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English 102

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Loss of the Traditional Inuit Way of Life: Is Global Warming to Blame?

The Inuit culture is full of ancient traditions dependent upon the use of the land and animals. The Inuit population is spread throughout northern Canada, Greenland, and Iceland (see appendix A). For many native Inuit, global warming has become a constant threat straining the traditional way of life. In the International Arctic Research Center pamphlet, *The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment*, explains the impact global warming has on the Inuit people: “for Inuit... [global] warming is likely to disrupt or even destroy [the Inuit’s] hunting and food-sharing culture as reduced sea ice causes the animals on which they depend to decline, become less accessible, and possibly become extinct” (ACIA 7). Global warming has certainly had an impact on the Inuit way of life, however, one can also claim that modernization by the Canadian government has played an even larger role in the destruction of this way of life. Nungak Zebedee, an aborigine in Northern Canada, believes a major hurdle the Inuit have to face is how “over the years, Quallunaat [white people] simply took over, much in the way they did in other parts of the world” (Zebedee 2). Zebedee, continues on to explain how the Quallunaat falsely assumed that there was a lack of development in the Inuit society. Although I agree that modernization has altered the Inuit’s traditional way of life, the Inuit are a society with a vast knowledge of the environment and depend upon it to keep their culture alive. Global warming is changing the Arctic in irreversible ways and as a result the Inuit are not able to live as their ancestors once did. Therefore Global warming plays a bigger role than modernization in the destruction of the traditional Inuit lifestyle.

What is implied by modernization in the forced ideals of developed Western countries onto the Inuit. Louis- Jacques Dorais, a scientist who has spent 28 years studying the Inuit culture, explains the relationship the Inuit have with the land and modernization by Canadian government in his book, Quaqtaq Modernity and Identity in an Inuit Society when he mentions how the Inuit culture experienced much modification during the years 1955- 1965. During this time the Canadian government was trying to establish a program that provided the Inuit with economical and scholastic resources. The main objective of this government program “was to modernize the North, in order to make mainstream Canadians out of the Inuit” (Dorais 31). By modernizing the Inuit villages, the Canadian government has altered the way the Inuit once lived, and destroyed much of the culture that existed. The Canadian government forced the Inuit to move into settlements made of poorly constructed buildings. In these settlements extended families were separated into differing camps. As a result of forced modernization the Inuit live in cities complete with roads, houses, and markets. This modern technology has decreased the Inuit’s need for hunting caribou or using igloos as a winter shelter.

The modern technology found in Inuit villages allows the Inuit to live a much different lifestyle than their ancestors once did. In traditional Inuit society, people lived in houses made of snow called (*illu* or *illuvigaq*) during the colder months and lived in dwellings made of caribou or seal hides called (*tupiq*) during the warmer months (Dorais 15). The building blocks of society were families and in the traditional society families often stayed very close together and many generations would migrate to differing camps throughout the year. Traditionally, men went off to hunt caribou while women would stay back to take care of the children. After spending part of the year at their spring camps living in *tupiq*; the Inuit retreated back to their cold weather habitats usually Iggiajaq or Iqaluppilik. It was during their stay at Iggiajaq or Iqaluppilik that

most of the Inuit's hunting of seal and caribou took place (Dorais 17). In the traditional Inuit's lifestyle their diet consisted solely of the food they caught, and villages ate as a community, sharing food with its inhabitants.

Although the Inuit still eat collectively, the life of the modern Inuit is much different than that of their ancestors. After World War II the Canadian government decided to give arctic areas the same educational and economical benefits given to southern regions, and many of the Inuit traditions started to die down. Igloos, once the norm during the winter months, were being replaced in many villages by sturdier more permanent winter housing :“In the winter of 1958-9, one last family was still living in an igloo, but by the following fall they had moved into a cabin. After that, snow houses were used only as temporary dwellings, during winter travel” (Dorais 30). Igloos, once a necessity in Inuit villages has become a thing of the past. The modern Inuit village such as Quaqtaq mirrors every other city in Canada, filled with parking lots, clothing stores, a service zone, and even an airport. (Dorais 48). (See Appendix B)

The development of cities is not the only area of Inuit lifestyle that has been changed by the Canadian government. While much of the Inuit diet still consists of caribou and seal, Inuit cities now have modern convenience stores containing food imported from various countries. When walking through the aisles of one of these stores, an American can recognize many food items that are popular in America such as Coca-Cola or cereal such as Cheerios. These items are highly priced and not as fresh as they are in America; however, the Inuit people still have the ability to obtain these foods. Along with markets, the Inuit people also have access to some of the restaurant chains that exist in America, such as Subway.

