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JULIEN PONGÉRARD

# *Nuna*

## Naming the Inuit land, imagining indigenous community

**ABSTRACT** The Inuit land is often known through Western phrasings such as the “Arctic” or the “Great North.” In this article, based on an extensive review of literature, I focus on the name the Inuit give to their own land, which is one of the only words common to all Inuit dialects: *nuna*. Studying the word’s meaning casts light on a peculiar indigenous territoriality, and on the centrality of environment in Inuit ways of life and holism thinking. The Inuit conceptualize their inhabiting of the circumpolar region in a way radically opposed to Western narratives of wilderness or wasteland.

In the late twentieth century, *nuna* was turned into a key component of identity politics. Inuit peoples linguistically reappropriated their lands, in parallel with formal land claims and the recognition of Inuit self-governed territories. *Nuna* is at the core of these processes, as the concept justifies the claims for recognition of vernacular toponyms, and the vocable itself was included in the names of Inuit regions. *Nuna* as an indigenous political banner helps understanding the imagination of Inuit political communities, emerging from a dialectical co-construction of identities and territories mediated through the linguistics of place.

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**KEYWORDS** *nuna*, place-names, territoriality, Inuit land, imagined communities, indigenous studies, identity politics

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## Introduction

The land is cold. The land is immense. It is a desert. It is unforgiving? It can be cruel? The land is also home. It sustains life. It breathes. It can bleed. It is part of our mother, the earth. It is beautiful. It nourishes our culture. We are part of it as it is part of us. We are one!

This is how indigenous leader and writer John Amagoalik describes the Inuit land in a 2001 poem, highlighting the intricate relationship between Inuit peoples and their land. He departs from the Western cliché of a cold and immense desert, only to oppose it and characterize *Nuna*, as the Inuit name their land, as homely and resourceful. *Nuna* has an exceptional status, for it is one of the only words common to all languages and dialects within the 14 dialects of Eskimo-Aleut continuum (Dorais 1990: 49). Its indigenous usage in opposition to foreign expressions such as “the North” or “the Arctic” makes it highly distinctive and a suitable object for the Inuit to invest with a meaning of identity. This has been strikingly reflected in the fact that when picking up names for their regions—more or less self-governed, depending on the case—Inuit peoples have systematically chosen to include the vocable *nuna* in it.

In this article, drawing from an extensive state-of-the-art review of existing literature on the subject, *nuna* is taken as a focus point to highlight how the linguistics of place may shape a nexus of territoriality and identity among Inuit peoples (especially in Northern America), helping to imagine political communities. On a theoretical level, *nuna* helps understanding the Inuit specific relationship to the land. It also conveys a practical relevancy, for it is the subject of effective, if not explicit, cultural and political claims by Inuit people. The very naming and conceptualizing of the land as *nuna* has helped Inuit communities to claim a certain territory, but also a specific mode of relating to it which is a key in the construction of their collective identities. Thus, *nuna* enriches the palimpsestic “idea of the North” with an indigenous viewpoint (Chartier 2015: 1).

Beyond the vocable *nuna* itself, the territoriality embedded in such an indigenous concept and its political implications is reflected in vernacular place-names and the very process of naming places proper to Inuit communities—the recovery of these toponyms was an important step in the political recognition of Inuit cultural identity. *Nuna* helps composing a linguistic landscape which is an essential part of the identity of Inuit people on local, regional and even international levels.

In a first point, the geographical, cultural and identity meanings behind *nuna* are explained in relation with conflicting views on the Inuit land. This

leads to questioning the political aspect of *nuna* in a second point, focusing on the uses of such a name as a banner to identify, imagine, and represent Inuit peoples, and on the claims for cultural recognition historically embedded in territoriality and language.

## The Inuit Land and its Meanings Geography and Beyond

To understand *nuna*, the vocable by which Inuit people name their land, one has to discern its different meanings—denotations and connotations. In a Westerner's view, the first meaning of the land would be the spatial extent which the Inuit recognize as their territory. Such territories may exist at several levels: the local community, a geographical unit defined by the settlement's boundaries; the dialectal group; the institutionalized region; and even that of the Inuit peoples as a whole. There is indeed a plurality of Inuit populations and cultures, still united in the "Inuit continuum" characterized by the belonging to the Eskimo-Aleut language family. Main parts of this continuum (133,000 Arctic inhabitants) live in Greenland, Canada (especially in Nunavut, Nunavik, Inuvialuit and Labrador) and northern Alaska. The very mode of inhabiting their land is quite peculiar to the Inuit: temporally durative, though discontinuous on a spatial extent. Inuit have long been a semi-nomadic people, seasonally migrating from a winter camp to summer hunting grounds. Today they mostly live in settlements, villages and towns, and sometimes cities further south, though many still camp out of settlements in summer.

