next hundred years. With some other fur traders the Hudson’s Bay Company started expanding their operations into the Inuit arctic territories after the end of the whaling period (in the beginning of the twentieth century). Fur traders, accompanied by the missionaries and police known as a “big three” or the “Arctic troika”, managed to control the life of Inuit for over 40 years (till the end of WW2).⁶²

In my opinion the fur traders influenced the Inuit way of life much deeply than the whalers. One of the reasons for that could be seen in establishing of several new permanent posts along the eastern as well as western coast, so all Inuit had soon a trading post within their territory or close to it. Their life became much more dependent on fur trading in these posts because they had to change their traditional hunting areas for new ones which were better for fox trapping. This brought also the change in traditional way of life in many other aspects (social life, hunting techniques, diet, etc.). We can see it for example in the change of the traditional social organization – some groups broke apart which meant less cooperation among the Inuit in hunting, sharing knowledge and food, and many other activities. The fur trader gained a control over the Inuit “through his power to issue a credit and collect debts.”⁶³

Of course, there were also some positive effects of the fur trading era on the Inuit life. As I have mentioned the fox trapping became very profitable business for some years and the Inuit living in areas of plentiful wildlife could have lived very well – e.g. washing machines, radios, record players, whaleboats and peterheads (boats designed like Scottish fishing boats) were bought by many Inuit during the 1920s. These things made the hard life

⁶¹ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 110-117.

⁶² See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 110-117.

⁶³ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Inuit History and Heritage”, ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/5000YearHeritage.pdf>.

in the arctic regions easier and more comfortable for the Inuit but also more dependent on the traders.

Unfortunately, the era of fox trapping did not last forever and after 1930 the life of Inuit turned for the worse. Both foxes and meat animals were scarce and in some areas such as Ungava it caused a great deal of hardship and starvation for the Inuit. However there were other effects on Inuit life caused by fur traders such as the death of many Inuit of European diseases, the dependence on manufactured goods, and a mixing of foreign and Inuit races.⁶⁴

2.3 Missionaries

Soon after the traders came into the Canadian north, they were followed by missionaries. The first were the Moravians who established missions and also their own trading posts in some parts of Labrador in the early of 1750s. However the most Inuit were influenced by either Protestant ministers from England or Roman Catholic Priests from France and Belgium a hundred years later. The role they played in the Inuit life will be discussed in greater detail in this part.

In the first place I will focus on the Moravian missions because they had a special role in the Inuit history. Their members worked not only as priests but also as traders and administrators in the Labrador region. The British government let the Moravians take care about the Inuit education, trade, medical care and religion. There were many good things they had done for the aboriginal people in this area. During their stay they managed to make a peace between the Inuit and the Indians. They opened a trading store at each mission which was not intended to make a big profit, but to support the local people during hard times. The Inuit became gradually members of the Moravian church and they learned to read in their language. The Moravian missions were eventually invaded by missions of other churches in the late of the nineteenth century and their stores were leased to the Hudson's Bay Company.⁶⁵

Nevertheless Christianity was spread among most of the Inuit people with the arrival of Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries who set up their missions into the trading posts. There was a big rivalry between these two churches; therefore, the north settlements

⁶⁴ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 110-117.

⁶⁵ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 138-140.

gradually became mainly either Anglican or Catholic. Even though the missionaries were not welcomed by the locals with great enthusiasm, the new religion was accepted without serious opposition by most Inuit which was probably due to the fact that Christianity meant probably a new hope for the Inuit who were upset by many disruptions of their traditional way of life caused by foreigners. At first they saw in a new religion a similar set of taboos against sickness or enemies they had used so far.⁶⁶

Though the missionaries went north primarily to teach Christianity to Inuit, they also tried to give education and medical help where the Canadian government was absent. They studied and recorded the native languages and invented ways of writing them. In spite of some actions done by missionaries which caused disturbance of the traditional Inuit life (e.g. the young Inuit children were brought from their families to the church residential schools, or the drum dancing and lip ornaments were forbidden), the churches were often defender of native language and custom and have become a part of Inuit heritage.⁶⁷

2.4 Canadian Government

In this part I would like to analyze the impact of the government on the Inuit life which was performed mainly by members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), missionaries and Hudson's Bay Company. But firstly let me point out some events which had taken place in Canadian history and turned to be crucial for the Inuit community.

Since 1900 the government had slowly increased its activities in the north lands which had been transferred from Britain to Ottawa in 1870 and the Inuit had become Canadian citizens. The Canadian government interest in the Arctic regions had three reasons: to show that Canada owned its huge northern lands by setting up police posts in various parts of the Canadian Arctic (confirmation of its sovereignty), the discovery of mineral wealth (gold in Yukon, oil at Norman Wells, etc.), and concern for native welfare.⁶⁸

The first of the government efforts was to enforce Canadian law by setting up detachments of the RCMP in many settlements. Since there was a little crime among the Inuit, the RCMP officers often provided medical care in the North. They also maintained the records of statistics for the federal government and the Inuit people were registered on

⁶⁶ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 102-105.

⁶⁷ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 137-151.

⁶⁸ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 153.

“disc list” which meant that each person had been given an identity disc with a number and regional code letter. Another of the government interests was the improvement of educational and health services. This duty was transferred on missionaries. Their schools were the only providers of education in the Canadian North in the first half of the twentieth century.⁶⁹

Among some others efforts of the government which supposed to help the Inuit were following ones. Some of the Inuit bands were moved by the plan of the Hudson’s Bay Company, approved by the government, from their homelands to the new areas where wildlife was plentiful (e.g. Inuit from southern Baffin Island to Devon Island). But the consequences were mostly negative for these Inuit. They had to leave their relatives, get used to new land and hunting techniques, and learn new dialects and people of that region. Another one of the government bad decisions was the idea to bring a herd of reindeer from Alaska. It was believed that the Inuit would have learned to herd but this plan did not succeeded and the reindeer is still being looked after by the government.⁷⁰

In my point of view the activities done by the members of the “Arctic troika” – missions, RCPM and fur traders represented by Hudson’s Bay Company had a great influence on the Inuit. Even though some of them were meant to help the native people and some even were a real help for them, these intruders followed primarily their own interests and never really tried to give the Inuit people control over their lives.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to look more closely on the size of the Inuit population and its changes which took place between the 18th and the first half of the 20th century. I will also summarize the most important events which had a great impact on the traditional Inuit way of life at that time.

