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*INUIT GOVERNANCE IN A CHANGING  
ENVIRONMENT: A SCIENTIFIC  
OR A POLITICAL PROJECT?*

*Cécile Pelandeix*

From the 1970s onwards, the Inuit populations have achieved political representation in several Arctic states and studies of their increasing implication in Arctic governance have recently been on the increase.<sup>5</sup> The studies focus on indigenous organizations in the development of national and international political structures [Tennberg, 2010], on the juridical systems of Greenland and of Nunavut [Loukacheva, 2007] or on sustainable governance and human rights [Loukacheva and Garfield, 2009]. Koivurova [2011] discusses the legal aspects of indigenous governance at the international level and Nuttall [2000] examines the involvement in Arctic environmental cooperation of the indigenous peoples' organizations.

With global warming affecting the Arctic environment and increasing economic prospects for resource exploitation and shipping, generating fears of environmental deterioration, and therefore involvement of Inuit in environmental governance, where does the question of Inuit political representation stand concerning the major direction of Arctic politics? This article focuses on Inuit governance at the national and international level in terms of policy in order to discuss the developing involvement of Inuit in policy-making, and the role environmental knowledge might have had in this process. Governance has been defined in various ways, such as a social function centred on efforts to direct human action towards collective issues beneficial to society (the Arctic Governance Project, 2010). With reference to the definition given by the Commission on Global Governance [The Commission on Global Governance, p.4], Inuit governance is here conceived as “the process through which Inuit people and institutions, public and private, exercise an authority to manage their common affairs”.

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<sup>5</sup> Although a number of local denominations exist, the term Inuit is used in accordance with the definition adopted by the International Circumpolar Council (ICC) to designate the 150,000 Inuit of Alaska (Inupiaq, Yupik), Canada, Greenland and Chukotka (Yupik).

As a necessary historical contextualization, the first part of this article focuses on the emergence of an Inuit political thought during the colonization process, an emergence that in most cases has preceded the question of land claims. There then follows an assessment of the degree and scope of political power granted to Inuit through land claims agreements and other moves towards self-government. It is nevertheless outside the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive analysis of Inuit governance. Thereafter, the article examines how environmental issues have been the driving force in involving Inuit representatives in inter-governmental forums such as the Arctic Council, and on this basis, it underlines the limits to the effectiveness of their participation.

### *THE DEVELOPMENT OF INUIT POLITICAL THOUGHT AND THE PROCESSES OF COLONIZATION*

If the exploitation of the resources of the Arctic subsoil has catalysed the Inuit territorial claims, to the point that questions of territorial rights and the exploitation of natural resources have been inextricably linked to the question of autonomy, as in the case of Alaska, the expression of a distinctive Inuit political voice cannot simply be seen as emerging from the question of natural resource development; it has in most cases preceded it. In fact, the basic impulsion of Inuit claims is grounded in the conflict and dissatisfaction generated in reaction to the colonial policies of the American, Canadian and Danish governments in the Arctic. There is considerable evidence of this, relating to economics and administration and questions concerning sovereignty, education and human rights.

In 1897, the Canadian Royal Union flag was run up for the first time at Kekerten, a whaling station, in order to assert, before the indigenous people and others who were present, a visible proof of the Canadian claim to sovereignty [Mimeault, 1998]. Inuit have attested to the feelings of injustice which were felt at the time. “We did not understand; we, Inuit, have lived on these islands forever.” [Pangnirtung, NWT archives].

The allocation of identification numbers to the Inuit of Canada in 1941 engraved on a metal plate to be worn in order to facilitate the census process created a feeling of unease and certain Inuit people refused to wear them [Indian and Northern Affairs, 2008]. In 1966, Simonie Michael, the first Inuit to sit in a territorial assembly in Canada, the North West Territories Council, refused to be identified by his number (E7-551) and started the “patronymic campaign” to let the Inuit choose their own patronymic name.

The displacement of Inuit populations for reasons of national sovereignty and military defence, at Resolute Bay and Grise Fjord (1953) where conditions of life were particularly severe, became the object of considerable controversy, until the Government of Canada apologized on August 18, 2010 for these relocations that “resulted in extreme hardship and suffering for Inuit” [Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada]. John Amagoalik, the man considered as the political father-figure of Nunavut, uprooted at the age of five with his family and 17 other Inuit in the High Arctic, became the key figure in the fight for compensation for the displaced Inuit families.

