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**“Who Will Write for the Inuit?”  
Cultural Policy, Inuktitut Translation, and the First Indigenous  
Novel Ever Published in Canada**

**Valerie Henitiuk and Marc-Antoine Mahieu**

**Abstract:** This article examines the circumstances surrounding the first publication of an Indigenous novel in Canada, namely *Uumajursiutik unaatuinnamut* by Markoosie Patsauq, in 1969-70. It describes the context of the federal government's cultural policy, in particular within the then Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and how this impacted relations with Inuit generally speaking, but also how it set the stage for bureaucratic involvement in the production of an English adaptation of Patsauq's text, widely known today as *Harpoon of the Hunter*. Finally, we present our own rigorous new translations, titled *Hunter with Harpoon/Chasseur au harpon*, done in collaboration with the author and based on his original Inuktitut manuscript, suggesting some more ethical practices for working with Indigenous source texts.

**Keywords:** Inuktitut; Inuit literature; public policy; Indigenous languages; Markoosie Patsauq

**Résumé:** Cet article examine les circonstances entourant la publication du premier roman autochtone publié au Canada, à savoir *Uumajursiutik unaatuinnamut* de Markoosie Patsauq, en 1969-70. Il décrit la politique culturelle menée par le gouvernement fédéral de l'époque, en particulier celle du Ministère des Affaires indiennes et du Nord canadien, ainsi que l'impact de cette politique sur les relations avec les Inuit en général. Il montre la façon dont cette politique a conduit à une intervention bureaucratique dans l'écriture de l'adaptation anglaise du texte de Patsauq, largement connue aujourd'hui sous le nom de *Harpoon of the Hunter*. Enfin, nous présentons nos propres traductions du roman, réalisées en collaboration avec l'auteur. Intitulées *Hunter with Harpoon* et *Chasseur au harpon*, elles se veulent rigoureuses et se fondent sur le manuscrit d'origine en inuktitut. Nous suggérons de cette manière des pratiques plus éthiques dans le travail avec les textes sources autochtones.

**Mots clés:** Inuktitut; littérature inuite; politique gouvernementale; langues autochtones; Markoosie Patsauq

**Resumen:** Este artículo examina las circunstancias que rodearon la publicación de la primera novela autóctona publicada en Canadá, *Uumajursiutik unaatuinnamut*, de Markoosie Patsauq, en 1969-70. Describe la política cultural del gobierno federal de entonces, en particular la del Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas y Desarrollo del Norte, así como el impacto de esa política en las relaciones con los inuit en general. Muestra cómo dicha política condujo a una intervención burocrática en la redacción de la adaptación al inglés del texto de Patsauq, ampliamente conocido hoy como *Harpoon of the Hunter*. Por último, presentamos nuestras propias traducciones de la novela, realizadas en colaboración con el autor. Titulados *Hunter with Harpoon* y *Chasseur au harpon*, pretenden ser rigurosas y están basadas en el manuscrito original en inuktitut. De ese modo, sugerimos prácticas más éticas al trabajar con textos originales autóctonos.

**Palabras clave:** Inuktitut; literatura inuit; políticas públicas; lenguas indígenas; Markoosie Patsauq

**Resumo:** Este artigo examina o contexto da primeira publicação Canadense de um romance Indígena, qual seja *Uumajursiutik unaatuinnamut*, por Markoosie Patsauq, em 1969-70. Este artigo descreve tanto o contexto da política cultural do governo federal, particularmente as dinâmicas internas do então Departamento de Assuntos Indígenas e Desenvolvimento Nortista, e o impacto destas dinâmicas nas relações com os Inuits de forma geral, quanto como estas criaram as condições para o envolvimento



languages remain very much minority populations in two of the four regions<sup>1</sup> making up Inuit Nunangat.<sup>2</sup> In May 2018, the ITK had

passed a resolution calling on the Government of Canada to enact legislation that fills federal policy gaps that contribute to conditions of linguistic disadvantage and addresses discrimination faced by those for whom Inuktitut is a first, only, or preferred language. To that end, legislation should recognize Inuktitut as an official language within Inuit Nunangat and affirm rights for Inuktitut speakers, including the right to access federal services in the language. (Obed 25)

Present-day attention to Inuit language needs can and often does function as mere tokenism. While oral services in the North are typically delivered in English, virtually all written public-sector materials are made available in Inuktitut as well as French. Nonetheless, owing to varying translation quality (impacted by limited funding and training opportunities), dialectal differences, and other issues, the resultant Inuktitut texts are frequently incomprehensible and thus lack any real functionality for Inuit, who rarely even bother to try reading them.

This article will briefly introduce the federal government structures, programs, and personnel that set the stage for the first "novel"<sup>3</sup> ever published in Canada by any Indigenous author, whether Inuit, First Nation or Métis. It will also explore the translation history of the work authored by Markoosie Patsauq<sup>4</sup> (1941-2020), which was first serialized in a northern periodical in Inuktitut syllabics under the title *Uumajursiutik unaatuinnamut* (literally: "hunter with no means but a harpoon"), and then in November 1970 brought out through McGill-Queen's University Press (MQUP) as an English-language book called *Harpoon of the Hunter*, edited by a federal bureaucrat named James H. McNeill. Finally, this article suggests a different, more ethical way forward for Inuit literary translation and criticism, namely, one that involves paying close attention to

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to deny the linguistic complexity present in even those regions where Inuktitut remains clearly the majority language. As Louis McComber describes the situation in Nunavik, "on y rencontre des aînés ne parlant que l'inuktitut, des adultes ayant suivi les programmes dispensés en anglais et inuktitut, des jeunes Inuit qui parlent inuktitut, français et anglais, des anglophones qui restent le plus souvent unilingues et des francophones en grande majorité bilingues anglais/français" ("you meet Elders who speak only Inuktitut, adults who have been trained in English and Inuktitut, young Inuit who speak Inuktitut, French and English, Anglophones who remain mostly unilingual and Francophones who are for the most part bilingual English/French") (McComber 234). Regardless, English does remain the *lingua franca* within northern Quebec.