As I have mentioned the size of native population had been influenced by all newcomers – explorers, whalers, traders, missionaries, and police officers. We will have to begin our study with estimated numbers of Inuit people living in the early contact period because at that time there was nobody to record such statistic. Based on several sources the

⁶⁹ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 102-105.

⁷⁰ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 116.

Canadian North were occupied by approximately 12 000 to 16 000 Inuit people around the year 1750. At first the newcomers who brought with them many of European diseases had become a real disaster for the Inuit population in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. During this time there were many epidemics of smallpox, influenza, measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis or typhoid fever among all people living in Canada which almost decimated the Inuit population in some areas (Mackenzie Delta Inuit or Sallirmiut people) because the natives did not have any immunity to new diseases. The epidemic had one sad side effect for the native people – the epidemics usually affected the whole bands and it resulted in hunger and poor diet because there was nobody who could have nursed the patients and gone hunting for food.

In fact, the Inuit population suffered a significant decline in population through the introduction of diseases brought by all foreigners. The proof could be found in the words of the explorer Hall who stayed in the Frobisher Bay area in 1861-1862. He wrote about the health conditions that Inuit had to confront and he even thought the Inuit would have not survived as a race:

The days of the Inuit are numbered. There are very few of them left now. Fifty years may find them all passed away, without leaving one to tell that such a people ever lived.⁷¹

Fortunately for the Inuit people, these predictions did not come true. Surprisingly we can give some credit to the same foreigners, especially missionaries and Canadian government, for the improvement of the Inuit health conditions. About 1900 a government spread its medical services and the numbers of the Inuit population have increased “again to about the size of the pre-foreign population.”⁷²

Considering the changes in the traditional Inuit way of life, we can say that in the first half of the twentieth century the Inuit people had lived a life which could be defined as a half return to the traditional hunting way of life and half a new-style based on trading with the newcomers in the posts along the Arctic coast. The Inuit lived mostly in separate camps

⁷¹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Inuit History and Heritage”, ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/5000YearHeritage.pdf>.

⁷² Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 129.

(in groups of several families) which were visited periodically by the RCPM officers. Otherwise they were left relatively alone and spent most of their time by hunting or carving which has become a new way of income. They still spoke Inuktitut among themselves and even many of the newcomers have learned it. Of course, the Inuit got used to European products which made their hard life easier and happier. Among these things belonged whale boats, peterheads, primus stoves, gun traps, seal hooks and seal nets, steel runners, tartan shawls, accordions, and many others.

3 MODERN INUIT

This part called “Modern Inuit” will focus on the conditions of life in which the Inuit have lived since the end of World War II. The special attention will be paid to the changes caused by the government decisions concerning the north regions and its indigenous people during the past sixty years because of the enormous impacts which had on the Inuit way of life. This process of integration of the aboriginal people into the modern Canadian society is also known under the term assimilation.

Among the main themes I am going to discuss belong the land claims agreements that underlies the creation of Nunavut (homeland) consisting of four Inuit regions nowadays and the Inuit population of Nunavut. Other subject of my interest will be challenges of the modern life the Inuit have to face today in areas such as housing, health conditions, education and employment. In the part concerning these social issues which portrays the Inuit life nowadays I will concentrate on the analysis based on the latest data issued by the Statistics Canada. In the end of this part I will try to express my ideas about the future of the Canadian Inuit.

3.1 Inuit Land and its population

Inuit land and its population have experienced great changes in the 20th century which were closely connected with the arrival and settling of outsiders in the Canadian Arctic regions. We have already talked about the whalers, traders and missionaries who had great impacts on the Inuit traditional way of life. However, the biggest change came to the north regions when the Canadian government took more interest in these parts of its land. Even though the south had long known that the Arctic had rich resources, they became increasingly attractive after World War II.

At this point, we must mention that during World War II, the Arctic was used as a strategic region for the Allied Forces – the government of United States invested a lot of money into the transportation system because it was the most effective way of supplying its troops in Alaska and England. Among the other military project belonged for example Project Crimson (constructions of a series of landing fields in Canada’s eastern Arctic that allowed military planes to fly to Baffin Island and then to Greenland, Iceland and England) and the military complex built at Goose Bay which served as a major American air base. The US military continued to invest into the Canadian North during the Cold War,

however, with its end the strategic importance of these regions diminished along with the US military expenditures.⁷³

But what all of this meant for the Aboriginal people? The main effect of the military was the involvement of the Inuit people into wage economy. They started working for the military which was accompanied by the gradual growth of aboriginal settlements around the air bases and increased dependence on modern products such as steel knives, rifles, and building materials.⁷⁴

After World War II there was a resource boom in the north regions. The Canadian government supported such economic initiatives with new programs and policies which resulted in realizing many megaprojects such as the development of iron ore mines in northern Quebec and Labrador. These industrial projects raised the first questions concerning the negative impacts on the polar environment and their effects on aboriginal land use.

As a result of this new southern interest in the Arctic was the establishment of the federal Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources in 1950s. The main role of this new agency was the realization of a program of community development which meant that the Inuit families across the Canadian Arctic were relocated during the times of starvation into the permanent settlements with its own administrator appointed by the government. This was the beginning of the housing projects, compulsory education for Inuit children, and dependence on social welfare because hunting of wildlife around the communities was soon exhausted.⁷⁵

Until the 1970s, the Inuit people had to challenge many of the changes which greatly affected their way of life. The old nomadic life was gone and they were introduced to the new modern world. It is obvious that it took some years for the aboriginal people to get used to it. Even though “many outside observers predicted a demise of their culture and sense of identity, eventually, they began to take control over their lives once again.”⁷⁶ On one hand, they took advantages of amenities of the settlement life such as living in houses

⁷³ See, Bone, *The Geography of the Canadian North: issues and challenges*, 65-66.

⁷⁴ Frank James Tester, *Igloo to Iglurjuaq*, in *Critical Inuit Studies: an anthology of contemporary Arctic ethnography*, edited by Pamela Stern and Lisa Stevenson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 230-252.

⁷⁵ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 105-108.