This mode of occupation has influenced the perception the Inuit have of their land. *Nuna* thus primarily means the solid coastal ground and the sea ice on which the Inuit live, as opposed to open seas or the underground. However, *nuna* also has important ontological and cosmological dimensions. As Hamelin explains it:

Reducing the meaning of the word [*nuna*] simply to 'land' [or 'earth'—French *la terre*] does not cover the meaning the Inuit give to it. The concept bears everything, it incorporates to nature the necessary presence of men. Human intervention brings space into existence. (in Giguère 2012, *my translation*)

This is confirmed by the indigenous definition of *nuna*, as given in the first Inuktitut dictionary ever written:

*Nuna*. Does not move. For a long time, it has been the inhabited land and the place where humans and animals grow and also where they die. *Nuna* has plants, food, people in great numbers and variety; it is full of

[different] language groups. (Qumaq 1991: 394, quoted in Dorais 2008: 11, *my translation*)

This definition makes clear the polysemy of the term as well as the fact that *nuna* cannot be restricted to a spatial entity, nor to a natural and untamed environment, as is often done by Westerners—or *Qallunaat*, as Inuit call white people in Inuktitut. *Nuna* is that land which is inhabited, that is, covered, travelled through and known by the Inuit, and providing them living resources on a long-term basis. Out of ethnographic work, Collignon explains that “humanization, on the Inuit land, pertains to the idea more than to the material reality” (Collignon 1999: 36–37, *my translation*). The spatial extent of the land is only a background on which a more complex whole, *nuna*, is constructed through everyday practices which materially shape the territory (for instance drawing footpaths or arranging stones), and through immaterial practices (the emotional attachment to the land as well as the intellectual understanding of it). They turn an extent of space, with what lies on it, and what lives in it, into a proper and distinctive land.

Furthermore, *nuna* has a prime cosmological denotation. It may be impersonated in Inuit myths, and understood in contrast to *Sila*, according to Saladin d’Anglure (1990: 20). The Inuit world is polarized between *Sila* on the one side (the cosmos, sky and atmosphere, and the world order, or reason), and *Nuna* on the other side (humanity, included in the same whole as earth and land). This is illustrated in a tale in which *Nuna* is personified as a crow, defining itself as “the voice of the land, the animals, and the fish in the waters [and] brother of *Sila*, voice of the winds, the rains, and the stars” (Amagoalik 2000*b*).

### A Place for Inuit Identity

The polysemy of *nuna* makes it hardly translatable but reveals some of the Inuit cultural-anthropological specificities. It is rooted in Inuit ontology, defined by Hamelin as a form of holism, where “the ‘whole-ist’ aspect prevails over the differentiation of the components” (in Giguère 2012, *my translation*). Indeed, *nuna* encompasses “human beings, animals, landscape configurations, seasons, and even the invisible beings which may always be met” (Therrien 1999: 46, *my translation*) and which are separate in *Qallunaat* ontologies. Huse & Proppé thus state that

Inuit culture does not make the divisions, distinctions and dichotomies that we make between man and nature, man and animals. Inuit culture exists “in” nature, while our Western culture exists “apart” from nature. (Huse & Proppé 2005: 111)



Another aspect of cultural Inuit specificities *nuna* contains is its cosmocentrism. In Inuit ontology, the whole world does not revolve around humanity: the latter is just a part of a larger whole. As stated by Collignon:

the Inuit built up their relationship with a territory they cannot own for it contains them [...] it is not man that is in the center of the system, but *nuna*, the land, in the broad sense of the word. (Collignon, quoted in Collin 2009: 3–4, *my translation*)