<sup>2</sup> This term refers to the extensive Inuit homeland within present-day Canada, spanning from the Beaufort Sea across the Inuvialuit region of the Northwest Territories (Inuvialuit means "real people") and Nunavut ("our land"); from the eastern shore of Hudson Bay around to Ungava Bay in northern Quebec, a region known as Nunavik ("great land"); and along the eastern coast of Labrador, known as Nunatsiavut ("our beautiful land").

<sup>3</sup> Generic categories are not universal. The author of the Inuit text dealt with here describes it as belonging to the Inuktitut genre *unikkaatuaq*, meaning a story of a certain length, telling of events that are supposed to have taken place in a non-mythical past.

<sup>4</sup> Family names were introduced to Canadian Inuit in the late 1960s through a federal government initiative known as "project surname." Most of this author's work was published solely under his personal name.

the specific context within which this Indigenous text was produced and circulated and then allowing what the author actually wrote to be read anew through an explicitly decolonizing approach.

Our collaborative volume (Patsauq, *Uumajursiutik unaatuinnamut/Hunter with Harpoon/Chasseur au harpon*) was also published by MQUP, on almost exactly the fiftieth anniversary of the release of Patsauq's English adaptation, but it looks back to his initial conception in Inuktitut. It contains Patsauq's original syllabics along with a Romanized version that, for the first time, makes this ground-breaking text available to Inuktitut speakers who cannot read the particular script developed in the mid-nineteenth century by Christian missionaries. Furthermore, these versions sit alongside what are, surprisingly, the only rigorous translations ever done directly from the Inuktitut. True, Patsauq's text has long circulated in both of Canada's official languages. The bilingual author himself prepared the English adaptation at the request of a federal government official, and there were also two French translations prior to ours: one by Claire Martin from 1971 and another produced as recently as 2011, by Catherine Ego (as part of a series edited by Daniel Chartier). However, both Martin and Ego worked exclusively from Markoosie's adaptation, without reference to his original text.<sup>5</sup> Even more surprisingly, at no point in the past five decades has anyone taken the trouble to note the many changes introduced into the English rendition; instead, the author's second version has always been assumed to be identical to the Inuktitut. In reality, the form, style and even content of Patsauq's writing in his mother tongue is significantly different from what he later published in English. The problem is compounded by the fact that this adaptation has been translated not only into French, but also in subsequent relay translations into languages as diverse as Japanese, Marathi, and Estonian.

### **A Note on Terminology**

Self-translation, where an author produces a version of their own text in another language, is a highly complex yet relatively understudied area (see, e.g., Cordingley). Even where source and target texts are by the same author, they are never identical and, especially where a significant power differential exists, can have entirely different valences. Relay, indirect, or pivot translation (see, e.g., Kittel and Frank) involves a translator working from a language other than that of the author's original text; although a not uncommon process where languages of lesser diffusion are concerned, it can give rise to a range of miscomprehensions. Retranslation (see, e.g., Berman, Deane-Cox) involves a text being translated more than once into a given target language; the motivation for retranslation varies, but in any case it is rather uncommon in the case of texts written in minority languages. An adaptation (see, e.g., Bastin) differs from a translation in the degree of leeway granted the translator; such texts undergo interventions that may be quite significant, and often deliberate. All of these terms are

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<sup>5</sup> Although the 2011 version is explicitly marketed as a French-Inuktitut bilingual edition, the translation it contains was actually done from the 1970 English adaptation alone, and all analyses of the "original" in the editor's introduction are in fact drawn from that same adaptation.

vital to understanding what has happened to Markoosie Patsauq's work in the half century since it first appeared.

## Inuktitut/Inuktitut and Translation

According to the 2016 census, approximately 65,000 Inuit live in Canada, three-quarters of whom are based in 53 communities spread across Inuit Nunangat, and two-thirds of whom can speak Inuktitut. The term "Inuktitut," which was first introduced at the Nunavut Legislative Assembly in 2007 to designate the language of the Inuit as spoken in Nunavut (including the main language groups of Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun), is increasingly used to encompass all Inuit dialects found within Canada (including each different variety of Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun and Inuvialuktun). ITK passed a resolution adopting this term in April 2016 (Patrick, Murasugi and Palluq-Cloutier 150).

Inuktitut is the central part of what is known more broadly as "the Inuit language," a dialect chain stretching from West Alaska to East Greenland. This distribution of language across the vast North American Arctic region results from the so-called "Thule migration" (or "Neo-Inuit migration"): in the early thirteenth century, the direct ancestors of present-day Inuit left what is now known as Alaska and began to move eastward. This migration "represents a paradigm case for the rapid expansion of a language into virtually uninhabited regions with ensuing gradation of innovations and losses away from its original homeland" (Fortescue 340). Developing on its own over centuries, Inuktitut has in terms of the linguistic evolutionary scale only very recently come into contact with other languages, and thus fallen into the orbit of Western ways of communicating. In another early Inuit novel by a Nunavik author, Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk describes her people as astounded that the first *Qallunaat* (this word refers to non-Inuit, or more specifically White people) they met in the 1930s neither spoke nor understood the Inuit tongue:

Itirtaulirqut qallunaanut. Itirsimalirmata Aqiarulaaq imaililirquq qallunaanut: "Ai!" Sunauvva tukisirqajangngimata nillingittuluunniit. Uqarviruutilirmataguug taikkua, inutuinnait ajugailluutuvialuuqattalirtut. (They find themselves intruded by the Qallunaat. Once the Qallunaat have entered, Aqiarulaaq says hello to them. But astoundingly, they do not respond at all, because they cannot understand. When they start talking among themselves, it is said that the Inuit are very amazed.) (Nappaaluk 26)<sup>6</sup>

The long-isolated condition of Inuktitut has deep implications for cross-cultural communication. First, translation, whether from or into this language, is not a long-established practice with its own specialists and professional codes. The very notion of translating is far from innate in Inuktitut, which has no obvious term for designating such activity: in order to communicate something like "(s)he translates (these words) into

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<sup>6</sup> Our translation. In the published English translation (Nappaaluk 26), this passage reads as follows: "The Qallunaat had come to visit. Once they were ashore, Aqiarulaaq shouted to the Big Eyebrows, "Ai!" They failed to understand, not making the slightest response. They began to talk among themselves. The Inuit were astonished to hear them speak [...]."