⁷⁶ Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 107.

or travelling by snowmobiles, but on the other hand they were greatly committed to preserve some aspects of the way of life and values of their ancestors.

Furthermore, the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s was the era in which pan-Indian movements had appeared among Aboriginal peoples in southern Canada and the United States. Consequently, many regional and national organizations were formed as the opposition to a White Paper issued by the Canadian government in 1969 (a plan to terminate the Department of Indian Affairs and to integrate Aboriginal peoples into the larger society). However the Inuit were not subject to the Indian act, these events could have had some impact on the Inuit because soon the first small Inuit associations began to be formed in the Northwest Territories. In 1971, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC) and its committee was formed and declared its mandate of speaking out on issues of education, northern development, and the protection of Inuit culture. Besides this, the ITC introduced the concept of Nunavut (our land) for the first time. This idea of Inuit-dominated territory of Canada had been negotiated for a long time and finally in Iqauluit, on May 25, 1993, the Canadian government signed an agreement with Tungavik Federation of Nunavut (an outgrowth of the ITC), for the establishment of new territory in Canada. As the largest political unit in Canada, Nunavut was formed out of the Northwest Territories on 1 April 1999.⁷⁷

It must be mentioned that until 1973, the Aboriginal title to their historic homeland was not recognized which was challenged in the courts. Fortunately for the Aboriginal people, the title was acknowledged by the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. Consequently, the Aboriginal title was defined and Aboriginal peoples of Canada could have reached modern land claim agreements with federal governments in territories and with the federal and provincial governments in the provinces.⁷⁸

As a result of these successful agreements, the Inuit took more control over their lands which today consist of four regions – Territory of Nunavut, Nunavik, Inuvialuit region and Nunatsiavut. In the Arctic, 78 % of the Inuit population (about 40,000) occupies the area that includes more than one third of Canadian landmass and about one half of Canada's coastline, extending from northern Labrador to the Northwest Territories. However, Inuit

⁷⁷ See, Matthiasson, *The Maritime Inuit: Life on the Edge*, 108-112.

⁷⁸ See, Bone, *The Geography of the Canadian North: issues and challenges*, 70-71.

also live outside Nunaat mostly in urban places such as Ottawa, Yellowknife or Edmonton.⁷⁹

According to the 2006 statistical profile, the Inuit population has grown from 40,220 in 1996 to 50,485 in 2006 which was a 26% increase compared to 8% increase of the non-Aboriginal Canadian population. Besides this, the Inuit population is very young – over one half of all Inuit were aged 24. As the result of a young, growing Inuit population, there are some potential issues to be taken into consideration. These for example include the growing demand for housing stock as well as all levels of schooling.⁸⁰

In the end of this part we can say that Nunavut had to be considered as a great success for the native people of Canada. This new territory represents a homeland for the Inuit in which they are able to ensure that its policies and operations would follow their interest. Moreover with the creation of Nunavut, the Inuit have gained more control over their lives because the government is mostly run by the native people who try hard to concentrate on issues of the Inuit culture and economic development. Of course, there are still many problems to be solved which will be closely examined in the next part.

3.2 Social and economic issues

This part will be focused on the most crucial aspects of Inuit life nowadays - the conditions of housing, health, education and employment. I will use the latest data released by Statistics Canada which were developed with the input from the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (the national Inuit organization representing Canadian Inuit), the four Inuit regions (Nunatsiavut/Labrador, Nunavik/northern Quebec, Nunavut, the Inuvialuit Settlement region in the Northwest Territories), and Laval University.⁸¹

In my opinion these statistical information shows us best the reality of Inuk's everyday life in the Canadian North because this 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey has been developed in co-operation with Inuit and has acknowledged their different geographical

⁷⁹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "Inuit in Canada: 2008 Inuit Statistical Profile", ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/InuitStatisticalProfile2008.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "Inuit in Canada: 2008 Inuit Statistical Profile", ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/InuitStatisticalProfile2008.pdf>.

⁸¹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "Statistics Canada Report Confirms Inuit Children Suffer from Lack of Food and Shelter", ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/media-centre/media-releases/statistics-canada-report-confirms-inuit-children-suffer-lack-food-and-sh>.

and cultural circumstances. Based on these data and several other sources the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami has prepared its own Statistical Profile in 2008 which will be also used here for further analyses including the comparisons between the past and present and also between the Canadian Inuit's and non-aboriginal Canadians' living conditions.

3.2.1 Housing

To begin with, the housing issue has played the key role in the quality of the Inuit life since the 1950s when the Canadian State introduced and realized their plans concerning a modernization of the Inuit housing. In my opinion, the word modernization was actually the synonymous for assimilation. In 1950 the Canadian government started providing the rigid-frame housing to the Inuit which culminated in the Eskimo rental housing program initiated in 1965. Until then the Inuit lived much as they had - in tents in summer and igloos in winter. Inuit camps were temporary locations including a few households built around the extended family.⁸²

However, the Second World War had changed some of this traditional housing before the government appeared on the scene. As I have already said, many Inuit were employed at military and communication stations in several areas such as Victoria Island, arctic Quebec, Frobisher Bay, etc. First the Inuit had started building shacks around air bases and weather stations because there were no other alternatives of housing. Later the Inuit followed their children who were obliged to visit church-run day or boarding schools which led to the growth of such settlements. Their new homes were made of lumber and other building materials from dumps. Consequently, these dirty, wet, and extremely poor houses had a disastrous impact on the Inuit health and general well-being.⁸³

To be more accurate, there were great differences among the Inuit housing conditions at this period of time. Some Inuit still lived in traditional tents and igloos, some of them decided to move to the settlements and built their own houses because the supplies were much easier to get, and a lot of Inuit people were gradually relocated by the government to new towns and locations in order to protect them from starvation and poor housing conditions. As one example of much relocation done by the government in the 1950s was the relocation of Inuit families from Port Harrison in Quebec and Pond Inlet on Baffin

⁸² See, Tester, *Igloo to Iglurjuaq*, 230-252.

⁸³ See, Tester, *Igloo to Iglurjuaq*, 230-252.