From 1950 onwards, Inuit children to the number of 3,500 were sent to residential schools in order to integrate them through a process of assimilation into the dominant culture. Often far removed from their native region, they were victims of physical, moral and sexual violence. “That is the terrible tragedy of all of this. Those of us who became the best educated and the most capable of leading the drive towards the creation of Nunavut – of talking back to the Qablunaaq [the White people] – were the most negatively affected by the same education that made all of this possible.” [Irniq, in Labelle, 2005].

In the economic domain, the artistic cooperative organizations which received considerable federal government support constituted a real commercial and cultural success; and yet the exclusion of the Inuit from the Canadian Council of Eskimo Arts which controlled the quality of the prints put on the world art market, only exacerbated the tensions. Tagak Curley, President of the Tapirisat Inuit of Canada, the body which acts as spokesman for the Inuit, explains: “We [...] value participation not just for the sake of cultural inclusion, but as a real function in decision or policy-making. That it is generally believed the Inuit have not yet reached that 'stage of development', we feel is presumptuous, arrogant and tribal (Kabloona-fashion [meaning White-fashion]).” [Canadian Eskimo Arts Council 1972].

In Alaska, Alfred Hopson Sr., born in 1898, recalled the dispossession of lands settled by the Inuit for several thousands of years, notably by the American marine and the subsequent dependence of the Inuit on the American economy, based on barter and subject to the world market price for raw materials, the fatal diseases picked up from the western peoples, the injustice of not being allowed to use natural gas as fuel, meagrely allocated to the local peoples twenty years after the imposition of American administration [Hopson A., 1970]. His witness threw light on the context in which his son, Eben Hopsen, developed the political stance which was going to leave its mark on the circumpolar Inuit movement. As the first Inuit senator in 1959, Eben Hopson, at the very beginning of the creation of the

Inuit Circumpolar Conference in 1976, claimed for the Inupiaq people the right to use the natural resources of the region, the right to have access to quality education, to healthcare and decent living conditions. He insisted on the right to autonomy: “We wanted all these things, but most of all, we wanted to determine for ourselves the nature of our destiny and then, act to fulfill that destiny to the best of our ability.” [Hopson, 1973].

In Greenland, relocation of population occurred to establish Danish sovereignty over Northeast Greenland in 1925, a territory claimed by Norway, and, later at the time of the Cold War, to make way for a U.S. military air force base in the Thule area in 1953. The exploitation of the mineral riches happened in effect relatively early: a cryolite mine was operating for the sole benefit of Denmark from 1850 onwards, lasting over a hundred years. And yet in the absence of individual land ownership in Greenland, the point of view of the government of Denmark, which was that the ownership of the land was automatically in the hands of the Danish government, was not questioned until the 1970s [Petersen, 1995].

Whereas the Danish constitution had in 1953 made Greenland into a Danish “county” and after a referendum organized in Denmark put an end to the colonial status of Greenland establishing thereby a de facto equality between the Danes and the inhabitants of Greenland, in 1964 the mention of a criteria of birth-place introduced by new legislation effectively created a clear economic dividing line between the Greenlanders and the Danish in Greenland [Petersen 1975]. It was at that point that a political party, the Inuit Party, was created. Brosted and Gullov [1976] estimate that this led to a change in the political scene in Greenland as a consequence of the increase in Danish immigration and Danish economic domination.

The Yupik peoples of Siberia who have inhabited the Chukotka region for thousands of years saw the arrival of new immigrants from the seventeenth century onwards. The Russian empire which stretched to the East imposed an acculturation of populations, through organized forced labour. The Soviet period introduced major changes with the collectivization of the means of production which led to the destruction of Yupik villages and their relocalization. The decades which followed saw an important increase in the number of suicides and violent deaths, the development of alcoholism and other social problems [Schweitzer, Gray 2000]. With immigration on the increase, the indigenous population became minorities in their own villages, taking less qualified jobs than the immigrants and being paid less. In Chukotka, today an independent territory inside the Russian Federation, since the end of the 1980s, once *glasnost* had introduced a climate of confidence, the indigenous populations organized themselves in associations and established contact with their neighbours in Alaska. In 1989,

the Eskimo “Yupik” organization of Chukotka was founded: it became a member of the International Circumpolar Council (ICC) in 1992. Yet its effective functioning remains difficult; in 1999 the organization was dissolved after a decision of the Arbitration Court of the Autonomous Region of Chukotka, before being re-established in 2000.