English," one would typically say *qallunaatituulirtirijuq*, or "(s)he makes (these words) begin to do (i.e., to speak) like non-Inuit." Second, unlike languages that have been in contact over centuries, where their respective semantic content ends up adapting in complementary ways, Inuktitut still today poses almost insurmountable challenges for its translators, countering any facile assumptions concerning the intertranslatability of propositions that are inherently intracultural.<sup>7</sup> Issues of equivalence, already a thorny matter where Indo-European languages are concerned (see, e.g., Kenny), are even more problematic between linguistic contexts as distant from one another as Inuktitut and English or French.

Third, Inuktitut is de facto adapted to local cultures, in a way very different from globalized Western culture, with the result that it is difficult to express accurately in that language a great number of what are otherwise quite banal modern subjects. Louis-Jacques Dorais helpfully explains the different usage strategies of what he calls the Indigenous languages of America (ILAs) and languages of wider communication (LWC) as follows:

Some ILAs, such as Greenlandic Kalaallisut and, perhaps, Nahuatl, Guarani or Quechua-Aymara, were able to adjust to the expression of Western knowledge, thanks to a longstanding tradition of literacy and primary/secondary education in the native tongue. But the vast majority of ILAs, especially in North America, still remain primarily adapted to expressing their speakers' environments, cultures, and local ways of life, and the transmission of much Western-inspired global knowledge—in school, the media or otherwise—occurs through an LWC. (Dorais 31)

Accordingly, Inuktitut can be used to articulate certain things quite naturally, other things much less so. The barriers to adequate rendering of contemporary texts, whether literary or technical, across the eastern Canadian Arctic—from Nunavik to Nunavut—are so daunting that translation can be experienced as a sort of violence inflicted on the language. In the phonebook, for instance, the concept Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services is expressed as *naammangittuliriji uqaalanirmut*, literally "the one who deals with things that are not correct concerning the fact of speaking abundantly" (Dorais 33). Nor is translating *from* Inuktitut without its challenges, especially given the ever-present temptation to impose a lexicon, style, or concepts that may be foreign to the Inuit world and worldview. Nonetheless, as noted by Dorais, this is essential work:

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<sup>7</sup> As Quine has written of "radical translation": "Containment in a continuum of cultural evolution [...], by facilitating translation, encourage an illusion of subject matter: an illusion that our so readily intertranslatable sentences are diverse verbal embodiments of some intercultural proposition or meaning, when they are better seen as the merest variants of one and the same intracultural verbalism. Only the discontinuity of radical translation tries our meanings: really sets them over against their verbal embodiments, or more typically, finds nothing there" (Quine 76).

Very few oral or written documents produced by Canadian Inuit in their language—and by speakers of other Indigenous tongues—are available in English or French. In a troubled world, where we often question our identities and futures, listening to what Indigenous languages and those who speak them have to say about life, society and the environment could indeed be extremely enriching to the mind. (40)

Our own work on *Uumajursiutik unaatuinnamut* has explicitly sought to do just that: to listen, and to offer the opportunity for readers to be enriched by the Inuktitut language, especially as employed by Patsauq as a literary author.

### **Inuit Art and Literature**

Carving, the decoration of skins, drawing on horns and antlers—these are the forms of Canadian Eskimo art which the outside world best knows. Singing, dancing and the poetry of the Eskimo legend or song are equally a part of the culture, but they are lesser known for they cannot be translated, or can be translated only with difficulty, to an alien land and an alien tongue. (Houston 35)

Many readers of this article will be familiar with soapstone sculptures featuring that iconic little igloo sticker, functioning as an official stamp of authenticity by proclaiming “Canada. Eskimo Art Esquimau.” Some will also know something about Canadian artist, author, and film-maker James Houston, who first travelled to the northern Quebec settlement of Inukjuak in 1948, and until 1960 worked with northern communities to locate and promote Inuit art. Through collaboration with the Montreal-based Canadian Handicrafts Guild, and with federal funding, Houston contributed significantly to creating what is now a thriving market for Inuit sculptors and printmakers.

Prior to the arrival of the *Qallunaat*, the very notion of art or artists did not exist in Inuktitut and there is today still no direct equivalent for such terms.<sup>8</sup> (This is of course not to deny that artefacts dating from the pre-contact period had aesthetic, even artistic qualities.) As of first contact, Inuit started to produce small objects (typically from ivory) to trade for metal, tobacco, sugar, flour, and tea. Eventually, an “Eskimo arts and crafts program” was developed and operated by DIAND’s Northern Administration Branch, specifically its Industrial Division (see Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development 3), with a view to providing income to Inuit forced out of their traditional lifestyles and into settlements. From its beginnings, therefore, “Inuit art” has been inherently bound up in colonialist interactions and the imposition of foreign economic processes.