Island and Grise Fiord where wildlife was more plentiful at both new places and even there were few jobs available at the Resolute air base. In spite of these advantages, it was not easy for the people to adapt to new land, people and dialect.⁸⁴

So we can say that growing concern about the health conditions had stood at the beginning of the first arctic housing policy in 1959 which did not bring anything good to the Inuit people. The houses were sold to the Inuit but they were not able to pay the mortgage, and many consequently returned back to their shacks. The other problem was with the size and the construction of the house because nobody from the government people thought of the family size and specific arctic conditions. Between 1959 and 1964 seven hundred houses had been provided to the Inuit under this welfare housing program at a cost of \$1,42 million. Finally after many disputes among the Inuit, the government and the Indian and Northern Health Service, the government introduced a low-cost, rental-housing program under which the Inuit could have participated in building their new homes as well as shared some costs of their housing.⁸⁵

As a result of these changes in Inuit housing made by the government, the native people have become more dependent upon wage labor. They needed more money to pay for costs of the house. Therefore, their way of life had to change and this was the main problem for the native people used to live on land. Many of the Inuit were resistant to this assimilation process and left their jobs to go hunting and trapping which contributed to the negative portrayal of Inuit as lazy and primitive people. In my opinion, this whole movement of native people to new settlements was not a happy experience for the Inuit because they did not understand this new way of life they had to suddenly face.

After this brief but very important look into the history I will concentrate on the present situation of the Inuit housing. Unfortunately, the housing conditions have not improved too much. From my point of view we can find one of the main reasons for that in bad decisions made by the government in the past, regarding the quick but unconsidered Inuit transition from their traditional homes to the European-style homes and community-based life which were not suitable for living in the Canadian Arctic.

⁸⁴ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 185-188.

⁸⁵ See, Tester, *Igloo to Iglurjuaq*, 230-252.

Based on the information from the workshop held by Ajunnginiq Centre, NAHO (National Aboriginal Health Organization) in March, 2008, the Inuit housing shortages and poor quality housing have become recently the most serious issue for all Inuit regions in Canada. The explanation for such anxiety is obvious. Among Inuit, the overcrowded houses and homelessness is associated with a lot of negative side effects such as health problems, low achievements levels in schools, violence, depression, and substance abuse.⁸⁶

Sooner than we examine the main reasons for present circumstances of the Inuit homelessness and housing realities, we will look closely on the recent data issued by the Statistics of Canada and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. According to the 2006 Census, Inuit suffer the worst overcrowding in Canada compared with other aboriginal groups (Métis and First Nations) and non-Aboriginal Canadian inhabitants. It is necessary to say that crowding was defined as more than one person per room.

Table 1: Percent of Inuit living in crowded homes in Canada and Nunaat⁸⁷

	Canada	Nunaat
1996	36	43
2006	31	38

Table 1 shows us that in 2006, 31% of Inuit (about 15,600 Inuit) lived in overcrowded houses which were lower than in 1996 when the proportion was 36% in the whole Canada. We can see slightly bigger decline in percentages between the same years in Nunaat. In contrast, in the 2006 Census there is also available the percentage of non-Aboriginal Canadian population living in crowded houses which was only 3%.

⁸⁶ Ajunnginiq Centre of National Aboriginal Health Organization, "Homelessness and Housing Realities for Inuit: Background for Discussion, National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2008, http://www.naho.ca/inuit/e/resources/documents/2008-03-18_HousingandHomelessness_BACKGROUNDFORDISCUSSION.pdf.

⁸⁷ Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census: Inuit", Statistics Canada 2009, <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/aboriginal/crowded.cfm#nt15>.

Table 2: Percent of Inuit living in crowded homes in four regions of Nunaat⁸⁸

	Nunavik	Nunavut	Inuvialuit	Nunatsiavut
1996	47	43	31	37
2006	49	39	19	13

According to the Table 2 it is obvious that the Inuit lived in crowded conditions in all regions of Nunaat. On the other hand there is one positive fact - except for Nunavik there was a drop in percentages of the Inuit living in overcrowded houses between the year 1996 and 2006. The biggest decline of 24% occurred in Nunatsiavut where the government of Newfoundland and Labrador funded the construction of new housing units. To stay objective we must mention again the rate for non-Aboriginal population of Nunaat living in crowded houses which was about 5%.

Moreover we have to take into consideration the fact that there is a growing percentage of Inuit who lives in homes which need major repairs. For example, in Inuit Nunaat, 31% of Inuit lived in home in need of major repairs in 2006 compared to a percentage of 1996 which was 19%. In the whole Canada, 28% of Inuit (about 14,000 Inuit) reported living in homes requiring major repairs in 2006. In contrast, 7% of non-Aboriginal population in Canada lived in similar conditions in the same year.⁸⁹

In only Nunavut itself, “15% of its population is on waiting lists for public housing. In 2004, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami estimated that 3,300 houses are needed to address the current housing shortage in Nunavut, and an additional 250 units per year would be required thereafter.”⁹⁰

In spite of some decline in percentage of Inuit living in overcrowded houses, the situation is still alarming. If we take into consideration the comparable data concerning the non-Aboriginal population and growing percentage of Inuit living in homes in need of major repairs, the situation for the Inuit seems to be much worse. Furthermore there exists one more issue to be discussed - “hidden homelessness”. This type of homelessness is typical for the north regions and native people living in urban places - such people do not

⁸⁸ See, Statistics Canada, “Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations”, 2006.

⁸⁹ See, Statistics Canada, “Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations”, 2006.

⁹⁰ Ajunnginiq Centre of National Aboriginal Health Organization, “Homelessness and Housing Realities for Inuit: Background for Discussion”, 2.

live on the streets or in the communities as in the south but they usually go from home to home and survive with the help of friends or relatives. Unfortunately, there is limited data about the number of “hidden homeless” issued in the present statistics that makes the situation more difficult to be solved.

If we want to see the complicated situation about Inuit housing conditions in context, we should find answers on these two questions:

- What circumstances caused this difficult situation in the Inuit housing?
- What could be done to improve the present dissatisfactory conditions of the Inuit housing?

