

preface

Nunavut and Nunavik: Guardians of the Canadian Confederation

Northwest Greenland, 16 June 1951. Three men are climbing a glacier with their dogsleds, bound for the legendary polar village of Thule. Two of them are Inuit: Sakaeunguak the shaman and Qaallasoq (“Navel”). The third is me. Our dress consists of animal-skin coats, bearskin pants, and triple-layered boots of seal and bearskin with an outer layer of caribou hide. We are returning from the great solitudes, the deserted lands of Ellesmere Island and Inglefield Land (North Greenland), where I have mapped uncharted coastline and plateaus at a scale of 1/100,000. Throughout my fourteen months of solitude among the Inuit, I have listened, mesmerized, to the mythic tales of a free and happy people.

Suddenly, Sakaeunguak draws the three of us to a halt. Visibility ahead is nil. With his knife, he beats out a rhythm on the cover of a metal can and raises his voice in an agonistic *ayayarpok*, a shamanic song. “A great tragedy looms before us. I sense it.” As we continue along our route, Martians come into view in the sky.

Martians ... that would be the United States Air Force, which is here in utter secrecy building the largest offensive air base the Arctic has ever seen. The assignment involves the construction of a runway for bombers targeting Peking and Moscow. It is the height of the Korean War and Comrade Stalin has told Comrade Mao that the time has come to lay waste to capitalism. France and Britain are in no condition to fight, while the United States is disarming.

"We'll need to deploy five hundred thousand Chinese soldiers, Comrade Mao – no, many more than that – against the American divisions in Korea. The Red Army will follow them into battle." Mao declines, viscerally distrustful of Moscow, and peace is secured. For the time being.

On the peninsula, the American troops and their allies begin to fall back, losing Seoul. Soon they will be driven to the beach of Pusan, or to surrender. It is in this context that the Pentagon, in the winter of 1950, has decided that a secret weapon is called for. It has to be an aerial operation since the hundred ships dispatched the previous April are still iced in at Melville Bay to the south. I am the only foreign witness to this top-secret operation, carried out without deigning to consult the 302 Polar Inuit of Thule.

The three of us and our dogs approach the tent of the general heading the operation, who comes out to meet us.

"Who gave a Frenchman clearance to be on this base?" he snaps.

I have recently killed a polar bear, and my hair is long. I might as well be emerging from another age. I stare at him, then respond in kind:

"Who gave you 'clearance' to be on Inuit land, General?"

CHANGING TIMES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE INUIT

The US Air Force's invasion of Thule was followed by the crash, on 28 January 1968, of a B-52 carrying four H-bombs. Three of them exploded on impact, polluting virginal waters, while the fourth was lost and remains a threat to the Far North to this day. And so, in the infernal violence of a veritable invasion, the North American Arctic entered the strategic history books, while the Inuit were put on the front lines of our conflict with the East.

This book is dedicated to the Inuit of Canada. The current generation of Inuit has come through the greatest of perils and responded to them with extraordinary tenacity, thus earning the country's respect. To the east, the Inuit of Greenland have, since 1995, gradually expanded the scope of their self-government initiative. In this, they have built on the structures of "Greenland Home Rule" – a stable governmental apparatus – that the Danish state had gradually enacted over two centuries. Young Greenlanders have received

business and administrative training through their involvement in the state agency Kongelige Gronlandske Handel (KGH).

By contrast, in the new, hastily founded territories of Nunavut and Nunavik, economic and social problems have proved particularly troublesome. An expanding economy (e.g., the rapid growth of the Makivik Corporation), a people striving for progress, cannot survive solely on tourism, sales of their artwork, or small-scale fishing. Thus the Inuit are having to face the future with steely determination. They are staring down the barrel of gradual assimilation as they try to regain the inspiration of their past, all the while demonstrating the forward-looking virtues of their civilization.

In the Far North, the clash of civilizations has been particularly brutal, and the West never more cynical. Today, the world's three largest fortunes represent more wealth than that of all the less-developed countries (LDC) with their combined population of 600 million. For the Inuit, the clash has been as dramatic as the military defeats suffered by the American Indians. To be sure, their adversary presents itself as a force of peace and goodwill, but the outcome looming – assimilation – is the same, and no one has any good solutions to propose. The northern peoples are not interested in a vast Navajo-style reserve or in the isolation of the Amish. Men and women of adventure, their goal is to devise a new form of government for their immense territory.