Within the DIAND program, Houston operated as an unquestioned authority figure, acting on behalf of Inuit who remained voiceless and more often than not also invisible,

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<sup>8</sup> “Art” can be translated by *sanangnguarusiq*, which is literally “the usual way to play at making (objects),” although in any case this term tends to be applied to sculpture only.



as he acquired their wares and transported them south. (Note that signatures in syllabics remain today illegible to the majority of consumers, and even Romanized versions tend not to come with attached bios or detailed artist statements.)<sup>9</sup> Houston also shaped "Eskimo sculpture" according to his own tastes as an artist, which leaned heavily toward Henry Moore. As far as printmaking is concerned, it has been suggested that he trained his local contacts and suppliers using a pattern book that accidentally included Siberian designs, which now form an inseparable part of what the South (or the North, for that matter) now thinks of as Canadian Inuit print design.<sup>10</sup>

Story and song comprise less widely known Inuit cultural production, stemming from an oral tradition that dates back to prehistory but includes more recent, innovative writings as well. The introduction to Robin Gedalof and Alootook Ipellie's 1980 compilation *Paper Stays Put: A Collection of Inuit Writing* describes how Inuit eagerly took to writing from the moment it was introduced to their communities in the early twentieth century. Such authorial activity may in some areas be dated even earlier: McGrath mentions an Inuktitut-language newsletter published in Newfoundland from the late-nineteenth century through 1903 and, in Greenland, Hinrich Rink was producing a Kalaallisut newsletter as early as 1861. In any case, as many Inuit across Canada's north began experimenting with authorship of poems and articles, a range of government newsletters and educational magazines sprang up to circulate their writings.

A great number of Inuit oral narratives have also been collected and recorded under the auspices of such hegemonic organizations as the government, the scholarly establishment, and the Church. Men such as Germany's Franz Boas, Greenland's Knud Rasmussen,<sup>11</sup> or France's Maurice Métayer first selected and then both retold and repackaged, according to particular aims and objectives, a wide range of northern narrative art for southern readers. By the mid-1900s, we also find *Qallunaat* authors writing their own highly influential stories about northern communities, such as Roger Buliard, an Oblate missionary whose *Inuk "Au dos de la terre"* appeared in 1949, or Farley Mowat, the well-known Canadian novelist who published *People of the Deer* in 1952 and *Desperate People* in 1959. Until very recent times—with Norma Dunning's *Annie Muktuk and Other Stories* (2017) and *Tainna* (2021), the latter winning the Governor General's Award for Fiction, Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth* (2018), and the fully revised second edition of Mini Aodla Freeman's *Life among the Qallunaat*—few Inuit voices have been accorded the agency to tell their own stories in their own way.<sup>12</sup> Instead, various policy-makers and

<sup>9</sup> This is, granted, only logical given that "Inuit art" is not governed by ego, in the Western manner, where the artist expresses his/her unique self in unique works of art.

<sup>10</sup> In *Eskimo Realities*, Edmund Carpenter writes that these prints "combined Siberian designs with techniques learned directly from Japanese printmakers. By a fascinating error, a designer selected from the huge library of his father-in-law, an elderly anthropologist, Siberian designs and included these in a booklet on Canadian native designs. The Eskimo were given this booklet for reference. Many Eskimo prints displayed in art museums and printed on Christmas cards owe their forms to this error" (Carpenter 195).

<sup>11</sup> Although educated in European institutions and living much of his (highly privileged) life in Denmark, Knud Rasmussen is a special case among these established European authorities, in that he was one quarter Inuit, and learned Kalaallisut as a child.

<sup>12</sup> Franco-Manitoban author Gabrielle Roy's *La Rivière sans repos*, set in Nunavik and published in 1970, was turned into a feature film released in 2019, co-directed by Madeline Ivalu and Marie-Hélène Cousineau.

influence peddlers have repeatedly prescribed other preferences and agendas, with the result that non-Inuit have essentially been speaking for Inuit (see, e.g., Thériault or Pryde), who tended to be cast as passive victims in need of saviours.

## **Cultural Policy and DIAND**

In the modern age, governments have largely stepped into the sphere previously held by missionaries or philanthropists in order to encourage and protect specific cultural activities. At first narrowly defined, cultural policy would later come to encompass all forms of creative expression, with an aim of expanding the range of artistic forms as well as opening up access to audiences. Nor does the culture in question need to be developed already, as the goal can just as easily be "to create an environment in which a distinctive culture can emerge" (Marsh and Harvey).

Since the nineteenth century, the Canadian Parliament has undertaken a range of initiatives to develop and support domestic culture, at least nominally in response to a perceived imbalance with, and excessive influence from, the United States. Noteworthy stages in the creation of a national identity include the founding of both the CBC and NFB (in 1936 and 1939, respectively), along with the establishment of museums, galleries, and archives across the country. Immediately following World War II, arts groups advocated for a board to protect culture and raise awareness of Canada's past and present; highlights of this period include the 1951 Massey Report, which resulted in the creation of a National Library (1953) and the Canada Council (1957), as well as reports from the Royal Commissions on Publications (1961) and Book Publishing (1972). Although heavily lobbied for funds to support such initiatives, government is expected to keep at arm's length, so that cultural forms and producers can develop without political influence.

Indigenous arts and languages raise further issues in this context, and this may hold especially true where northerners are concerned. The high-profile Governor General's Literary Awards (funded by the Canada Council for the Arts), for instance, recognize books published in English or French only, and eligibility for the Translation category is restricted to those translated from English to French or French to English, thus precluding consideration of any translations from or into any Indigenous language. Other Canada Council programs include "Explore and Create" funding intended to provide, *inter alia*, professional development support for artists. First Nations, Métis, or Inuit artists "facing language, geographic, and/or cultural barriers" ("Professional Development"), alongside applicants with disabilities, may also apply for additional funds to assist them in completing an application. Ineligible activities include self-publishing, but with the exception that anyone "applying to a component of Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples" remains eligible. That separate stream does include a statement that it "recognize[s] the distinct and unique place of First Nations, Inuit and Métis artists in Canada as creators, interpreters, translators and transmitters of an inherent Indigenous cultural continuity, as well as unique contributions made to Canadian cultural identity," but literary translators are not specifically mentioned as artists eligible to apply.