Considering the first question, I have found out that in 2006, the Human Resources and Social Development Canada had issued a report: “Homeless in the Territorial North: State and Availability of Knowledge from which we can learn the key characteristics and issues that have contributed greatly to the present Inuit housing realities. Here are the most important ones:

- Demographic profile: no real knowledge about the number of homeless, highly mobile population with a little data about the migration patterns of the homeless, urbanization as a cause of many homelessness-related problems;
- Geography and climate: the Arctic climate conditions make transportation and engineering more difficult, the construction season is very short, limited road connections between communities, high costs of heating, insulation, delivering of heavy materials which all together have a direct impact on affordability of housing;
- Socio-economic issues: the north territories are mostly dependent on federal transfers, high rates of unemployment and social problems, service sector is seriously deficient;
- Supply and condition of housing: excessive reliance on housing assistance, great need for public housing, emergency shelters face many problems including management trouble, financial collapses or insufficient capacity.⁹¹

As for the answer of the second question, I would like to concentrate on the various ways of help and improvement in the end of this part. Because the issue of the Inuit

⁹¹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Inuit in Canada: 2008 Inuit Statistical Profile”, ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/InuitStatisticalProfile2008.pdf>.

housing is closely connected with other issues concerning health, education, and employment in the North, it would be appropriate to look for possible solutions in all these problematic areas together.

3.2.2 Health

The Inuit health will be another of serious issues I want to discuss. As I have said the Inuit present health conditions have originated partly in bad housing conditions. However, the Inuit fight with several new diseases had begun a long ago with the first arrival of European newcomers. Next to the fatal consequences caused by epidemics of European diseases in the 18th and 19th century, which have been already discussed, there have been many side effects of new way of life and diet on the Inuit health such as diabetes, respiratory problems, mental disturbances, and drug addictions. The Inuit people eat less meat, eat and drink more sugary products, and get less exercise. As a result many children and adults have bad teeth, acne, overweight, heart, and many other troubles nowadays.

Surprisingly tuberculosis still troubles many Inuit people. According to the 2006 Statistical Profile, “the tuberculosis rate for Inuit is almost 23 times higher than the rate for all Canadians.”⁹² When we look into the past, this disease had become a great danger to the native people in the 1950s when one in every seven of the Inuit underwent treatment in the southern hospitals, far away from their family members. This situation was very sad and upsetting for all of them. Many of the Inuit came home weakened by this disease and could no longer hunt or trap. Moreover small children returned back after years of treatment unable to speak the Inuit language.⁹³

Nevertheless the new phenomenons for the Inuit are chronic and mental diseases. The most widespread chronic diseases among the Inuit adults are respiratory problems (e.g. asthma) and high blood pressure and heart problems. Among the most dangerous chronic diseases, Inuit children suffer from, belong several kinds of allergies and ear problems. In 2001, the total rate was over 30% of the Inuit adults and children suffered from all kinds of chronic illnesses in Nunat regions altogether (Appendix PI).

⁹² Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Inuit in Canada: 2008 Inuit Statistical Profile”, ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/InuitStatisticalProfile2008.pdf>.

⁹³ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 177-180.

While the figures for chronic illnesses are almost the same for the Inuit adults and the whole Canadian population, the daily smoking rate for the Inuit (58%) was three times higher than the rate for all adults in Canada (17%). The high percentages are also among the Inuit women who smoke daily – e.g. 62% of Inuit pregnant women were daily smokers in 2001 which I found it very dangerous for the baby as well as for the mother. Therefore, it is not surprising that the death rates from lung cancer for the Inuit in Canada are the highest in the world.⁹⁴

The other group of current illnesses Inuit people suffers from creates variety of mental problems and diseases. The mental health has become recently a crisis issue in several aboriginal communities in Canada. According to 2001 Census data, the Inuit suicide rates (national Inuit suicide rate was 135 per 100,000) are more than eleven times higher than the Canadian rate (12 per 100,000) and 83% of these are young people under thirty years old. In the table below, we can see estimated suicide rates for Inuit regions between the year 1999 and 2003.

Table 3: Inuit suicide rates in four regions of Nunaat (1999-2003)⁹⁵

Nunaat regions	Suicide rate/100,000
Nunavik	181
Nunatsiavut	239
Nunavut	120
Inuvialuit	61

Considering the main causes of high Inuit suicide rates as well as ways of prevention, an important survey was done by the National Aboriginal Health Organization in 2006 and its outcomes cited in the report: “Suicide Prevention: Inuit Traditional Practices that Encouraged Resilience and Coping”. Firstly I will use this report as the main source of information for listing the reasons why so many Inuit people commit suicide. Furthermore, we have to realize that the suicide causes are common for the most of the mental illnesses.

⁹⁴ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Inuit in Canada: 2008 Inuit Statistical Profile”, ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/InuitStatisticalProfile2008.pdf>.

⁹⁵ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Inuit Approaches in Suicide Prevention”, ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/Inuit-Approaches-to-Suicide-Prevention>.

The suicide and other health preventions programs will be discussed in the end together with the housing, educational and employment programs.

In the National Aboriginal Health Organization Report there are described factors existing in Aboriginal suicide which are common for all aboriginal people as well as some factors specific only to Inuit. Among the most frequent suicide causes belong:

- Disputes in the family and community;
- Problems in romantic relationships;
- High-speed change in the community (growing sense of anonymity and social distance, increasing segregation of the generations, rejection by the others);
- Lack of access to mental health treatment;
- Loss of control over land and living conditions;
- Socio-economic factors including high poverty rates (low income, high rates of food and other products in the Arctic regions), housing problems, low levels of education and lack of employment;
- Variety of traumas resulting from historical events (forced relocation to permanent settlements, the end of nomadic life, separation and language loss caused by enforced boarding school attendance and treatments in southern hospitals);
- Individual reasons (loss of a parent, sexual abuse) and alcohol and drug addictions;
- The impact of suicide epidemics (number of suicides occur over a short period of time).⁹⁶

Among the Inuit youngsters the most common cause for suicide was found in romantic relationships. On the other hand the socio-economic problems such as homelessness, living in overcrowded house, unemployment contribute mainly to the depression, anger and hopelessness which underlie increase in violence, substance abuse and imprisonment.⁹⁷

In conclusion of this part there is one more statistic I want to point out. As a result of many health problems which have been mentioned in this part there exists a growing life expectancy gap between the people living in Inuit communities and all Canadians. According to 2001 Census, the life expectancy for all people living in Inuit Communities

⁹⁶ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "Inuit Approaches in Suicide Prevention", ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/Inuit-Approaches-to-Suicide-Prevention>.