Realism will prove a major asset in this enterprise. All my life, I have maintained my principled resistance to the Thule base and to the symbol of dispossession and military imperialism that it represents. But astute statesmen understand that it is better to work around an obstacle of this size, or even turn it to profit, than to attack it head on. The urgent task facing the North is to forge an intelligentsia who understand the high economic and geostrategic stakes of the Arctic. In this regard, the creation of a centre of excellence in Thule represents an exceptional opportunity. I would venture to suggest to my American colleagues in the National Science Foundation (NSF), which has purchased the Thule radar facility, that it be turned into a first-class scientific and logistical headquarters for administration of rational and environmentally sensitive development in the High Arctic – self-administration that is, by the Inuit, for their own benefit. I hope that the NSF will give the Inughuit and the Inuit of Nunavut and Nunavik the chance to become these young scientists. The Inuit are strikingly gifted in mathematics, information technology, biology, and ecology. On the strength of these aptitudes, and working alongside US and European scientists, they have what it takes to be space engineers. In the medium term, this centre of excellence in Thule could serve as an international Inuit scientific academy. Unfortunately, no such decision has been made.

THE FOCAL ROLE OF MINORITIES

My own involvement in formal research on the Canadian Arctic dates back to 1960, when I was invited by Quebec ethnobotanist Jacques Rousseau, first francophone director of the Human History Division of the National Museum, to take part in a wide-ranging research program on the Canadian North. He felt that the research of the day was overly dominated by American concepts and sought the input of European researchers into the development of a new perspective on the difficult situation of the Northwest Territories Inuit. In 1964 Mr Rousseau and I co-edited the first comprehensive study of what was then called Nouveau Québec and is now called Nunavik, the immense northern portion of the Province of Quebec.* The publisher was the Centre d'Études Arctiques, which the great historian Fernand Braudel and I founded in 1957 in Paris under the auspices of the École des Hautes Études des Sciences Sociales (EHESS).† The involvement of France and the centre in Arctic affairs continued with the hosting of the first pan-Inuit conference, chaired by Professor René Cassin, a Nobel laureate, in November 1969. An outgrowth of this momentous event was the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), founded at Point Barrow, Alaska, in June 1977; I was honoured to participate. At Le Havre in May 1973, once again under the auspices of the centre, the historian Jacques Le Goff and James Wah-Shee, president of the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories, co-chaired the first conference on Arctic oil and gas. Inuit groups and the Canadian authorities were also represented.

For a Frenchman like me, coming from a nation with a venerable Jacobin tradition, it was not always easy to understand the uniqueness of such a complex, ambitious federation as Canada. And for a European who had witnessed the arduous unification of the "Old World," Canadian federalism's intricate framework of interaction among different orders of government provided much food for thought. The Inuit minorities being my main concern, I was inevitably struck by the value placed on cultural diversity and, in particular, by the lively yet conflict-ridden interplay between anglophones and francophones. To this day, this dynamic continues to protect Canada from being engulfed by continual US efforts to homogenize the continent, NAFTA being only the most recent example. As Ottawa works to defend the federation, it can look to what makes Canada unique, including its Inuit and Indian minorities. Throughout the intense debates raised by the aboriginal peoples (today, some one million strong, living on and off of reserves), Canada's national

* This work was recently reprinted with new matter under the title *Du Nouveau-Québec au Nunavik, 1964–2004: Une fragile autonomie*.

† It was later incorporated into the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), while remaining associated with EHESS, its founding institution.

interest has nearly always won the day. Ottawa has demonstrated the confederal dimension of the problems posed and has often proved the best ally of aboriginal statesmen seeking to affirm their sovereignty.

The vastness of the Inuit lands (one-third of Canada's area, populated in the main by 40,000 hunters and fishers) has necessitated especially bold leadership. As of the 1970s the Inuit elites, with exceptional intelligence and skill as negotiators, began to assert their interests, and they have secured concessions far beyond what the less diplomatic and less assiduous Indians have achieved. The Inuit's strength has been their unity in the face of all obstacles. They have been astonishingly pragmatic and visionary vis-à-vis the Canadian authorities.