Inuit culture in general has rarely been addressed in policy discussion and debate about the Canadian Arctic, which in the past century tended to focus on governance, the environment, and social welfare issues. Sarah Bonesteel's substantial *Canada's Relationship with Inuit: A History of Policy and Program Development* has no chapter devoted to culture, and mentions Inuit literature in just a single footnote, with reference to a publication by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami on the need for education and training:

To address the gaps in knowledge identified by many Inuit pursuing secondary and post-secondary studies, and to promote confidence, self-esteem, and cultural pride, ITK recommended creating a program [...] that would be accredited, and would facilitate school instruction in topics such as Inuit literature, art, language, and history, and in northern and southern life skills. (Bonesteel 256, ft. 664)

It has been said that before the 1990s and the founding of Nunavut, Inuit "were largely a footnote in Canada's nation building narrative" (Belanger 194), which holds true for cultural matters as well, with Inuit literature ghettoized if not entirely ignored. This parallels the long history of shirked responsibilities more broadly at both the federal and provincial/territorial levels.

The Department of Indian Affairs had first been assigned responsibility for "Eskimo Affairs" in 1924, before which time this fell under the Department of the Interior, although it was in practical terms the North-West Mounted Police (renamed the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1920) who administered the North. By 1927, the Commissioner of the North-West Territories was in charge of matters relating to Inuit, whose relationship to the Indian Act has been anything but clear, despite the 1939 Supreme Court ruling that Inuit were in fact included as a federal responsibility, which has resulted in a fragmented mix of legislation and policy, "administered by a range of departments providing what was a limited base of programming due to fiscal constraints" (Belanger 179). Across Inuit Nunangat, cultural policy appears to have been mostly subsumed within welfare policy. A 1962 report titled "Northern Welfare," published by the Northern Administration Branch of the then Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (abolished in 1966, with the establishment of two separate departments: Energy, Mines and Resources, and Indian Affairs and Northern Development), offers accounts from social workers about housing, substance abuse and so on, alongside examples of creative writing in English by both Inuit and non-Inuit (Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources). And a 1968-69 report by the same branch, which begins by stating baldly that "Canada's 12,500 Eskimos represent a difficult and costly challenge to the people and government of Canada" (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development 1), nonetheless underscores its efforts to support their "important cultural heritage [...] by sponsoring cultural exchange of all kinds, through films, radio, exhibitions and other media" (5).

In Fall 1968, DIAND appointed Dr. Ahab Spence (1911-2001) head of the Cultural Affairs section of its Welfare Division (see *Indian Record*), with a view to devising programs related to the development of Indigenous culture. Dr. Spence had served with the department since 1965, following an earlier career as a theologian and educator. A

Swampy Cree born at Split Lake, Manitoba, he had himself been educated at the residential school in The Pas and later the University of Saskatchewan; in 1964, Spence became this country's first Indigenous recipient of an honorary doctorate, going on also to receive the Order of Canada in 1982 for his work promoting Cree language and literature.<sup>13</sup>

Around the same time, James H. McNeill (1925-2008), a folklorist with an eventful life of his own,<sup>14</sup> was hired as Literature Development Specialist.<sup>15</sup> Although the specific methods of this new program "remain[ed] to be defined" (McNeill, "Who Will Write" 6), McNeill was tasked with overseeing "the growth of all forms of Canadian Indian literature," in large part by providing Indigenous authors with support "ranging from money grants to simple editing and encouragement" (6). Various pieces in English (or bilingually in English and an Indigenous language) were published under McNeill's name or accompanied by a headnote that either specifically thanked him for his help (see, e.g., Husky; Evaloardjuak) or characterized his involvement as a form of "rescue" (Charlie 24),<sup>16</sup> but this program also sponsored printing of work written exclusively in Indigenous languages. In 1968, for example, they published the autobiography of John Ayaruaq, a hunter and storyteller born about 1907 in the area of Rankin Inlet (Kangiqliniq). That hardcover book, comprising 120 pages of Inuktitut syllabics, represents the first book-length "recreational reading" (McCulloch 47) to be made available to Canada's Inuit, for whom reading material had previously comprised almost exclusively Bible chapters and hymnbooks. The aim was explicitly to encourage other northern writers (Prefatory Note 1; McNeill 117; Chartier 16)<sup>17</sup> and, in related activity, Spence's division not only founded the journal *Tawow* to serve as "a forum for Indian writers and poets" ("Indian Cultural Magazine" 8) but also relaunched what is now known as *Inuktitut Magazine*,<sup>18</sup> which would play a significant role in Markoosie's career as a writer.

This periodical, marketed specifically at an Inuit readership, had been founded in 1959 by the Department of Northern Affairs, through the "Eskimology Section" of their Northern Welfare Service. Originally unilingual, *Inuktitut Magazine* later became a bilingual publication (it is currently trilingual), with a mandate "to communicate a much

<sup>13</sup> Spence's eldest daughter, Janet, who was the first Indigenous nurse to graduate from the University of Saskatchewan, would continue her father's work. Along with her husband Phil Fontaine, the former Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Janet Spence-Fontaine has been very much involved in community organization and influencing policy.

<sup>14</sup> McNeill, born in Edmonton, served in the military, translated Russian, and wrote two prize-winning collections of children's tales from around the world, all while raising nine children.

<sup>15</sup> This title appears to have been somewhat fluid. While McNeill is identified as "Literature Development Specialist, Cultural Development Division" in the foreword to *Harpoon of the Hunter* and other sources (e.g., McCulloch 47), the title of "Folklorist" appears in *The Indian News* (Husky 8) and "Literature Supervisor" in *North* (McNeill 20).

<sup>16</sup> "This story was found in a pile of old manuscripts belonging to a missionary from the North. Charlie, the author, is unknown. Editor, Jim McNeill, rescued Charlie's story and published it [...]" (Charlie 24).

<sup>17</sup> "The volume is the first of a series of Eskimo language books: the beginning of a program undertaken by DIAND to help preserve the culture of the Eskimo people, and to encourage them to create a written literature from their rich oral tradition" (Prefatory Note 1).

<sup>18</sup> Because the Inuktitut-language title of this periodical changed almost from issue to issue around this time, in this article we will use exclusively the present-day English title.

wider variety of material not only from north to south and, eventually, vice versa but most importantly between the various Inuit regions of the north" ("Editorial" 3) than had been possible with the earlier *Eskimo Bulletin*. *Inuktitut Magazine* had been in hiatus between the Summer 1962 and Fall 1966 issues, and an important part of McNeill's work was to revive it, assuming the role of editor.