In Alaska, in Canada, Greenland and Russia, the feeling that a grave injustice was being perpetrated therefore grew among the Inuit populations, fostering the development of a distinctive political stance well before the emergence of the grand projects for the exploitation of the natural resources of the Arctic that will contribute in several countries to structure Inuit political movements. The arguments which at least up to the 1970s prevailed to exclude the Inuit populations from any governance have been widely contested, whether the rationalization used was the supposed timeless attitude of the Inuit which was considered irreconcilable with modernity [Csonka, 2005] or whether it was a matter of their apparent incompatibility in terms of differentiation of political power [cf. Clastres, 1974; Rodon, 2003, pp.48-53].

### *POLITICAL AND TERRITORIAL CLAIMS*

Inuit political movements are rooted in the perception of an inequality of rights between the Inuit and western populations established during the colonial period. The sharing of land has very often been a consequence of negotiations with governments who were out to exploit resources or reinforce sovereignty over Arctic land. The grand projects for the exploitation of natural resources only served to develop the Inuit grievances which are going to focus on the double question of governance and land ownership. The question to ask is: how can these two dimensions be articulated in any future negotiations, while the notion of environment is at times focusing on the vital linkage between indigenous people and the land (recognized in Article 2 of ICCPR<sup>6</sup>), and in other circumstances invoked to justify an expertise and grant indigenous people administrative rights?

Obvious historical, cultural and juridical singularities differentiate Arctic countries. Negotiations between governments and the Inuit people and the arrangements and agreements involving Inuit and Arctic jurisdictions show great differences [Nuttall, 2000b]. Greenland definitely stands apart, with a striking development towards self-government while no agreement has

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<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 2 of ICCPR provides that “In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence”.

been signed with the Inuit in Russia. The agreements can involve several levels of jurisdiction, as in Nunavik and Nunatsiavut regions where parties include both federal and provincial governments. Regarding governance, there are two main types of agreement: land claims agreements with local and regional structures to administrate the settlement (Alaska, Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavik) and self-government agreements as in Greenland, Nunavut and Labrador. The administrations and governments can be ethnic (Nunavik, Nunatsiavut) or public (Nunavut, Greenland, Alaska). Nunatsiavut is the only region to have its own constitution. All these cases are examined here, with the exception of Labrador and the Inuvialuit settlement region.

In Alaska, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was established in 1971 in order to extinguish aboriginal title and claim on land and water area, with the prospect of the building of a pipeline to transport oil from Prudhoe across Alaska to the port of Valdez. The ANCSA set up twelve regional corporations which control one ninth of the territory of Alaska and which control the 962.5 million dollar compensatory sum allocated to the indigenous populations. Alaskan Natives became shareholders of their regional corporation. "We believed the right of self-determination was inherent within the constitutional provision for a 'maximum of local government'. That is why we established our North Slope Borough." [Hopson, 1973]. The right of self-determination was mentioned in Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), open for ratification in 1966. But the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 did not include any provision addressing the right of Alaska Natives to self-determination. In actual fact, corporations own the land, and as long as the land is a corporate asset, it will be vulnerable [Berger, 1985]. The effort to amend ANCSA led by the Alaska Native Coalition (ANC) revealed two major trends represented by the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), supporting the corporate structure, and the ANC which did not succeed in amending the corporate structure of the ANCSA or in securing land ownership for Natives [D. S. Dorrough, 2010, p. 203]. Moreover, government is fragmented into different organizations that give rise to wasteful competition.