⁹⁷ See, Ajunnginiq Centre of National Aboriginal Health Organization, "Homelessness and Housing Realities for Inuit: Background for Discussion", 5.

(in the four regions of Nunavut) is 66.9 years while for all Canadians 79.5 years.⁹⁸ The difference is almost 13 years which is unbelievably high gap for Canada that belongs to the most highly-developed countries around the world.

3.2.3 Education and employment

Education and employment are the last two issues in this part I would like to discuss. I have chosen them because of their importance which plays in everyday life of Inuit people nowadays. As it has been already mentioned, the Inuit traditional education had been based on the elder's knowledge that the young Inuit had been taught through observation and practice in the family and community. Nevertheless with the arrival of Europeans and their new way of life, the whole traditional Inuit life including the educational authentic methods has changed.

First in the beginning of the 19th century, there were set up residential schools in several trading posts run mostly by missionaries and at the end of World War II the federal and provincial governments increased the number of day schools. To be able to attend these schools, the Inuit children had to move from camps and left their family members. Eventually more and more Inuit families were forced to move to permanent settlements by the Canadian government. However, the reasons for the provision of education by governments to the northern native children could have seemed to be well-taken, the educational systems have been designed according to southern ideas which did not fit into the northern Inuit customs. Among those main reasons for example belonged an effort to improve the Inuit chances of making living or to train native people for migration south.⁹⁹

This foreign system of education had negative effects on the whole Inuit life. In the beginning, nobody thought enough about the native way of life where the great importance played native language, native way of education and sharing of similar ideas. The Inuit children were taught by teachers spoke only English or French, with totally different ideas about the life from those of the native people. Some of these new ideas were adopted by the young Inuit. As a result, elders did not understand what the children had gone through in schools and the traditional closeness between the generations was broken.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "Inuit in Canada: 2008 Inuit Statistical Profile", ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/InuitStatisticalProfile2008.pdf>.

⁹⁹ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 196-201.

¹⁰⁰ See, Crowe, *A History of the Original Peoples of Northern Canada*, 196-201.

The control of Inuit education was gradually shifted from missionaries to government between 1955 and 1969 (on April 1, 1969 the government took total responsibility).¹⁰¹ By the 1970 there was some improvement done with the introduction of a school-construction program by the federal government in most Inuit villages. Under this new education programs for Inuit, the Inuktitut have been identified as “the language for of instruction for part or all of the primary grades.”¹⁰² In spite of a lot of faults the schools and vocational programs caused in the north, we can see one positive point in it for the Inuit. They have prepared many native people for the modern world, so today they can speak for themselves and protect their rights and culture more effectively.

Inuit presently have four education systems in two territories and two provinces across the Inuit Nunaat because the education is under provincial/territorial jurisdictions. It means that each educational system follows unique legislation, policies and standards. Next to that the Federal government is responsible for lifelong learning in early childhood education. However elementary, middle and secondary schooling is available in most Inuit communities today, the drop out rate of Inuit children at the high school level is very high – approximately only 25% of Inuit who started a school graduated with success.¹⁰³ Moreover we can see from the table bellow that about a half of Inuit population in the age group of 25-64 years old did not finish high school in 2006.

Table 4: Highest level of education completed for Inuit men and women aged 25-64, 200¹⁰⁴

	Men	Women
Less than high school	51%	51%
High school	12%	14%
Trades	18%	9%
College	15%	19%
University Degree	3%	5%

¹⁰¹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “State of Inuit learning in Canada”, ITK, Socio-Economic Department 2005, <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/NR/rdonlyres/03AC4F69-D0B8-4EA3-85B1-56C0AC2B158C/0/StateOfInuitLearning.pdf>.

¹⁰² The Canadian Encyclopedia, “Native People, Education”, Historica Foundation of Canada 2008, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0005646>.

¹⁰³ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Education Summit is a step in developing a National Strategy on Inuit Education”, ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/Education-Summit-is-a-step-in-developing-a-National-Strategy-on-Inuit-Education>.

Although there was an increase in number of Inuit with a high school diploma, the rate of Inuit aged 25-34 years who did not complete a high school is three times more when compared to Canada as a whole. Among the main reasons for not finishing elementary or high school given by the Inuit men in 2001 were following ones:

- They wanted to work (18%);
- They were bored in school (18%);
- They had to work (14%).

The Inuit women left school mostly because of the pregnancy or taking care of children (24%). The other reasons for leaving school were for example a necessity to help at home or not unavailability of school.¹⁰⁵

Considering the low numbers of the Inuit with a high diploma certificate, it is not surprising that there were only a few students to go on to complete trade, college certificate or University degree. Furthermore there exist other difficulties for which the Inuit do not want to prolong their studies: low English literacy skills, travel outside the community, and unavailability of certain courses at the high school level.

In view of the fact that the education is closely connected with the employment, the Inuit have to face another struggle to survive in today's modern world. In 2001, the Nunavut had an average of 28.2% unemployment rate and in some places reached 46%. In contrast, in the same year the Canadian average unemployment rate was 7.7%. However, the low level of education is not the only reason for high unemployment rates among the Inuit. Next to the lack of education, the Inuit workers have a little job experiences in an industrial workplace compared to other Canadians which is very stressful for the native people. Therefore, a lot of Inuit eventually stay in their home communities relied on assistance money and traditional trapping and hunting.¹⁰⁶

To make the picture complete, the Table 5 shows the latest unemployment rates for Inuit and non-Inuit adult men and women in Canada. The unemployment rate for both,

¹⁰⁴ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "Inuit in Canada: 2008 Inuit Statistical Profile", ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/InuitStatisticalProfile2008.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "Inuit in Canada: 2008 Inuit Statistical Profile", ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/InuitStatisticalProfile2008.pdf>.

¹⁰⁶ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "State of Inuit learning in Canada", ITK, Socio-Economic Department 2005, <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/NR/rdonlyres/03AC4F69-D0B8-4EA3-85B1-56C0AC2B158C/0/StateOfInuitLearning.pdf>.

Canadian men and women, was 5%, while in the same period of time there were 23% of Inuit men and 15% of Inuit women without a job.