### The Genesis of Markoosie Patsauq's Book

In a short opinion piece published in *The Indian News* in March 1969, McNeill poses the provocative question of "who will write for the native?":

Never has the need for Canadian Indian writers been so great and urgent as it is at this moment in our long history. It is true some have written and a few still do. But they are far too few to give a real voice to our [sic] people. We need our own historians to record the events of history and recreate the lives of heroes. We need our novelists to express the yearning of the soul and the human drama. We need our folklorists to put our oral literature and tradition into lasting form. We need our own poets to sing our songs. We need scriptwriters and playwrights to project our true image to each other and the world. (6)

While the appropriative use of "our" by a settler bureaucrat is jarring, the above paragraph does point not only to the federal cultural concerns of the day but also to preoccupations within Inuit-Canadian communities about the preservation of cultural capital.

Among the texts submitted to *Inuktitut Magazine* that year was the lengthy fictional narrative ᐅᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐅᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ (*Uumajursiutik unaatuinnamut*), comprising 73 pages handwritten by Markoosie [Patsauq], a bush pilot living in the tiny, isolated High Arctic community of Resolute Bay. Almost all extant Inuit novels are Greenlandic in origin (Stern 120), and thus Patsauq, along with Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk (1931-2007)—whose *Sanaaq* was composed in the 1950s and '60s, but not published until 1984—and the Inupiaq Fred Bigjim (1941-2012) from Alaska, stands as an important exception.<sup>19</sup> McNeill's periodical being the sole publication venue this Inuit author had ever heard about, that is where Patsauq sent his manuscript: "The way to inform people, to inform them about the past, was to write it somewhere, and *Inuktitut* was the only magazine that I knew that did the printing. I didn't know where else to go" (qtd. in Lium 43).

Patsauq had started on his story by at least 1967 (McGrath, *Canadian Inuit Literature* 81; Lium 42), later apparently spurred on by reading the Ayaruaq autobiography. As McNeill recalled:

I heard that Markoosie had read the book and had begun writing, and I quickly got in touch with him. Yes, the answer was, and would I be interested in it when it was finished? Of course it was some time before a traveller from

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<sup>19</sup> For an in-depth discussion, see Langgård.

the North looked me up and handed me a bulky envelope full of paper. With the help of several Eskimo friends, the manuscript enclosed was carefully read. It was the breakthrough we had all been waiting for. ("Markoosie" 117)

In Patsauq's own recollection, the process of crafting his Inuktitut story took quite a long time, certainly predating any contact with McNeill:

I started writing a bit about it in the early 1960s, and it went on for a few years because a lot of time, I just put it away, forgot about it for a few months, picked it up and then wrote some more. I *really* started writing about it while I was flying. We used to get stuck in so many places—stormed out and forced to wait—and that's when I started putting notes down. Finally, I got it finished. It took me years. (qtd. In Lium 43)<sup>20</sup>

Patsauq based the tale on stories he had heard during childhood from various family members, but he shaped this material into a creative text of his own, incorporating innovative features along with his own distinctive voice.

The story appeared in *Inuktitut Magazine* in three parts (Summer 1969, Winter 1969 and Spring/Summer 1970) in its original language, but plans were quickly made to release an English-language version. This hardcover book, which was also released simultaneously in a sealskin-bound, boxed and numbered special edition, would become a sensation and remains MQUP's all-time bestseller. Reviews appeared in publications ranging from the *Canadian Geographic Journal* to *The Atlantic* and *The Times Literary Supplement*, and the writer was interviewed during the intermission of *Hockey Night in Canada* and on American network TV. Today, however, *Harpoon of the Hunter* does not enjoy the high reputation one might expect, in our view because Patsauq's text has been misclassified and treated as a lesser work based in large part on how it had been rewritten for English readers. When poet, spoken-word artist and short-story writer Taqralik Partridge is asked to talk about Inuit authors who have preceded her, for example, she does not mention Markoosie Patsauq at all (Martin and Partridge).

In most sources, whether anthologies, essays, or reviews, his book is judged to be something of interest to children only. Is it any wonder that Patsauq's fascinating text is rarely even identified as Canada's first Indigenous novel? Even McGrath joins her voice to others who have written dismissively about the 1970 edition of *Harpoon of the Hunter*: "a fast-paced story told in relatively simple language with a surprise ending" (*Canadian Inuit Literature* 81). McNeill himself was an accomplished author of children's literature, and this cannot help but give rise to speculation about what influence he may have had on the final shape of Patsauq's book. Although the archives have yet to reveal any editorial files from the period, a mediating position is made explicit in the acknowledgements at the front of the 1970 English adaptation:

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<sup>20</sup> In contrast, Patsauq suggests today that the time he spent working on the English adaptation was much briefer: "it didn't take me long to complete the book" (*Hunter with Harpoon* xvii).

Our special thanks go to James McNeill, who brought together author, artist, and publisher. Modest and self-effacing, he has nevertheless inspired us all with his enthusiasm for the project, and has provided generous help and practical guidance at every stage in the production of this book. (*Harpoon of the Hunter* 9)

These acknowledgements begin by thanking "the Honourable Jean Chrétien and members of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development" not only for funding, but also for "the interest and concern which has discovered and encouraged talent among the Eskimos of the Canadian North". At a formal reception held on November 2, 1970, Chrétien, as DIAND Minister, personally presented a copy of *Harpoon of the Hunter* to the National Library.

Our research into McNeill's role in the production of that English adaptation, especially as reflective of cultural policy at various levels of government, as well as colonial power relationships more generally, is ongoing. It is clear, however, that he and possibly others in Spence's office had a hand in revising Patsauq's English,<sup>21</sup> or at the very least encouraging the Inuk author to rework the story in specific ways to appeal more to a wider (settler) readership. The answer to the provocative question posed by McNeill in 1969 would appear to have been, at least in part: himself.