Now, in 2006, looking back on that bygone era, the self-government proposals put forward at the pan-Inuit conference of 1969 seem quite modest. What the attendees dimly perceived then is now clear to all: the minority question is one of the major issues of our time. If it is to find a satisfactory resolution, it can only be by giving the aboriginal peoples their due and empowering their leaders. But unfortunately, central governments, lacking the necessary high-mindedness, have too often improvised solutions in the sphere of "Indian affairs," where a host of intangible factors come into play. Likewise, the social sciences have refused to devote in-depth study to the first peoples' difficult transition to modernity and to the syncretisms that have characterized their mental evolution. Instead, many academics have doggedly cast their halcyon gaze on a past deemed to be pure, free of contamination. Nor is all research even that noble in its aims. For too long, study of the brute facts over the short, medium, and long term has been regarded as pointless, unaesthetic, even degrading. Academics have overlooked that in uncertain times, complex societal developments can lead to catastrophic breaks with the past, and from there to new births. We must, as necessary, exit the confines of the university and roll up our sleeves, and it is to that effort that this book testifies. The sociologist Jules Monnerot brilliantly reminds us, with the title of one of his works, that "social facts are not things." In stating this, he draws our attention to the unpredictability of human beings, who have a tendency to behave in ways that contradict our preconceived theories. And so it is for the oral traditions of North America's peoples; we now know that they can endure, even when many people assumed that they were gone forever.

I have stressed this point at length in my writings, and I am convinced of it: the first peoples are the leaven of tomorrow's humanity. And we cannot content ourselves with an aesthetic dialogue as we stand before the museums of the immaterial. This encounter can happen only if the groundwork for dialogue has been laid in advance. It can happen only if we make it happen, if we do our part to help them discover and nurture their own elites. One thinks of Jean-Marie Djibaou in New Caledonia, Amadou Hampaté Bâ in Mali, Nelson

Mandela in South Africa, Aimé Césaire in the French Caribbean, Mahatma Gandhi in India, and the humanists who supported them (famously, Albert Schweitzer in Lambaréné, Gabon). My friends Tagak Curley (who participated brilliantly in the Rouen conference of 1969), Canadian senator Charlie Watt, and “father of Nunavut” John Amagoalik would agree that “the mind does not conceive of minor nations; it only knows of fraternal nations and winners without losers.”¹

CANADA AS A MODEL

The great democratic nation of Canada, the world’s second-largest country, has always scorned the variety of racism that stained Nazi Europe, the kind of racism that had such dire consequences for Jews and people of colour. In this, Canada has set itself apart from the United States, which, for example, only resolved the worst of the problems affecting its African American minority long after the Second World War. The relentless battle against Nazism will at least have had the merit of establishing the human truth that there is no superior people. All of us are equal, and each people is at a different stage of its history, its evolution, its genius. However, another sort of racism persists within each of us. It is a deep-rooted cultural racism, nurtured by our reverence for the revealed truths of Christianity and science. The rest is confusion, falsehood. Our educational curricula remain inspired by a philosophy of progress. If ethnology and history have succeeded in the monumental task of convincing Europeans and North Americans that so-called “primitive” peoples are just as important in the history of humanity as are we, it is thanks to the work of pioneering intellectuals such as the ethnologists Marius Barbeau and Diamond Jenness, the archaeologist Robert McGhee, and the historians Jonathan Dore and Robert Vaughan in Canada; the anthropologists Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, Bruce Jackson, Margaret Mead, and Clifford Geertz in the United States, and the historians Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel in France. But to proclaim, as some do, the received truth that “primitive peoples” are our equals while ignoring their troubling present-day situation is nonsense, pure demagoguery. Consider the art world’s enduring interest in Inuit painting and sculpture. If primitive art has carved out a place for itself, it is not because of its pantheistic message or the complex philosophy that inspires it but because of its aesthetic value, which determines its price. As a result, the Inuit co-ops and the metropolitan art galleries they deal with have been the incidental ambassadors of Inuit thought. Cultural racism, in the West? Some art observers found it revolutionary, even shocking, when a major museum such as the Louvre, by order of President Chirac, exhibited Inuit, African, and Oceanian masks alongside Italian *quattrocento* and French impressionist

paintings. Likewise, it was no small matter for the anthropological collection *Terre Humaine** to publish writers such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Emile Zola, and Victor Ségalen in the same series as the works of an Indian untouchable, a deaf mute, a member of the Amazonian Yanomami tribe, a Greenlandic Eskimo (Minik) deported to the United States, and a caribou rancher (Anta) in Lapland.