Because of grocery stores and restaurant chains such as Subway, jobs available to the Inuit people have changed. While in a traditional society the men's job was to hunt while women played a more traditional role raising children, the modern Inuit have jobs in fields "including education, health, administration, utilities, transportation, and retail" (Dorais 55). This change in the workforce has also played a role in decreasing the importance of hunting to the Inuit society, "as a matter of fact, the major part of their income is drawn from wage work and business. Hunting and trapping revenues now constitute only a negligible percentage of their total monetary earnings" (Dorais 55). Modernization has opened up many new job opportunities for the Inuit people. However, these opportunities make the food and hides obtained from hunting not as essential as they once were. Jobs in utilities and transportation provide the Inuit with resources to buy their food instead of hunting it. Hunting, not as important as it used to be is a means of cultural identity for the modern Inuit people.

Although the Inuit villages have been modernized they still practice many traditional activates as means to preserve their cultural identity. Even though the Inuit have access to many modern items, quite often people do not realize that the Inuit have been including modern ways into their traditional way of life (Oosten 447). Even though the Inuit have alternative ways to obtain food, many continue to hunt and fish for their food as a way of preserving their cultural identity. Despite modernization by the Canadian government the Inuit are finding ways to preserve their cultural identity.

This cultural identity has been severely changed by effects of global warming. The gradual warming of the planet's surface is causing many irreversible changes to the arctic. As the temperatures increase, glaciers are melting at increased rates and animals are dying off in large numbers.(See appendix C) Although modernization by the Canadian government has changed

many important parts of the Inuit traditions such as the necessity of hunting, the changes caused by global warming are of a more significant nature. Most of the Inuit now live in houses and have the ability to buy their food; and although these conveniences are available to the Inuit they do not have to take advantage of this modernization. The affects of global warming are of a much more detrimental nature than modernization because global warming does not give the Inuit a choice of how they want to live. The arctic upon which the Inuit live and hunt consists of frozen water or pack ice surrounded by land. As the temperatures increase, the ice melts and much of the Inuit land and lifestyle disappears as well, whether they want it to or not.

While scientists argue about the exact cause of global warming, one thing they cannot deny is that the arctic ice is melting. Tim Flannery, currently a professor at Macquarie University observed the effects that global warming has on the arctic in his book "The Heat is On". In this book Flannery mentions how, the Greenland ice cap "in the summer of 2002 ... along with the arctic ice cap, shrank by a record 400,000 square miles—the largest decrease ever recorded. Two years later, in 2004, it was discovered that Greenland's glaciers were melting ten times faster than previously thought" (Flannery 144). As temperatures increase, the Greenland glaciers are melting at an estimated cubic mile per week. This is 500% the amount of water that Los Angeles uses in an entire year. The remaining glaciers have greatly thinned as a result of global warming, studies have shown that the arctic ice is 3/5 as dense as it was 40 years ago (Time 8). As the arctic shrinks due to increased temperature, the strength of the Inuit traditions shrinks as well.

As a result of global warming, these caribou which play a major role in the traditional Inuit way of life are crashing through the once sturdy chunks of ice, and are dying off in great numbers. Seals, which are another source of food for the Inuit people are also having a hard time surviving because they depend on the presence of the ice as a place to give birth (Krause 1). As

the amount of ice melts, and the remaining ice becomes increasingly thinner the seals natural habitat is disappearing. Polar bears, along with the seals and the caribou, are having a hard time surviving in the increasing arctic temperatures; the increased arctic temperatures decrease the period of time during which the ice packs are sturdy enough for a polar bear to hunt on. Also, the polar bear's survival is dependent upon the survival of the seals, their main source of food (Cloutier 2).

As the ice melts and becomes thin, the traditional arctic animals move farther north and species such as grizzly bears and salmon are being spotted in the arctic. This alteration makes fishing and hunting hard for the Inuit people because even though there are “generations of indigenous knowledge available to the hunters and trappers of Sachs Harbor they are having a difficult time predicting when once-predictable seasonal migrations will occur” (Krause). The knowledge that is traditionally obtained by the elders and passed down to the younger members of society is becoming virtually useless. The elders, who once played an important role in the Inuit society, are discovering that their knowledge of the land barely applies to how it is today.

One such Inuit tradition passed down by the elders is the sport of hunting caribou and then sharing the food caught with everyone in the village. The Inuit people “rely on 80 percent of their food from hunting, and with the reduction of the hunting season because of the loss of ice, most of their hunting season is reduced now by about 40 to 50 percent. So they’re not able to obtain foods that they would normally get” (Steger 2).