In Quebec, as early as 1969, the idea of setting up a regional government was adopted by the leaders of the cooperative movement. Two competing visions of government emerged here too: "a more radical grassroots organization centred on the co-op movement and especially strong in the Hudson Bay region called for the creation of an Inuit government" while "a more pragmatic group based in the Ungava region and closer to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) asked only for a continued

federal presence and some administrative autonomy” [Rodon and Gray, 2009, p.320]. The Comprehensive Claims Policy was established in 1973 by the Government of Canada for negotiating and settling Aboriginal land claims. The Comprehensive land claims are based on the assertion of continuing Aboriginal rights and title that have not been dealt with by treaty or other legal means.

The Stockholm Convention, 1972, signalled the duty of governments to protect and improve the environment and recommended the integration of this environmental reflexion in development projects: a principle of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) thus specifically recognized the participation of the indigenous peoples in the decisions and establishment of rules concerning all ecological matters. The outcome of the JBNQA is an administrative structure in which the notion of co-management of natural resources dominates. The JBNQA formulates a principle according to which the indigenous people will participate in decision-making and in the establishment of rules dealing with ecological matters. In Canobbio’s view, this principle consolidated the emergence of a political power amongst Arctic indigenous people, a political power that was drawing its fundamental legitimacy from the acknowledgment of an environmental competence [Canobbio, 2009, p.94].

The JBNQA made provision for an administrative structure, the Kativik Regional Administration, which is more a supra- and inter-communal organization than a truly regional one. The newly created corporation, Makivik, was to administer the financial compensation paid. The JBNQA created lands of different categories and only gave power to the Inuit over small local plots of land, described as category one, which only represented one per cent of the surface area covered by the agreement. The Inuit felt that the JBNQA limited their role to that of hunters and fishermen [Mark, 1987]. The president of Makivik, Charlie Watt, similarly signalled his dissatisfaction after the signing of the agreement [Mitchell, 1996, p.423]. Thus the Inuit political model underlying the negotiations was based on the principle that there could not be any autonomous government if the agreement did not specify the operation of an autonomous region.

Since 2006, two major agreements have been signed: the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement (NILCA) in 2006 and the agreement-in-principle for the creation of a Nunavik Regional Government in 2007. Under the NILCA, the Nunavik Inuit own and have surface and subsurface rights to 80 percent of the total area comprised by the islands in the Nunavik Marine Region. On April 27<sup>th</sup> 2011, Nunavik inhabitants were asked by referendum if they approved the Final Agreement on the creation of a Nunavik Regional Government (NRG) that would merge the three administrations into one



body. The Agreement proposed that a second stage would be set up, which “could, if necessary” include new powers for the regional government. 66% of the population voted “no” in the referendum. Several factors can explain this result, including the emphasis placed on the improvement of an administrative structure rather than on the process of setting up political autonomy, the lack of guarantees on the preservation of culture and language, and the inadequate representation of young people in the negotiation process. Moreover, the “Plan Nord” project, that will lead to an investment of 85 billion Canadian dollars over 25 years for the development of mining, energy production, and logging, as well as providing new infrastructures in Northern Quebec, has led to discussions regarding social issues, employment and housing [Pelaudeix, 2011a and b; Papillon, 2011]. Jobie Tukkiapik, the recently elected President of Makivik, is aiming at moving towards better consultation on projects affecting the region [Rogers, 2012].

In the case of Nunavut, the question of land ownership was first perceived as an argument justifying a political authority. But Thomas Suluk, in 1984, admitted that certain questions were being asked by the Inuit organizations: “The biggest stumbling block at this point is whether to own or not own the land or to put more emphasis on control” [Mitchell, 1996, p.423]. “Some of us are doubting whether a land claim settlement is desirable. Maybe we should just go for managerial rights”. But he added: “The psychology of ending up owning a small fraction of what you consider to be yours is hard to swallow”. For others, such as John Amagoalik, the Nunavut agreement was the corner stone of the Inuit claim. Although the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement was committed to a number of objectives such as Inuit participation in government employment in the Nunavut Settlement Area “at a representative level”, and although the government of Nunavut’s department of resources was willing to implement traditional knowledge, referred to as *Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit* (IQ), a major deficiency of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement lay in the fact that it granted land rights over about 17% of the territory, of which only one tenth was accompanied by subsurface rights – which nevertheless meant that in order to access the subsurface, it was necessary first to obtain access through the surface titleholder. To decrease the level of fiscal dependency of the Nunavut government towards the federal government, the Nunavut Government wishes to obtain royalties on the exploitation of non-renewable resources, since all royalties currently belong to the federal government. The Government of Nunavut has just commenced the devolution process.