Like the Inuit, these and other minority peoples had been marginalized by the authorities. Their voices had been confiscated, and the white people were speaking for them. The historian Jules Michelet might have been lamenting this state of affairs when he wrote: "Barbarians, savages, children ... all have this common misery: their instinct is misunderstood, and they themselves do not know how to explain it to us. They are like those mutes who suffer and die in silence. And we hear nothing, we hardly know it ... Those weak and incapable ones, those miserable persons who can do nothing for themselves, can do much for us. They have in them a mystery of unknown power, a hidden creativity of living springs in the depths of their nature."²

Granted, the recent success at Cannes of the Inuit-made film *Atanarjuat* attests to the respectful, admiring public reception given to manifestations of the Inuit worldview in Paris, Ottawa, New York, and Rome. The Inuit have no greater ambassador than their arts – sculpture, painting, song, dance – whose beauty is that of an open book. Through them we can vicariously experience the epic lives of these ancient peoples, lives that I shared from 1960 to 1963 at Igloolik, Spence Bay, and Back River. Through them, we may be led to recall the legends of our own heroes. But once the first peoples' territories are occupied, the pattern is always the same: colonization (i.e., deculturation), Western-style education, evangelization, eradication of sacred customs as "pagan" or even satanic, and – with economic integration – decay and corruption. Black Africa is a deplorable example. In this connection, I would cite a sadly ignored text by Charles Péguy: "Because the bourgeoisie began to treat the work of man like a security on the stock exchange, the worker in his turn began to treat his own work as a security on the stock exchange ... Everywhere it is the same demagoguery, the same widowhood ... Such poverty of thought may be unique in the history of the world."³

But, in Canada, in the last half-century, the wind has shifted. Prime Minister Louis Saint-Laurent, during a now-famous speech to the House of Commons on 8 December 1953, stated that "we have administered these vast territories of the North in an almost continuing state of absence of mind." And, as

* I founded *Terre Humaine* in Éditions Plon and continue to be its senior editor. The collection recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with an international symposium at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France under the aegis of the president of the Republic.

Areas studied on Jean Malaurie's thirty-one missions, 1948–97.





if by some miracle, this comment marked the beginning of a gradual process in which the requisite high-mindedness would be brought to the resolution of the many problems plaguing the North. Playing a role in this process were successive northern affairs ministers Jean Lesage, Jean Chrétien, and Arthur Laing, as well as senior officials such as Walter Rudnicki and Mark Malone (an official in former prime minister Pierre Trudeau's office), all of whom did me the honour of meeting with me. After decades of mistakes, the federal and provincial governments began to make improving relations with the Inuit a top priority.

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF EDUCATION

Now, with the advent of self-government, the Inuit have everything they need to play a pivotal role within Confederation and in the province of Quebec. But education remains the crucial issue. Provide the typical colonial education, and you risk inculcating complacency in the elites, as has been seen in certain North American Indian communities. It has been my immense privilege to witness extraordinary changes and an acceleration of history in Greenland, the Canadian Central Arctic, Alaska, and Chukotka. In this, I was greatly assisted by the authorities, who gave me a relatively free hand to conduct my research as well as unrestricted access to confidential government and police archives. My recommendations were always received with interest. Is it even conceivable that the French prefect in New Caledonia, say, would grant a Canadian researcher similar privileges? No, of course not. Given the tensions between the natives (Kanaks), the European settlers (Caldoches), and the French Republic, such a thing would be almost unthinkable.

The recurrent conundrum that every Inuit premier will have to wrestle with is how to soften the blows of globalization. Can anyone legitimately protect a culture that young people seemingly want to shed through rapid "development"? It is unfortunate that some of these youths are afraid of learning English – or French – for fear of losing their own language. Many drop out of school at age twelve or fourteen and become unemployed; likewise, the lack of adequate housing leads to homelessness. The people's reaction to such bargain-basement democratization has been simple: they have rejected it. Their rejection has taken the form of alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, and an extremely high rate of youth suicide. The alternative would be to conduct an across-the-board reform of the educational system, as in the inner-city schools of Paris and New York. Reeducate the educators.