Apart from obtaining food, hunting is a way for the modern Inuit people to remain connected to their heritage. Many Inuit draw a connection between the arctic animals and their culture. The Inuit believe that “the seal... provides us with more than just food and clothes. It

provides us with our identity. It is through sharing and having a seal communion that we regain our strength, physically and mentally” (Oosten 472). Seals are one type of animal whose entire existence is in danger as a result of global warming. Later in his book, Gelspan tells of how global warming is threatening the lives of seals not only in the arctic but throughout the western hemisphere

Several springs ago, a large number of seal pups were found to be starving to death on the beaches and rocks of the northern California coast... Every spring seal pups feed on fish that inhibit the surface waters off northern California. That spring, however, the surface waters had warmed so much that the fish descended to colder, deeper levels to survive. Unfortunately, their new habitat was deeper than the seal pups could dive- leaving them stranded and malnourished. (Gelspan 27)

The Inuit people hold the animals they kill with a large amount of respect and do not believe in overloading their plates to the point of waste. While most of the Caribou is eaten, the remaining bones and hides are used for different purposes. The caribou hides are used as a source of clothing, “The use of *pukiq*, the white underbelly fur of the caribou, to create elements within the body of the parka produces a sharp contrast of white against the dark brown fur of the caribou” (Driscoll-Engelstad 37). As a result of global warming, there will not be any caribou for the Inuit to hunt; and, consequently, the Inuit will not be able to use their hides as clothing or shelter. The ability to construct or live in a tupiq will permanently become a thing of the past. Also, the Inuit will no longer be able to wear the traditional garments that connect them to their heritage.

While global warming and modernization by the Canadian government have both affected the Inuit way of life, both have altered the lifestyle in very different ways. Modernization has changed superficial parts of the culture such as jobs, houses, and technology. While global warming has permanently changed the arctic landscape, is in the process of melting

the polar ice and will destroy the Inuit's ability to hunt, the core of the traditional Inuit culture. Although people may attribute the decline of Inuit culture to modernization, global warming is a more serious threat to the culture. Modernization gives the Inuit people a chance to live similar to the rest of Canada; however, the government is not going to force a modern lifestyle on the Inuit. Modernization makes the once necessary activities such as eating caribou and using the hide as shelter and clothing not as essential to survival, while global warming threatens the Inuit's ability to hunt at all. If nothing is done to prevent global warming from happening, the polar ice caps will completely melt, and the arctic animals will have no means of survival. Unlike modernization by the Canadian government, global warming does not give the Inuit people a choice. If the polar ice caps disappear, so will their culture.