### ***Hunter with Harpoon/Chasseur au harpon***

Renée Hulan once insightfully suggested that "just as land is appropriated by the Canadian state, so is the experience and imagination of aboriginal writing appropriated by non-aboriginals" (*Northern Experience* 74). Two decades into the twenty-first century, it is becoming increasingly difficult to defend what were once common colonizing practices, whether of reading and criticism, or editing and translation. Given the heavily mediated state and outright elision to date of the original, there is a pressing need to return to and highlight what Markoosie's Inuktitut manuscript actually says, as well as to offer readers (Inuit and *Qallunaat*, both within Canada and abroad) more direct access so they can judge for themselves.

In collaboration with the author, we have accordingly conducted in-depth linguistic research on Markoosie's manuscript (National Archives Reference R11775-0-9-E) to produce long-overdue rigorous translations; the resulting scholarly edition (*Patsauq, Uumajursiutik unaatuinnamut/Hunter with Harpoon/Chasseur au harpon*) includes the story in Inuktitut (both syllabics and Romanized), English and French. It was important to us that readers should benefit within a single volume from the original, written in one of the most resilient Indigenous languages in Canada today,<sup>22</sup> as well as translations into both of the country's official languages (coincidentally, the Official Languages Act dates from the same year that the first and second installments of this text were published).

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<sup>21</sup> Note that Spence was himself a Cree (Nehiyaw) translator.

<sup>22</sup> The three Indigenous languages with the largest number of speakers in this country are Cree (Nehiyaw), Inuktitut, and Ojibwe (see 2016 Canadian Census).

Specialists will find it helpful to have the texts all in one place, but more compellingly, the English and French versions are to be understood as two complementary openings that allow the interested reader access into the Inuktitut, which sits alongside these entry doors. Were the Inuit text to be presented with just one hegemonic language in a straightforward bilingual edition, it would lose that symbolic, and politically meaningful, central positioning. Further, the paratextual matter of our forthcoming book goes beyond a mere contextualization, to serve as the first critical study of a long-overlooked original text. We recognize that the trilingual and digraphic nature of this edition may initially shock, but ethical work on *Hunter with Harpoon* demands nothing less.

Indigenous writing can often confound critics who are troubled by "its apparent lack of academic sophistication and complexities in the conventional sense" (Episkew 188), as well as readers unsure how to appreciate it. It is true that Inuit literature "doesn't read like English Canadian literature. Inuit don't speak English like people in the South, and they don't write like people in the South [...]" (Gedalof and Ipellie 10). Our approach in translating directly from Patsauq's Inuktitut-language text has been to respect the author's style, vocabulary and pacing insofar as possible, even when we sometimes worried that features such as lexical repetition risked being negatively received by non-Inuit. Translators of Indigenous languages are well advised to "leave clues to our compromises, signs of our unwillingness to compromise" (Wiget qtd. in Swann 249). Those familiar with any of the previously published versions will be struck by how much starker and more powerful the original story is, stripped of the embellishments and clichés (along with added scenes and a completely rewritten ending) introduced into the 1970 English adaptation.

Our book's critical apparatus consciously frames the reading experience by engaging explicitly with such issues as colonialism, agency, gatekeeping, and power imbalances, as well as the very timely concern of language and cultural revitalization, in a bid to counter so many years of European or other voices speaking on behalf of this particular Indigenous author. Working together with Markoosie Patsauq, we corrected a number of errors (mostly spelling and punctuation) to arrive at an authoritative version of his manuscript; all changes are listed in an appendix. We also address how Patsauq's writing intersects with traumatic events: his family was among those forcibly relocated to the High Arctic in 1953, he almost died from tuberculosis, and he was sent away to residential school in Yellowknife. A lengthy preface by the author, based on interviews conducted by Marc-Antoine Mahieu in spring 2017, underscores the impact of these shameful episodes in contemporary Canadian history. Readers are thus encouraged to examine this text and its tangled translation journey through a necessarily post-colonial lens. At every step we as editors have sought to minimize the risk of simply contributing to a further "speaking-for," instead giving space to Patsauq's own reflections on his authorship as well as his life experiences; we also draw on other Inuit authors and thinkers to create room for an explicitly non-*Qallunaat* worldview.

## **Decolonizing Strategies and Outcomes**



It seems clear that in 1970 someone was intent on producing a version of Markoosie Patsauq's ground-breaking text that would appeal to readers in the South, which is all well and good: after all, if no one reads it, what is the point of publishing Inuit literature at all? Nonetheless, in the process of adapting Patsauq's story from Inuktitut to English, a significant part of its originality was diminished and the author's striking innovations, including his use of the present tense throughout, were lost. The choices made in producing the 1970 adaptation are far from trivial, in that they have had—and continue to have—real implications for the understanding, and valuation, of Patsauq's important work. Where the available texts do not fully represent the desired image of a dominated culture, the dominating culture can and does help create somewhat different versions, responding to other, more convenient norms. The various textual shifts that took place in the initial rendering of Patsauq's story from Inuktitut to English all seem designed to satisfy the expectations of the non-Inuit reader; readers of our new translations will encounter a very different tone, and even different content.

Significantly, as Wang Hui notes, translation has long "served colonial powers in many ways" (Wang 200) and certainly the uses to which it is put can be seen as intimately entwined in various ways with the imperialist project: "The natives can be conquered with brutal military force and coercion, but colonial rule must be sustained through persuasion and knowledge of the other" (200-201). Throughout our work, we strive to avoid the trap highlighted by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang of relying on "settler moves to innocence" (10 ff.), with the term "decolonize" reduced to a mere metaphor. What our project seeks to do is make use of different translation strategies in a deliberate attempt to avoid the elision of Otherness that had previously resulted in a work of significantly less interest to readers today, whether Inuit or non-Inuit. We do not wish in any way to detract from the value of Patsauq's adaptation on its own, of which he was rightly proud, but it remains true that the exercise of making Indigenous stories palatable to a non-Indigenous audience can and often does do violence to the text and contribute to silencing a range of other voices.