It is often counterargued, in a spirit of social Darwinism, that these self-governing territories should dissolve into a broader economic and cultural whole. No effort should be made to keep Inuit "authenticity" on life support.

To this I reply by stating what is for me a fundamental principle, namely that civilizations are of equal importance, even if not at equal levels of development. Cultural diversity is a major asset to any nation, and protecting it is vital to the future of humanity. Now, such diversity implies genuine self-government, not a simulacrum thereof. The Inuit elites need time if they are to achieve, through interactive dialogue, a salutary hybridization of their culture with the larger Canadian society. They must be given the opportunity to muster the resources necessary for a fairer confrontation. For this to happen, the Inuit and federal governments, as well as the Inuit and Canadian societies as a whole, must relate to each other on an equal footing.

But history turns upon timing; come too early or too late, and you are consigned to oblivion. Will the Inuit have enough time to complete this process? Pursuing the counterargument, some might say that it is pointless to focus on education and training of elites now that evening television is giving the Socratic spirit of school a formidable run for its money. Add to this the pornographic and violent videos available over the counter, whose images and plot lines do nothing to prepare northern minorities for their desired destiny, and what you have is mental miscegenation. The casualty of the process may well be the oral tradition.

Again, I reply: the people can and must be alerted to these perils. It is quite simply a matter of patriotism in its fleshly dimension. There is no people who, once aware that they are responsible for their own and their children's future, fail to take their destiny in hand. Thanks to the brilliant work of true statesmen, the Inuit now have the territorial basis for whatever policy they may choose to pursue; Nunavut is a vast, cohesive, self-governing territory. The next step is a critical one, truly a matter of life and death: Inuit leaders, after ensuring that the people, and especially youth, are fully informed of their options, must come to grips with what their constituents want for the future.

Obviously, this is not for me to prescribe, or even to foresee; I cannot get inside the secret thoughts and aspirations of an Inuit teenager. I did spend some time working as a volunteer teacher at Kangiqsugaapik on Baffin Island, but that was almost twenty years ago, in 1987. The children all told me, "We want a little job in the village; nothing too demanding." They did not want to shoulder heavy responsibilities nor – and on this point they were even more vehement – be cut off from their families. To leave the community would be to cut the umbilical cord, to divorce themselves from the spirits of their dead. A youth can sacrifice only so much to help his ancestral homeland – especially since, by discovering a world in which everything is foreign, he risks losing himself. Still, they might do well to keep in mind the exploits of historical heroes who could serve as role models. One thinks of Hans Hendrik, the legendary North Greenland explorer of the 1860s; Joe Ebierbing and Tookoolito,

the Inuit-Canadian couple who accompanied Charles Francis Hall (d. 1871); and in our day, Ole Jørgen Hammeken of Uummannaq, Greenland (north of Disko Island), who travelled by sea for three years to meet his Inuit cousins from Alaska to Siberia.

I cannot recommend too strongly that the Inuit of 2006 who read these lines should beware of blindly following any such examples, or even suggestions from friends like me. They must rethink all recommendations. They will be Inuit only to the extent that they think for themselves, devising solutions equal to the immense problems that they face.

I have often written that the Inuit have a strong belief in the virtues of time, of waiting. Unfortunately, time is short and the stakes are considerable. The governing idea, the hidden agenda of the profit-driven West, is to reduce minorities – indeed, all of humanity – to a group of clients. Minorities are threatening and must be reduced to vassalage before they realize what is happening. The West has fought against them for too long to turn about and encourage them to take their place in the wide world. The purpose of neo-colonialism is to nurture illusions now, only to take control later. Yes, the time is very, very short, and I am only moderately optimistic. We are all incurably colonialist in spirit. “Almost everywhere, two classes have wielded over the people a domination from which only instruction can preserve us: lawmakers and priests. The latter have usurped its conscience, the former, its affairs.”⁴

THE COMING INVASION

My readers may find these considerations academic. They are mistaken, if only because of a major phenomenon currently weighing on the minds of every Inuk: planet warming and pollution. The average temperature measured at weather stations in Greenland has risen by 2–3°C. Recently, US Arctic Commission Chair George Newton, Jr, told delegates to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, that Arctic temperatures could rise by 5°C within this century. Likewise, sea levels could rise by a dozen metres. Writing in *The Observer* for 22 February 2004, Mark Townsend and Paul Harris stated that catastrophic climate change could be upon us within twenty years. The polar ice has thinned dramatically. A short while ago, a Russian research vessel reached the North Pole during the summer without an icebreaker, indicating the extent of the melting.