Table 5: Unemployment rates for Inuit and non-Inuit adults, aged 25-64, 2006¹⁰⁷

	Inuit		Non-Inuit	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Canada	23	15	5	5
Nunatsiavut	45	21	21	0
Nunavik	21	17	8	4
Nunavut	13	15	3	3
Inuvialuit region	29	21	4	4
Total outside land claims	18	13	5	5

3.2.4 Economic and social development programs

Concerning the ways of improvements in the most crucial areas of the Inuit life such as housing, health, education and employment, there already exist many concrete projects initiated by the Inuit and Aboriginal organizations and communities that are financed by the provincial and territorial governments as well as by the federal government. In spite of some improvements done by these economic and development programs, there is still a great gap between the levels of current living conditions for Inuit and other Canadians according to a wide range of indicators issued recently by the Statistics Canada.

In my opinion, the most important position in securing a more equal and equitable place for Inuit within Canada has the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) which represents all Inuit of Canada. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami means “Inuit are united in Canada” in English and this organization has been working in all areas of Inuit life since its foundation. ITK consists of four regional Inuit associations, the National Inuit Youth Council and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. Besides the main role which has played ITK in the area of land claim settlements, this organization has a wide range of agenda including also many

¹⁰⁷ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Inuit in Canada: 2008 Inuit Statistical Profile”, ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/InuitStatisticalProfile2008.pdf>.

projects in housing, health, education and employment that should help to raise the Inuit standard of living to the average standard enjoyed by other Canadians.¹⁰⁸

The ITK's 2007-2008 Annual report gives us an overall summary about variety of activities done by this organization during the year 2007 and 2008. Let have a brief look at some of the projects concerning housing, health, education and employment:

-Housing: In 2007, ITK invited the Special Rapporteur on housing to Canada whose main aim was to review the status of the housing conditions in Canada. The key areas of interest were homelessness and indigenous people. Through many examples, ITK used this opportunity to demonstrate that the Inuit lived in the most crowded homes in the country and to show the consequences of such living conditions (social problems, chronic diseases, etc.). The most significant result of the Rapporteur's conclusion was a call for the Canadian government to develop comprehensive strategies to end the crisis in Canada's housing with special attention paid to its indigenous people.

-Health: Among the most important activities of the ITK Health and Environment Department belonged the first Inuit Health Summit which took place in Nunavik/Quebec in January 2008 and were attended by the government of Canada, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories and Inuit leaders from several aboriginal organizations. Discussion was focused on the Health Human Resource Shortage in Inuit communities and the challenges faced by community programs. Among the other activities concerning the Inuit health can be mentioned the 2008 National Aboriginal Health Working Summit where the delegates for example discussed the development of an action plan to address Health Human Resource needs in Inuit communities. In 2007, there was created the ITK/Health Canada Task Group which prepared a joint-work plan focused on areas such as the quality and access to health services or collaboration in Inuit data sharing and research through partnerships on national and regional levels.

- Education and Employment: In April 2008 there was held a Summit on Inuit Education in Inuvik that was preceded by the implementation of ITK's Initiative on Inuit Education. Through funding provided by the Canada Millennium Foundation, the Canadian Council on Learning, the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, and Inuit

¹⁰⁸ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "About ITK", ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/About-ITK>.

Relation Secretariat, the Education Summit was focused on action plans of the six Summit themes (e.g. capacity building, graduating bilingual students, building Inuit curriculum and teaching practices, etc.). Among the other activities done by the ITK in education and employment belonged the Youth Suicide Prevention program, the meeting of the Early Childhood Development Working Group in 2007, or the Urban Inuit Human Resource Development Research project (concerning the access to employment and training by urban Inuit).¹⁰⁹

In conclusion it is necessary to say that the situation in all areas of Inuit life has been slowly improving thank to these economic and development programs which are tailored to the real Inuit needs. We must realize that it would take more time to repair all the damages done in the past.

3.3 Inuit in the future

On the contrary to some critics of the Nunavut creation as well as many challenges Inuit have to face in the 21st century, I believe that the right way for the Inuit lies in the concept of aboriginal self-governance. The most important proof for my opinion could be seen in the Inuit history. These people managed to have survived in the Canadian Arctic for thousands of years and live independently and quite happy according to their rules and beliefs. Their traditional way of life had been mostly changed through the past three centuries, but almost ruined by the wrong government's decisions only in a few decades of the second half of the 20th century. Even though the government's interventions were meant to help the Inuit, the final impacts of such one-sided decisions were reverse. This clearly shows that the Inuit had different perspective on life which had to be taken into consideration nowadays. Therefore, I see the concept of Nunavut for the Inuit as the first step in the search for a place within Canadian society.

¹⁰⁹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "2007-2008 Annual Report", ITK 2008, <http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/4-ENGLISH-TEXT-2007-2008-ITK-Annual-Report.pdf>.

CONCLUSION

As I have worked on this bachelor thesis, I have become seriously involved into the depth of the serious problems the Inuit have to face today. Among the most important challenges they have to struggle belong the current crucial situation in housing, health, education and employment concerning all the group ages. It is also necessary to see a close impact of the poor housing conditions on the health and education as well. Moreover, they are the children who suffer most. The situation is so crucial that about a third of them had gone hungry because the family did not have enough money. Therefore, it is no surprising, that in general, there exists a great gap between the indicators of living standards of the Inuit people and non-aboriginal Canadians.

In my opinion, the Canadian government should start to deal more intensively with the problems concerning the everyday life in the Inuit communities and funded the surveys which the solid projects have to be based on. As I have already mentioned, another part of solution of the Inuit problems could be seen in the effort to involve the natives to have a possibility to make decisions in political and economic areas of their lives. As a result of a new political sovereignty, they will be able to support and strengthen the economic development based on the local sources as well as traditional skills and ability to hunt. Thanks to the new power gained through the land claim agreements, the Inuit can also influence the decisions about the environmental issues which are in the centre of the public concern nowadays.

In conclusion let say that there are many challenges the Inuit have to face in the future. However, I would like to mention a great contribution the Inuit unique culture has brought into the Canadian as well as world society such as their outstanding arts and crafts. Besides, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national organization representing all Canadian Inuit, has become a key partner in the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games and the Inukshuk, a symbol universal to Inuit culture, will welcome the world to the 2010 Vancouver Olympics.