As Zebedee Nungak rightly laments in relation to what has been a striking invisibility of Inuit writers within the literary establishment:

Several Inuit have pioneered the literary trail as published authors, but the world of mainstream literature is still largely unconquered territory for Inuit. Inuit writers have yet to attain such "firsts" as making the best-seller lists or winning prizes for written works. [...] Ways and means have to be figured for Inuit writers to attain a presence in the world of letters and literature. (26)

Nationally, texts written in languages other than English or French, especially those in Indigenous languages, have had little chance of becoming a full part of the critical record. Grauer and Ruffo reference Jeannette Armstrong on "the early stages of a literature in Canada which is not Canadian literature, although it has developed side by side with other contemporary Canadian writing" (499). What our collaborative volume sets out to do is to take some steps toward addressing this injustice by re-presenting Patsauq's text as he originally wrote it, and especially by providing brand-new English and French translations

to help it take its rightful place within a broader conception of our national literature and, indeed, Inuit culture. Furthermore, because the scholarly record on Patsauq's life and works has to date been rather haphazard, our volume also contains a comprehensive bibliography that corrects any number of errors and misattributions.

The aim is for a critical re-examination to counter decades of misconceptions and one-sided presentations, to encourage readers and scholars finally to take the actual form and content of this important text seriously, rather than simply reproducing the colonizer-colonized relationship. An over-arching objective of the broader project is to raise awareness of Inuktitut as a living heritage of unimaginable richness, and inspire more people, whether settler or Indigenous, to learn the language. With the Government of Canada having passed an Indigenous Language Act to parallel the Official Languages Act<sup>23</sup> and the United Nations declaring 2019 the Year of Indigenous Languages, the significance and timeliness of such work with Inuit authors cannot be overemphasized.

Ethnography, literary criticism, and translation have all participated in the colonizing of Indigenous cultural material: collecting, appreciating, and representing without careful explanation or interpretation (Hulan, *Northern Experience* 78-79). More diverse and rigorous—that is, decolonized—critical practices may help reveal unique voices and themes. The task of an ethically defensible practice in translation must at least be understood as to bring the reader's attention to the actual features of the source text, and thus create space for greater understanding. There are several concepts introduced into the 1970 English adaptation that are misrepresented as traditionally Inuit, many of which can usefully be read through the framework established by Hulan that draws its central notion from a 1967 CBC radio documentary by pianist Glenn Gould. Hulan rightly points out that the "idea of north" prevalent among southerners often has stronger valences than the reality of the North as experienced by Inuit themselves (Hulan, *Northern Experience* 24; see also Grace). In the critical framing to our collaborative book, we tease out the implications of how concepts such as nature, time, basic survival... even, and most importantly, "North," are presented in the 1970 *Harpoon of the Hunter*, leaving readers with a misleading idea of an Inuit worldview.

With the 2015 release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report on residential schools, settler Canadians have the unique opportunity alongside Inuit, First Nations, and Métis to reflect on our past and establish different, more sustainable relationships. We all find ourselves today in a particular cultural moment, with a new spotlight on Indigenous cultures and languages more generally, but also specifically Inuit culture and language—presented in film, music, and political discourse—both within Canada and abroad. Patsauq's original Inuktitut text, previously elided from any critical

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<sup>23</sup> Bill C-91: An Act Respecting Indigenous Languages received Royal Assent on June 21, 2019 ("Indigenous languages legislation"). It should be pointed out that this legislation contains very little with respect to translation from or into Indigenous languages. Section 11, titled "Federal Institutions," does reference "Translation and Interpretation" in the context of what *may* be provided, namely translation of certain documents or interpretation services to facilitate the use of Indigenous languages in federal government business. Section 25 speaks to a willingness, "at the request of an Indigenous community or Indigenous government or other Indigenous governing body," to establish "certification standards for translators and interpreters," but without providing any detail.

discussion and analysis, has a significant role to play in our shared journey toward uncovering truth. Readers of our volume are asked to work harder *as readers*, to open themselves to a more Inuit world and worldview, and thus to appreciate *Hunter with Harpoon* more fully. By addressing more directly and honestly the forms of power, ideology and empire building that ineluctably impact what is available to be read and understood from a dominated culture, together we—Inuit and settlers alike—can approach some form of reconciliation.

Given the close link between translation and colonialism (see, e.g., Cheyfitz), texts originally authored in Indigenous languages should be read critically, with an eye to the necessarily impactful mediation that occurs whenever two cultures encounter one another. It has been underscored elsewhere that “translation from dominated cultures not only informs and empowers the colonizers but also serves to interpellate the colonized into colonial subjects” (Wang 201). This is not in any way to denigrate translators under the stereotypical theme of *traduttore traditore*, and certainly not the translators who have made such great efforts to date to bring Patsauq’s text to new readers, but instead to acknowledge the inherently complex nature of the activity. In a post-TRC Canada, an Inuit work of literature, especially one that literary figures as widely respected as Thomas King note “can be used to mark the beginning of contemporary [Indigenous] fiction” in this country (362), deserves to be finally made available in English and French versions that have been produced in a manner more respectful of the author’s original conception.

In the citation that opens this article, the author articulates something of the challenge he faced when self-translating from Inuktitut into English. We hope that this article, our work with Markoosie Patsauq and on his writing, and other ongoing efforts inspire others—whether Inuktitut speakers or those working together with Inuit who do have the language—to take up the task of Inuit translation and retranslation, which is even more imperative at this moment in understanding as well as making space for Canada’s Indigenous languages heritage. It is very much hoped that our volume will turn sustained critical attention to the story initially produced by Markoosie as well as the not yet widely studied language in which it was first composed. The time is now ripe for a translation and critical practice that reveals the complex journey of *Hunter with Harpoon*, treats it seriously, and finally allows readers—whether Inuit or non-Inuit—access to the ground-breaking text first written some fifty years ago.

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