These peculiarities are reflected in the relationship between the Inuit and what they name their land—a territoriality which may actually resemble that of other indigenous peoples worldwide. As Amagoalik coins it: “we [Inuit] are part of [*nuna*] as it is part of us” (Amagoalik 2001: 9). This is one of the major aspects of *nuna* and it accounts for much of the contemporary uses of the word, expressing a strong emotional attachment to the land. It is seen not only through anthropological accounts but also in current Inuit literature and other media, as well as in political discourses and even institutional statements. The name *Nuna* itself is invested with positive feelings, according to Therrien. Inuit often express love and gratitude for *nuna*, which evokes “a privilege for the self and for those who are cherished, which makes tears come to one’s eyes, for the beauty and the history of the places are moving” (Therrien 1999: 46, *my translation*). This intimacy with the land makes it important in one’s definition of self, as well as in the collective self-definition of Inuit communities. Thus, *nuna* is not only the way to name a place, but also “a term of identity” (Hamelin, in Chartier & Désy 2014: 60), used and declined when the Inuit talk about belonging and identity. Indeed, an Inuit describes herself by indicating her geographical and linguistic community of origin, and may use *nuna* to mean the place one considers as her home (“Nuumi nunaqapunga,” ‘I am from Nome’) (Correll 1976). The people inhabiting a common place are called *nunaqatigiit*, once more prompting Inuit communities to define themselves through *nuna*.

On top of these feelings, the identification process also goes along the line of history and its perceptions, or even reconstructions. *Nuna* is used by the Inuit to mean an “authentic” Inuit land, that is, the environment and the relationship to it which are thought to be so peculiar and anchored in history that they define the Inuit by distinguishing them from the rest of the world. According to Collignon, after sedentarization *nuna* has come to mean the area known and used by the Inuit outside settlements, on weekends or holidays. Her informants indicate that Inuit may consider themselves as such only to the extent that they preserve *nuna*, that is, the possibility of living an ancient way of life out of settlements and perpetuating practices

proper to the reciprocal relationship characterizing it (a symbolical balance between the living and the non-living): “On the land, when we hunt and camp, we are Inuinnait. And then, we get back to the village, where we become Qallunaat” (Collignon 1996: 207, *my translation*).

### Conflicting Perspectives on the Same Space

This identification to the land is internal. The Inuit identify themselves with *nuna*, considered as exceptional as it provides all the means to sustain a peculiar way of life. This should not be confused with the external Western identification of the Inuit with what is thought to be “their land,” the Arctic. The latter is an image often made of clichés and linked to essentialist perspectives of the Inuit land as a void and inhospitable area, characterized by its coldness and remoteness. On the contrary, the Inuit see *nuna* as a beautiful and resourceful place, welcoming and generous and favorable to biological and social life (Therrien 2012; Antomarchi 2009). This cleavage itself provides ground for the Inuit to identify themselves with *nuna* as opposed to what the Qallunaat deem to be their territory. This is another aspect of the identification process, that is, by distinction with an image reflected by people not belonging to the land. Joliet (2015) explains that the Inuit sense of landscape is precisely the opposite of the Qallunaat imaginary of the “Great White North.” *Nuna* is not seen as desperately white, sterile and wild, but rather as rich, living, inhabited, and reassuringly known through the age-old knowledge of its extent by the Inuit and their living off its resources.

The other vision of the Indigenous Arctic imposed by Qallunaat which has had tremendous and very effective consequences is that of a “wasteland.” Western public and private stakeholders have often seen the Arctic as an important potential for industrial activities, a pool of underused resources which global warming makes all the more appealing today. In this respect, Inuit occupation of the land may be seen by Western powers as an embarrassment, since subsistence ways of life in remote areas hardly fit in globalized capitalistic economies (Gombay 2013). The uprooting and relocation of Inuit villages has followed from such perspectives, effectively destroying strong communities, and the intimate links between human communities and the territories they inhabit. It is therefore the Inuit identities which are threatened by Western views obliterating their peculiar relationship with their land and landscape, as Amagoalik (2000a) points it out in an article aimed at fighting the myth of the indigenous North as a “Wasteland of Nobodies” and claiming a proper recognition of *nuna*.

Having seen what the denotations and connotations of *nuna* are, one can understand that putting this name forward and claiming it for an Inuit region is a political act of demanding identity recognition. Such territorial

and identity conflicts not only reveal, but also unite and create the communities which collectively identify themselves with *nuna*, on several planes.

## The Political Stance behind Inuit Place- and Land-Naming

*Nuna* is less about defining precise extents of spatial ground than a certain territoriality, a way for every Inuit individual or community to relate to their local symbiotic environment and worldview—an *ecumene*, as Berque (2000) phrased it. This helps understanding the territorial conflicts in the indigenous North, as well as the political importance of local place-names—all the more when the latter comprise the vocable *nuna*.