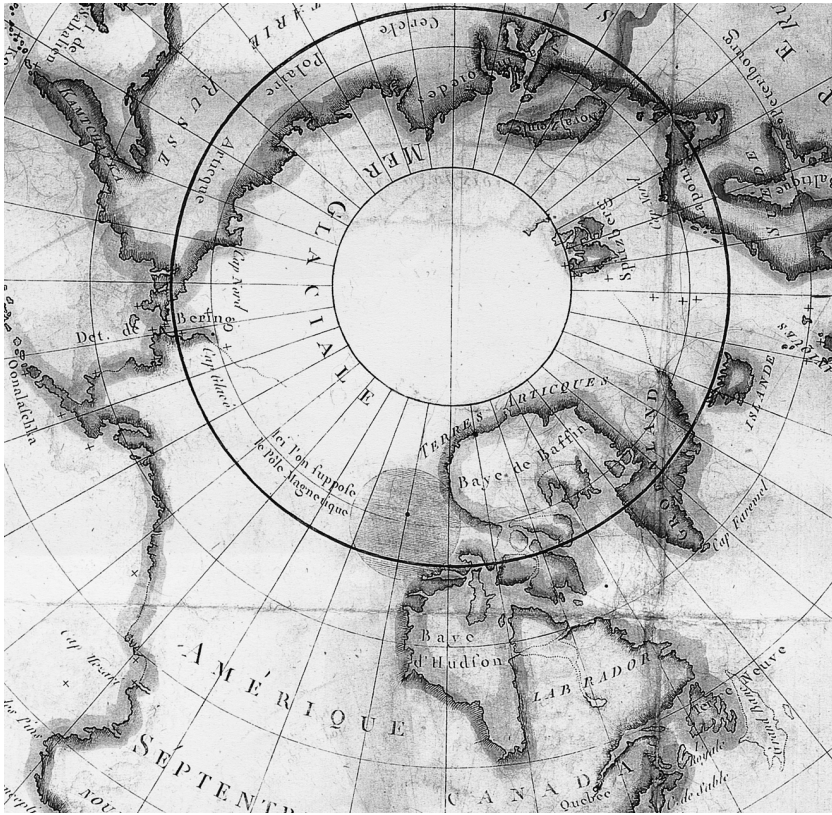
One consequence will be the recession of the permanent ice cap. Partial early-season melting will open the famed Northwest Passage, the shortest northern sea route from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Similarly, ship traffic from western Europe to Chinese and Japanese ports through the so-called “Siberian route” is increasing. This is likely to lead to stepped-up exploitation of the

vast oil, gas, and mineral resources of the North, some of which lie under the ice. Indeed, with the shrinkage of the ice cap, the Inuit should expect to see a “black gold rush” – a flood of whites looking for oil – in the coming years, probably within this generation. In fact, it is already underway. In Tuktoyaktuk, at the mouth of the Mackenzie River, a large Canadian tanker port is being built. The City of Churchill, on Hudson Bay, is growing. Each summer brings new expeditions by prospectors, geologists, cartographers. Spurred on by climate change, the conquest of northern North America and Siberia may result in the gradual dispossession of the first peoples and their ancestral land by virtue of an implacable ethnic calculus: whites versus Inuit. But this will happen only if nothing is done to strengthen the ethnic authority of the Inuit of Nunavut and Nunavik.

The gap between the forces of industrial development (white mining towns, ports, and so on) and traditionalist Inuit dispersed in their villages will continue to widen. I would like to persuade you, dear Inuit readers, that the colonization of the Arctic is not a long way off but right around the corner. Consider that when Alaska was purchased from the government of St Petersburg in 1867, its population was 99% Indian and Inuit. Today, they represent only 16%. In Chukotka, northeastern Siberia, the cradle of Inuit civilization, aboriginal peoples accounted for 90% of the population in 1926 and represent only 10% today. In the capital city of Anadyr, billionaire governor and industrialist Roman Abramovitch is pushing for stepped-up industrial development.