In Greenland, the question of land ownership only became a central question when a basic contradiction became obvious: the National Greenland Council adopted the principle of Greenland land ownership but had no

legislative power. Between 1975 and 1978, the question of land ownership opposed Danish representatives and certain Greenland representatives in the Home Rule Commission [Petersen, 1995]. The Act for Greenland Self-Government signed in June 2009 granted unprecedented rights to an Inuit government. It replaces the Home Rule agreement established in 1979, that had included some on-going financial support from Denmark for certain public services, but did not include any agreement on natural resources such as oil, gas, and minerals. Now Greenland assumes responsibility for self-government in 33 areas of competence, including justice and police. Foreign affairs, national defence and monetary policy, remain under the control of Denmark. The Greenland government exercises control over its subsoil and can plan the development of extractive industries in order to lessen its economic dependence on Denmark, which gives the island an annual subsidy of 470 million euros. The Self-Government Act also contains a provision regarding Greenland's access to independence. But lessening the economic dependence on Denmark will take time, and current challenges faced by the Government are similar to those in the other Inuit regions, with *inter alia* social development a crucial issue. How to set up a government that would not be a duplication of Western models is one of the questions being asked.

In Chukotka, the emergence of an indigenous movement during the 1990s was first supported by the Russian officials of the district, but, according to Diatchkova, this support "soon gave way as political opposition to regional autonomy and local self-government became apparent." [Diatchkova, 2010, p.225]. The region faces the highest rate of health problems in the Arctic [Larsen and Schweitzer, 2010, p. 34]. "Survival is the main obstacle" that the ICC must overcome: "ICC Chukotka has to find something just to hang on to in a region plagued by high unemployment, alcoholism, poor communication and cultural disinterest" [George, 2004].

Russia has not endorsed the UNDRIP. Galina Diatchkova considers that the quasi-non-existence of federal laws on indigenous rights prevents indigenous representatives from effective participation in the policy-making process [2010 p.230]. A law on Guarantees of Small Peoples' Rights has been passed in the Duma, but as Pavel Suliandziga states, it has been "so badly mutilated over the past few years that there are practically no rights left." The issue of communication has been highlighted as an important resource for indigenous development in the region [Diatchkova, 2010, p. 226].

Interestingly, in the case of Chukotka, if indigenous peoples do not yet influence regional policies, environmental issues happen to be the driving force for an involvement of Yupik in the governance of the region. "The right to the preservation of nature and biodiversity has become an important source in the establishment of new types of partnerships within Chukotka

such as, for example, government – research institutions – and indigenous peoples.” [Diatchkova, 2010, p. 227]. Furthermore, some isolated but important initiatives for international collaboration are taking place with Alaska, e.g. between the US National Park Service, the Naukan community and the indigenous community of Yupik, leading to an involvement of indigenous people in the preservation of their natural and cultural heritage, as well as in their contribution to the sustainable development of native enterprises.

If the agreements passed between the representatives of Inuit populations and the Arctic States (with the exception of Russia) represent significant advances at the level of formalizing Inuit population rights, they have nonetheless proved to be (with the exception of Greenland) a relative disappointment to a number of Inuit representatives, in so far as only a fraction of the lands which Inuit people believe to be de facto theirs have actually been recognized as under the control of the Inuit. On top of this, political autonomy has only been recognized in a very limited way in Alaska and in Quebec. Negotiations for the creation of a Nunavik Regional Government are still in progress as well as the negotiations with Canada and the North West Territories for Inuvialuit self-government.

### *ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS, TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF GOVERNANCE*

In the context of the growing recognition of indigenous peoples' rights under international law, it has been the absolute urgency of protecting the Arctic environment from the consequences of climatic change, from pollution through atmospheric and ocean water circulation, as well as the threatening prospect of the exploitation of mining and oil resources, that have brought the question of Inuit governance to the forefront on the international level. At this level though, the argument of Inuit knowledge as a lever to be involved in discussions on the future of the Arctic tends to limit this knowledge to its environmental dimension.