### Collective Identification through the Naming of Place and Land *The Importance of Vernacular Toponyms*

Since the 1970s, Inuit have fought for the recognition of their lands and rights, as part of long-lasting territorial conflicts which go beyond the scope of this article. One of the landmarks in the recognition of Inuit peoples and culture has been the recognition of indigenous toponyms. Alia (2006) puts place-names on the same level as persons' names, of which Inuit in Canada have historically been deprived and the restoration of which was a great step in reconciliation and indigenous empowerment. To collect, to record and to officialize indigenous toponyms in order to replace the names given by colonists is an activity of crucial importance in the building or actualization of identity. Nungak, a prominent writer and cartographer of Nunavik, acknowledges this importance of toponyms and hails the reinstalling of indigenous names for geographical elements in an article tellingly titled "Definition of identity" (Nungak 1980). The act of naming the environment in which a community lives establishes not just a sense of place among this community, but also at the same time a sense of community, as does the usage of vernacular place-names in the long perspective. Individuals' everyday lives are anchored in a peculiar landscape defined not only by physical elements, but also by the ways they are referred to, that is, toponyms proper to a certain localized dialect. This composes what may be termed a "linguistic landscape" in a different sense than the one usually attributed to this expression: not only the language materially present in a given place (Shohamy & Gorter [eds.] 2008), but all linguistic phenomena attached to a certain cultural and geographical environment.

It is especially meaningful in Inuit contexts, since Inuit toponyms reflect the inhabitation and the uses of the territory, and thus enhance the peculiar definition of the land (Müller-Wille 1986: Introduction). This may highlight the significance of the name "NUNA-TOP" for the project of collecting

indigenous toponyms in Nunavik, recalling that, through re-establishing Inuit names, it is *nuna* in all its specificities which is to be recognized. Place-names are not just arbitrary linguistic signs: they convey a whole relationship to the land peculiar to the people who name it. The Inuinnait people Collignon worked with thus proved grateful for her place-names collection work, since “place-names are essential not for journeys and people’s survival, but rather for their integration to the milieu, which thus becomes a humanized milieu where their culture may flourish” (Collignon 1996: 116, *my translation*). An example of this is a fjord called “*Nalluq*, the place where the caribou swim,” which implies that it is a good hunting spot for Inuit hunters (Collignon 1996: 122). Thus, communal practices are actually embedded in the Inuit name of each landscape feature, and prove vernacular naming to be at the interface between concrete space, cultural representations, and social practices, connecting people with their environment.

#### *The Significance of Regionyms*

In this respect, the symbolical and politically effective importance of *nuna* as a word may be best seen in the construction of regionyms based on this vocable. Inuit regions’ names were chosen during negotiation processes for the constitution of Inuit territories and they reflect the meanings these regions have for the Inuit. Most official Inuit regions have *nuna* in their names:

- *Kalaallit Nunaat*, ‘the land of the Kalaallit,’ the endonym for Greenland. It acquired internal autonomy within the Danish Kingdom in 1979.
- *Nunavik*, ‘the great land,’ in the province of Quebec, Canada, which name was adopted in 1986.
- *Nunavut*, ‘our land,’ a federal territory in Northern Canada legally created in 1999.
- *Nunatsiavut*, ‘our beautiful land,’ an autonomous territory within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, created in 2005.

Here *nuna* is not just an indicator of toponymy. When picking up this vocable, the Inuit (or their representatives) deliberately chose a name deeply meaningful, peculiar to Inuit culture, and with which all Inuit may identify. It was a way to distance the newly created regions from the Qallunaat territorialities, often limited to formal rights over a given spatial extent, framed by political boundaries. Inuit *nuna*-regions, on the contrary, are not only strictly geographical, but also encompass a specific relationship between human beings and their physical and metaphysical environment. *Nuna* and the derived regionyms have become the very symbol of the Inuit claims for territories and self-determination. Hamelin explains that “when an Inuit pronounces *nuna*, whether in ‘Nunavik,’ ‘Nunavut,’ or ‘Nunaat,’ she also

speaks about herself, she doesn't speak of something that would be exterior to her" (in Chartier & Désy 2014: 60, *my translation*).

The importance of recent regionyms is enhanced by the fact that Inuit may in return identify with them. Inhabitants of a region are known by the name of their region, therefore Inuit may refer to themselves with demonyms including *nuna*—for instance, Nunavut inhabitants are called *Nunaviammiut*. Newspapers and other regional media have also adopted names based on *nuna*, thus spreading the word and reinforcing the identification with this specific element.

### “Imagined” Inuit Communities at the Intersection of Language and Place

The vocable and notion of *nuna*, and the wider claim of specific territories and above all territorialities played a role in the processes of community-inventing and identity-building among Inuit in different regions. The recurrence of the vocable *nuna* when creating regionyms suggests that it progressively became a banner for Inuit claims, as explained by Müller-Wille (2000: 147): “place-names have become a political as well as a cultural banner to prove sovereignty to oneself and to the Other.” This could explain that *nuna* has been used in all Inuit regionyms, each region wanting to politically assert what it has in common with the other politically-affirmed self-governing regions, and by opposition to Qallunaat territorial conceptions.