In Alaska the Indians and Inuit have already been shunted to the sidelines, as they have in western Siberia, the Yamal Nenets Autonomous Area, the Komi Republic, and Evenkia in Russia. The 300 Inuit villages of the Alaskan corporations can no longer hold their own against the powerful oil, mining, and financial forces concentrated in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau. Aboriginal homeless people are now living on the edges of these cities within sight of the most ostentatious luxury, a situation more typical of developing countries in, say, South America. It is not a situation that anyone wants to see repeated in Nunavut or Nunavik, but it may well be if urgent steps are not taken to prevent it.

The Arctic is under the sovereignty of eight countries: the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland. Maritime law is hotly disputed, and the Arctic Ocean is the subject of contentious international debate. Certain nations consider their sovereignty to extend 200 miles to the north of their continental shelf. Moscow, with legal arguments at the ready, has laid claim to half the Arctic Ocean, an expanse reaching all the way to the Pole. But maritime-law arguments can also be made for the rights of the aboriginal peoples who have lived in these high latitudes for millennia;



French map from 1800 indicating the state of knowledge of the Central Arctic before John Ross's expedition to North Greenland (1818), William Parry's to Lancaster Sound (1819–20), and John Franklin's to the Beaufort Sea and Victoria Island (1819–22, 1825–27).

Nunavut certainly has them in its favour. The Inuit of Canada, if they are to protect themselves from this predictable crisis, must work with jurists to establish bold new legislative provisions within Confederation.

PRESERVING TRADITIONAL VALUES IN MODERN TIMES

"What is the major problem of the third millennium?" I was asked by a journalist from *Le Monde*.

My answer: “The problem of minorities.”

To prepare for this confrontation, it is essential for the Inuit to become aware that their history has been obscured. The Inuit public figures now emerging from the schools and universities must analyze their history, reflect on the modernity of their founding myths, and assess their pertinence to the future. Most such work to date has tended to take a rather utopian view of the past. Still, there is no doubt that the Inuit have remained strong throughout their history by being attentive to their elders and the wisdom of the group. There have always been strong personalities who carry the group forward and serve as the agents of its vital cohesion. In a recent interview with the Greenland newspaper *Atuagagdliutit/Grønlandsposten*, I was asked: "What wisdom and values should the Inuit retain from their past?" I answered without hesitation: "The courage to confront nature and its hazards, to fend off despair about the course of history, to transmit this history like a sacred torch from generation to generation."⁵ I was also asked about my opinion of the contemporary controversy surrounding the proposal by certain elites to concentrate the population into two or three large cities, a prospect that only a minority favour. Proponents of this measure argue that it is a necessary response to the political and economic problems of independence. I have strongly opposed such projects ever since I co-chaired (with René Cassin) the first pan-Inuit conference in 1969, looking on as participants worked out strategies for negotiating with the colonial administrations. Yes, the time is very, very short. If I have one important goal in this preface, it is to echo the elders' concerns and awaken young Canadian Inuit to the realization that losing their traditional ways is a matter of one or two generations. The West has designs on the immense wealth of the Arctic. It has already polluted the air and water, and it will take control over the land if it can.

In short, it is to be hoped that the modern Inuit nation will not repeat the mistakes of the West. Urban concentration, the tragedy of Europe and North America, is the biggest of these, and the Inuit should avoid it at all costs. At present, Inuit communities and villages are still widely dispersed over the territory. Following John Amagoalik's advice, the people could use their considerable proficiency in information technology as a tool to preserve this spatial pattern. For example, they could use videoconferencing to stay in touch with their elders – a vital necessity.

My dear Inuit friends, the treasure of your world is your age-old relationship with the ice and the water, the wind and the game animals. It is more than an ecology, it is a religion, a philosophy. To herd the Inuit into a large city would be to denature them, to devitalize them; and do not be surprised if modernity, for the less robust youth, comes hand in hand with alcoholism and violence. I have always believed that the first peoples are the wellspring of humanity, provided that they do not turn their backs on their true nature.

With television and the Internet, the West has invented an extraordinary school of knowledge; yet paradoxically, these same technologies are spreading the virus of moral disintegration and cultural and national annihilation over the face of the globe.