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APPENDICES

- P I Map of four regions of Inuit Nunaat
- P II Description of Inuit Nunaat
- P III Distribution of the Inuit population, regions, 2006
- P IV Chronic conditions among Canadian Inuit, 2001

APPENDIX P II: DESCRIPTION OF INUIT NUNAAT

'Inuit Nunaat' is the Inuktitut expression for 'Inuit homeland,' an expanse comprising more than one-third of Canada's land mass, extending from northern Labrador to the Northwest Territories. Inuit have inhabited this vast region, in what is now known as Canada, for 5,000 years. In recent years, four Inuit land claims have been signed across Inuit Nunaat.

While Inuit in each of these regions share a common culture and many traditions, each region is, at the same time, distinct. For example, traditions can sometimes vary and there is much linguistic and geographic diversity from one region (and sometimes from one community within the same region) to the next. These four regions are:

Nunatsiavut: This is the most easterly region, encompassing five communities along the northern coast of Labrador. The word 'Nunatsiavut' means 'our beautiful land' in Inuktitut. This region was created through the 2005 Labrador Inuit Land Claim Agreement and includes about 72,500 square kilometres of land and the adjacent ocean zone.

Nunavik: This region in northern Quebec was established through the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. This was the first modern land claims agreement in Canada, signed in 1975. Nunavik covers 660,000 square kilometres of land. More recently, the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement has given Nunavimmiut (Inuit of Nunavik) ownership of many of the islands off the coast of Nunavik.

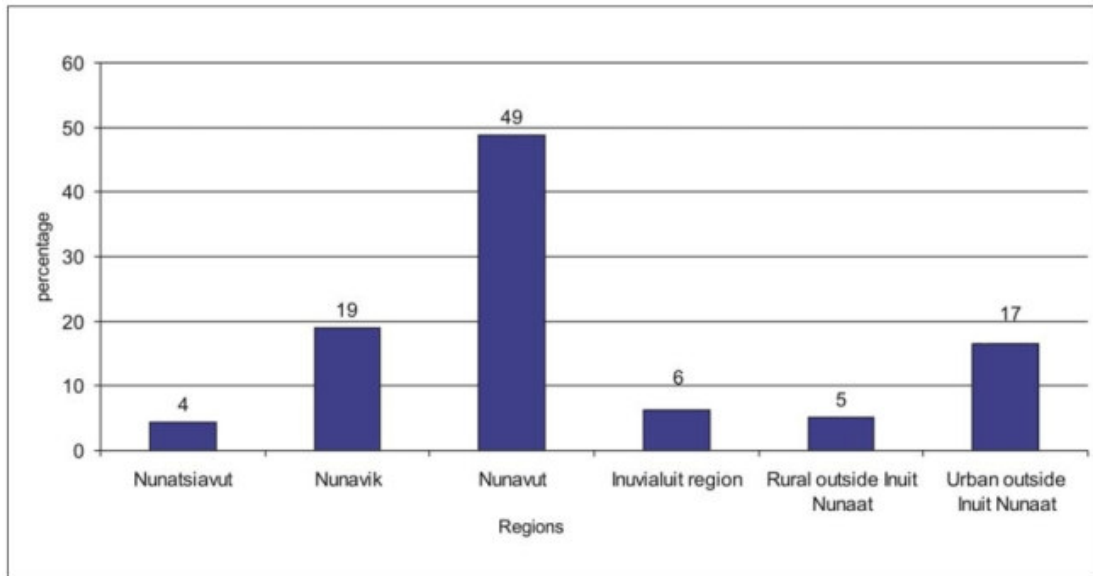
Nunavut: The 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement led to the creation of the territory of Nunavut in 1999. It was formed out of the eastern part of the Northwest Territories. This agreement is the largest land claim settlement negotiated between a state and Aboriginal people in the world. The territory spans 2 million square kilometres. There are three main regions within Nunavut: Qikiqtaaluk, Kivalliq and Kitikmeot.

Inuvialuit region: In 1984, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) was signed, giving ownership to 90,650 square kilometres of land in the Northwest Territories to the Inuvialuit (Inuit of the western Arctic). The IFA lists six Inuvialuit communities, five within and one outside the Settlement Region. For the purposes of this report, all six Inuvialuit communities have been included.

There are 52 communities 14 with large Inuit populations across Inuit Nunaat. Because of a lack of road access, these remote communities can, for the most part, be accessed only by air year round and by sea during the summer months. Most communities are small; well over one-third (38%) have a total population of fewer than 500 people. About 29% have between 500 and 999 people, while 33% have 1,000 or more.

Source: Statistics Canada, "Inuit Nunaat", in Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census: Inuit", Statistics Canada 2008
<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/aboriginal/inuit.cfm>.

APPENDIX P III: DISTRIBUTION OF THE INUIT POPULATION, REGIONS, 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006.

Source: Statistics Canada, "Inuit Nunaat", in Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census: Inuit", Statistics Canada 2008,
<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/aboriginal/charts/chart3.htm>.

**APPENDIX P IV: CHRONIC CONDITIONS AMONG CANADIAN
INUIT, 2001**

Description	Selected Inuit communities in Labrador	Nunavik	Nunavut	Inuvialuit region
Adults (15 and over)				
One or more long term condition (%)	39.8	29.6	30.3	35.4
Respiratory problem – asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema (%)	14.5	6.2	6.6	7.9
High blood pressure, heart problems or effects of a stroke (%)	15.8	11.4	10.9	13.8
Children (0-14 years old)				
One or more long term condition (%)	41.1	32.6	29.7	33.8
Allergies (%)	13.7	5.0	7.6	10.8
Ear infection/problem (%)	15.3	15.3	11.4	10.0

Note: Chronic conditions are those that have lasted or that are expected to last 6 months or more. These conditions have to have been diagnosed by a health professional. It is often more difficult to have conditions diagnosed in the north because of difficulty accessing health care services and the lower percentages for Inuit reflect this.

Source: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Inuit in Canada: 2008 Inuit Statistical Profile”, ITK 2008,
<http://www.itk.ca/sites/default/files/InuitStatisticalProfile2008.pdf>.