The exploitation of oil resources in the Beaufort Sea, which covers both Canadian and American territory, had already convinced Eben Hopson of the necessity of creating a circumpolar Inupiat Assembly to work with the multinational oil industry [“There is only one Beaufort Sea”, Hopson 1976]. In 1977, in Canada, the Berger Commission, charged by the Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development with the task of carrying out an

inquiry at the regional level into the social, environmental and economic impact of the proposed pipeline in the Mackenzie valley, recommended that the pipeline in the Yukon should not be constructed and to postpone for ten years the pipeline in the Mackenzie valley. Hopson drew on these results to argue for the necessity of establishing an international environmental policy.

Considering that self-determination was a right to be “reaffirmed”, the ICC established as one of its priorities, from its very inception, “the safeguard and protection of the resources of Inuit homeland” (ICC 1977). At the international level, however, it was only ten years later that environmental questions in an Arctic-wide cooperation were taken into account, and this at the initiative of Mr Gorbachev in his speech at Murmansk in 1987. In 1988, the ICC was granted a Global 500 Award for significant environmental achievement. This award was presented by the United Nations Environment Program for the ICC's Inuit Regional Conservation Strategy.

It was the specific Inuit environmental knowledge which constituted the primary argument for the association of indigenous populations in the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy (AEPS, formulated in 1991) and for its subsequent decisions [Tennberg, 1996]. Tennberg stresses that “according to indigenous peoples, the use of traditional environmental knowledge is an issue of self-determination”, and that “demanding the use of indigenous knowledge is a demand that the power is shared”. It is clear that the Inuit knowledge of the environment can be “used” or “instrumentalized” by indigenous leaders to pull political strings and levers [Nuttall, 2000b, p.627 and p.635]. Indigenous outlook on the relationship between man and the environment has also certainly been used to legitimize opposition to development policies [Nuttall, 2000a, p.407].

Inuit knowledge was indeed given prominence in research programs such as the Siku program for 2007-2008, which was declared International Polar Year: the program effectively specified indigenous knowledge of the polar ice-cap and its environment. But to pose today the question of indigenous governance in scientific terms can lead one to suppose that the Inuit people have acquired a natural expertise through their historical and cultural proximity with the environment. Yet what is at stake today, with the circumpolar environment affected in its globality by phenomena of climatic change, as well as the development of extractive industries, goes well beyond the local scale of life with which indigenous people are confronted, even when their travel carried out through hunting and social activities can cover very long distances. As reported by Patricia Cochran, the fact that the indigenous organizations are not capable of carrying out major scientific assessments of their own, compromises their effective participation in working groups of the Arctic Council [comment heard by Koivurova, 2011,

p.183]. The ICC has therefore pursued a strategy for more direct action to promote research led by indigenous peoples in the Arctic. A communiqué for circulation to the Northern Research Network on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2010 boldly declares: “From research to action! A career in research can help shape international policies that affect you!”.

The definition of traditional knowledge is here at stake. On the national level as in Canada, this notion has been defined through a number of principles, representing core Inuit values, and referred to as *Inuit Qanijimajatuqangit* (IQ), carrying meanings such as «knowing through experience», “merit as a source of authority”, “decision-making by consensus”, “being part of the environment”, “using resources wisely for the common good”, “respecting diversity” [Fondahl and Irlbacher-Fox, 2009, p.4]. In Nunavut, it is the Department of Human Resources’ mandate to incorporate IQ in the delivery of its programs and services [Department of Human Resources]. Even if the notion is not always clearly specified in a very operative way, there is a real concern in incorporating IQ in decision-making and the environmental dimension stands only as one core value amongst others: *Pijitsirarniq*: the concept of serving; *Aajiiqatigiingniq*: consensus–decision making; *Pilimmaksarniq*: the concept of skills and knowledge acquisition; *Qanuqtuurungnarniq*: concept of being resourceful to solve problems, *Piliriqatigiingniq*: the concept of collaborative relationship or working together for a common purpose; *Avatimik Kamattiarniq*: the concept of environmental stewardship [Department of Human Resources].