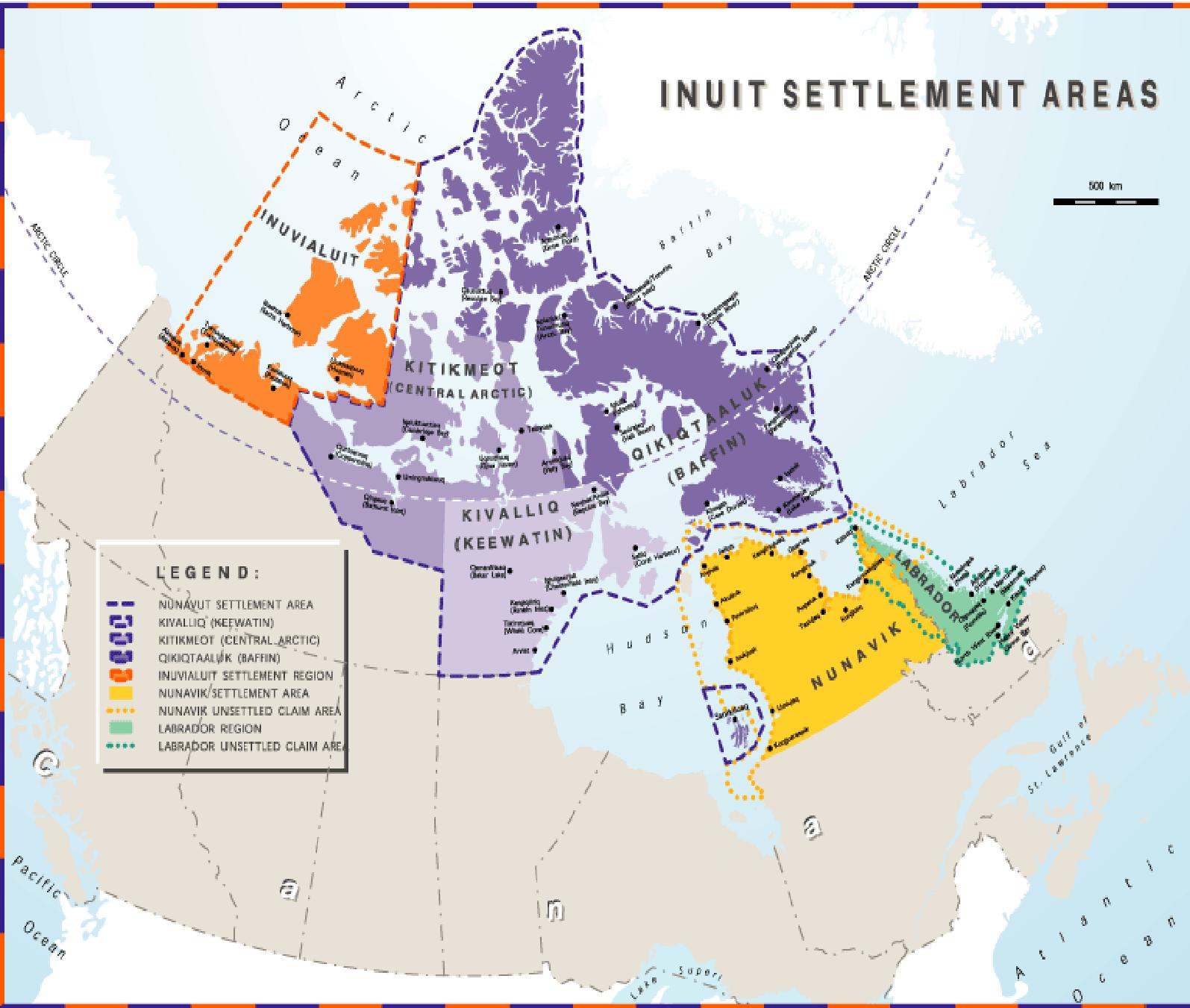
Appendix A

INUIT SETTLEMENT AREAS

500 km

LEGEND:

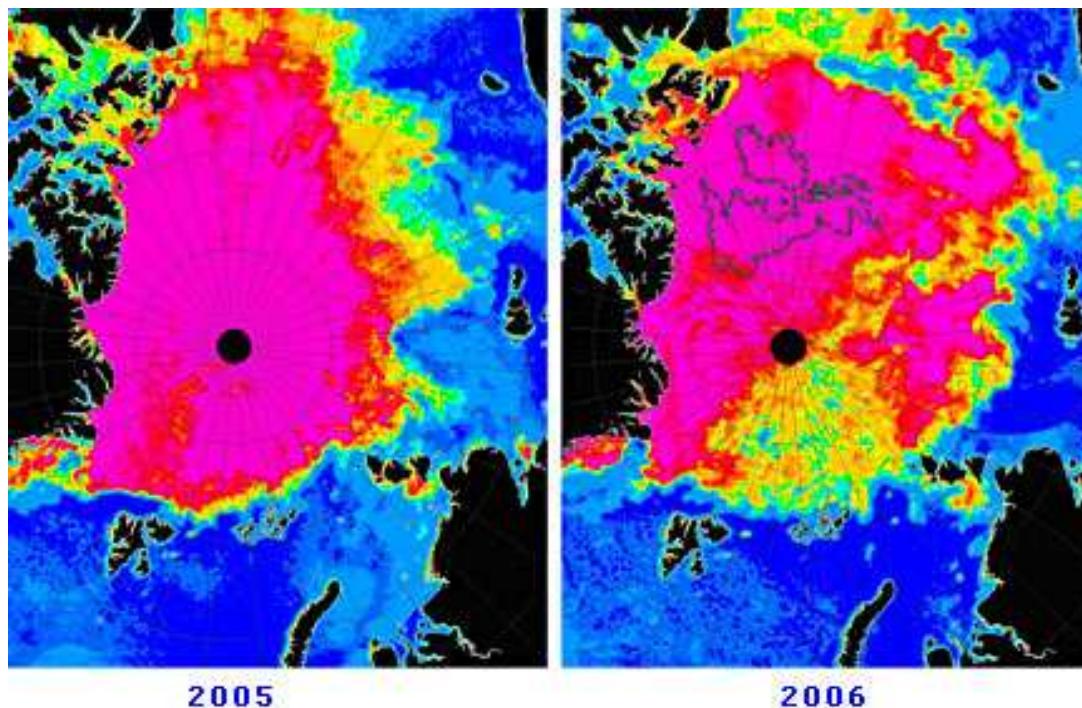
- NUNAVUT SETTLEMENT AREA
- KIVALLIQ (KEEWINATIN)
- KITIKMEOT (CENTRAL ARCTIC)
- QIKIQTAALUK (BAFFIN)
- INUVALUIT SETTLEMENT REGION
- NUNAVIK SETTLEMENT AREA
- NUNAVIK UNSETTLED CLAIM AREA
- LABRADOR REGION
- LABRADOR UNSETTLED CLAIM AREA



Appendix B



Appendix C



The picture above shows the changes in the amount of pack ice in the arctic from the years of 2005- 2006. The pink represents pack ice, the blue shows the amount of open water, and the "colors orange, yellow, and green indicate lower ice concentrations of 70%, 50% and 30%" (Ice Drastically reduced").

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