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

In the world's capitals, people are counting on the Inuit to preserve their clear-eyed awareness of the two faces of progress: one of them positive because it is liberating, the other negative – indeed, Satanic. The earth will wreak vengeance; in fact, it already is doing so with the ravages of pollution. If European, American, Canadian, Russian, and Japanese scientists and intellectuals are looking to the first peoples with such fellow feeling in the modern day, it is because these peoples have always lived in communion with the spirits of the earth, and they are the sentinels standing on guard for it.

“A civilization, then, is neither a given economy nor a given society, but something which can persist through a series of economies or societies, barely susceptible to gradual change.”⁶ When in extreme peril, a society either breaks apart or falls back upon what it sees as essential. History has shown that religion and respect for the dead are critical to a society. Only peoples who preserve their transcendence can persist. The Inuit are a people hungry for the sacred, possessed of an “implicit spiritual solidarity,” to use the phrase of Michel de Certeau.

Defending against the various threats that I have described are a number of important institutions. Notwithstanding the grave crises washing over the Catholic and Anglican missionary churches, which have come in for strong criticism in the North following a series of scandalous sexual-abuse and paternity cases, the Inuit (with the contribution of the Pentecostal movement) are ardently attempting to “Inuitize” Jesus, to reinvent Christianity as a syncretic amalgam with their ancient pantheism. It is a process similar to the one followed by the Hopi and Mexican Indians. The neo-Christianity of these first peoples makes clear that the universal church is not behind us but ahead, still to be envisioned. It teaches us that the church of the future will be profoundly ecumenical, melding pantheism with all forms of Christianity and even Buddhism. The Assisi meeting of 24 January 2002 at the initiative of Pope John Paul II prefigures this evolving church.

In the academic sphere, the State Polar Academy in St Petersburg was founded in 1991 by my Russian colleagues and I with a mission to train young Siberian managers. Today, this unique institution consists of five faculties (including Arctic ecology) housed in 27,000 square metres of building space; it is attended by 1,600 students from forty-five ethnic groups. Its pedagogical

mission is to help northern aboriginal peoples relearn the greatness of their history and become the agents of their own development. It is not perfect, but it is helping give new life to a traditional way of thinking.

CONCERNING THE FUTURE

The future is bright if such teaching and research institutions proliferate throughout Nunavut and Nunavik. Are there any precedents? Yes, Iceland, whose late-nineteenth-century population of less than 100,000 lived in dire poverty. Today, it has a network of research facilities and universities and is one of the richest European countries. The same is true for Finland. A century ago it was under Swedish domination in the South and czarist Russian domination in the North. Its mythic peasant worldview endured nonetheless and was consecrated with the milestone 1849 publication of the *Kalevala* (second edition), a compilation of Finnish folk poetry. In the twenty-first century, Finland has numerous first-class, forward-looking universities. It too is a rich country, one on which the European ideal is modelled. Costa Rica, on the strength of its highly educated population of four million, has propelled its economy into the digital age. It is a high-tech leader, attracting hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign investment from large North American corporations. On a per capita basis, Costa Rica is the Latin American leader in software exports.

A future for the Inuit?

LAST WORDS

2022. I float incorporeal, attempting in vain to dialogue empathically with a young Nunavut Inuk.

His home is an ultramodern hemispheric house, like an igloo, in a village of ten families linked by Internet to the rest of the world. On weekends he remains a fierce, happy hunter and fisherman. He has successfully built a unique, universalizable model of small-scale ecological development, a bubble protected from pollution that is the envy of the world. He speaks his own language, of course, which by now has produced several Nobel laureates in literature and the sciences. He is a political scientist, a mathematician, a biochemist, a computer scientist, a United Nations advisor, a doctor, an oceanographer, or an artist. Or perhaps he is an internationally renowned philosopher or an innovative theologian reinterpreting the gospel and the Buddhist texts. He is adept at choosing, from what the West offers, those things that are most propitious for his people. He has kept the spiritual flame alive and everywhere is recognized as a wise man standing on guard for the future of the world. He

has finally regained the greatness and courage of his ancestors, something to which I was one of the last witnesses in 1960–63 at Igloolik and among the Netsilingmiut and the Utkuhikhalingmiut. Moreover, he has attained that serene wisdom to which this book bears witness.

Viewing him from afar, I am pleased at the small part I was able to play in his accomplishment.

Paris
30 March 2006
Jean Malaurie