On the international level, the emphasis being placed on environmental issues and research programs led by Western scientists means that it has to be reaffirmed that traditional knowledge is not equivalent to a set of source data. “Will the language of science prevail, or that of moral philosophy and cultural survival?” ask Tester and Irniq [2007]. Fenge and Funston have reported the “frustration in being asked by scientists and policy-makers to justify, quantify and articulate concepts that might not fit into the scientific or policy templates so often used in western and other state-based institutions” [Fenge and Funston, 2009, p. 7]. Moreover, whereas the mandate of the Arctic Council has been enlarged from environmental issues to ‘common issues’, the Inuit who are represented as permanent participants through the ICC and do not have decision-making powers, do not wish to be confined to the role of victims of climate warming, nor to see their role limited to that of counselling on environmental matters. They express the desire to become full actors in their own development, because in spite of the growing interest in the environment of indigenous populations, they remain very little implicated in the basic decision-making concerning development projects in the Arctic.

One event has furthermore complicated the picture of Arctic governance, the Arctic Ocean Conference held in Ilulissat on 27-29<sup>th</sup> May 2008, bringing together five coastal States bordering on the Arctic Ocean: Canada, Denmark, Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States of America. This meeting excluded representatives of Iceland, and of the Arctic indigenous peoples, along with Arctic Council members Finland and Sweden. Since this meeting, which was followed by another so-called Arctic 5 meeting in Chelsea, Canada in March 2010, the ICC has placed on its political agenda the notion of Inuit sovereignty and released a Declaration of Sovereignty in 2009.

Estimating that the Ilulissat Declaration on Arctic sovereignty put out by the ministries representing the five Arctic coastal countries did not put sufficient stress on the rights which the Inuit people have obtained through international laws, through territorial claims and processes leading to increasing governmental autonomy, the ICC adopted in April 1989 at Tromsø a Declaration on the Sovereignty of the Arctic (ICC 2009). This declaration stipulated *inter alia* that it is imperative for those who wish to utilise Inuit lands to speak to them beforehand and to respect their rights. Sovereignty is not a notion which has only recently been taken up by the ICC, but the scope and forthright nature of this new declaration gives the question a new actuality. This ICC declaration makes it clear on the legal level that in the present context of climatic change and the likelihood of intensified exploitation of Arctic subsoil resources, those responsible for executive power must be aware of the international consequences of any political decisions made. This demonstrates that whilst exercising recognized rights at the national level, upheld by international law and jurisprudence in environmental matters, the Inuit nonetheless do not have access to decision-making on questions which affect their lives, once governance is treated on an international level, where state-centred structures predominate. So far, international law cannot fully accommodate the new forms of international governance that are developing [Koivurova, 2011 p. 171].

## CONCLUSION

In recent decades Inuit have obtained greater influence on decisions relating to their future. Such a contribution implies their effective participation concerning questions which are as much economic, social, cultural as environmental, all of which form the essence of any political involvement. So far, effective governance is limited by economic dependence on national governments. In economic matters, Greenland is engaged on a

path which through its underlying principles (a capitalist economy) and/or through its practical implementation (involving environmental control) is the subject of debate within the Greenland community, a debate which bears the hallmarks of a dynamic democratic space.

In the political history of the Inuit people, colonization constituted a process which triggered movements for Inuit assertion of rights and autonomy, even before the question of resource exploitation gave a new impulsion and dynamic to their political movement. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which in the Arctic only Russia did not commit itself to uphold, includes precisely the right to political participation: "Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of this right, they can freely determine their political status and freely secure their economic, social and cultural development. They have the right to maintain and to reinforce their specific characteristics of a political, economic, social and cultural nature, as well as their legal systems, whilst preserving their right, if such is their choice, to participate fully in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State."

What are still open questions in the present debate is to know what form this participation might take and at what level of the political hierarchy it might operate. As far as the Arctic Council is concerned, the Declaration which founded it stated clearly that the status of permanent participant accorded to indigenous organizations does not imply that the Arctic States recognize the rights that indigenous populations have acquired through international law [Nuttall, 2000b, p.633]. In the current inter-governmental system of representation in the Arctic Council, there is little probability that the advances of environmental law will suffice for Inuit populations to be associated in the decision-making process in the areas where decisions are being more and more made through international politics.

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