The institutional recognitions of Inuit regions and Inuit sovereignty on these regions are a major step in the definition of territorial identity, and they are constitutive of the imagination of communities—to take up the famous 1983 title from Anderson, whose argumentation is also based on the importance of language in the process of nation-building. Dahl (1988) puts forward how social groups known today as Inuit communities are recent constructions, and to what extent this construction is an imagined one, in the sense that their creation and perpetuation rely on symbolical elements and procedures, as well as on material ones. Such a constructivist viewpoint helps distancing oneself from naturalizing and essentialist visions which reify cultures—especially indigenous ones—by seeing them as immutable and having existed forever under a permanent form. Inuit collective identities as they are known today were invented in the 1970s and 1980s, in collective oppositions to Western powers, and in parallel with a cultural recognition and the creation of partly self-governed territories. The peculiar territorial imaginary entailed by *nuna* played an important role in such imagination, as Dahl (1988; 2000) highlights it, sometimes even framing a proper *national* imaginary. In Greenland for instance, the building of a Greenlandic identity relied on the construction and awareness of a homogeneous territory and

culture all over Greenland, a process launched in the late 1970s while political groups demanded the granting of Home Rule, and it led to the conceptualization of Greenland as a nation. The importance of *nuna* as a territorial and symbolic landscape is seen in the Greenlandic national flag, a stylized version of a sunset over iconic icebergs (Kleivan 1988: 50). On the other side of the Baffin Sea, the coat of arms adopted by Nunavut also highlights how a specific relationship to the environment is at the center of a regional Inuit “nationalism.” It depicts a caribou and a narwhal (paramount game) standing on rocks, earth, sea, and ice—a peculiar integrated environment surrounding a core circle representing the inhabited landscape (with a lamp and the human-shaped *inuksuk*) on top of which stands a stereotypical *igloo* house, between the sky and the Kingom’s crown. Under this, a banner reads “*Nunavut Sanginivut*” (‘Our Land, our strength’) in syllabic Inuktitut.

*Nuna*, both as a concept and its vocable form, has been used as a symbol and a support for identification in itself. The very name *Nunavut* is one of the elements which was repeatedly pushed and used through the process of self-governance negotiations, so that it became a nominative symbol for the new political order and affirmed the proper identity of a new Inuit regional community. Just as the national day or the lesser-known coat of arms, regionyms helped acclimatize Inuit and Qallunaat to the idea of new territories associated with new political powers and positions for the Inuit in their respective countries and provinces (Légaré 2002: 60). *Nunavut*, a name unknown until the 1970s, soon became an element of identity to be used internally (Nunaviammiut identified themselves with it) and externally (the outer world would identify the population comprised within Nunavut’s new boundaries with it), at the same time political communities were built in all Inuit regions, and enhanced by other factors such as regional media.

### Conflicts and Challenges behind the Landscape

This tentatively comprehensive picture of the Inuit linguistic landscape should not lead to a linear and/or univocal understanding of *nuna*. The vocable and its uses are actually multiple, disputed, and in constant evolution. This is made clear by the following three cruces: first, the multiplicity and evolution of the meaning of *nuna*; second, an example of political conflicts having aroused about the term; and third, a potential evolution of *nuna* to be used for future identification with a new pan-Inuit meaning.

Inuit geographical, political as well as linguistic landscapes have evolved along history, and so has the word *nuna*. Studying Nunavut, Therrien offers a subtle interpretation of the contemporary continuation of this process. She states that two meanings of *nuna* may cohabit today, one used internally within the Inuit group, and the other dedicated to external uses, that is,





Fig. 1. The coat of arms of Nunavut, adopted in 1999, is a depiction of what *nuna* symbolizes, and an example of its political uses.

Source: [http://www.assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/nunavut\\_coat\\_of\\_arms.jpg](http://www.assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/nunavut_coat_of_arms.jpg); access date 29 September 2017.

with the Qallunaat. There is a degree of flexibility in the uses of the term, so that the Inuit of what is now known as *Nunavut* “made two pictures of *nuna* coexist: the first, true to the definition of landscape in Canadian law, was directed towards legal, economic and political specialists”—and it was pragmatically adopted when negotiating territorial rights with the Qallunaat. The second meaning of *nuna*,

expressed solely in Inuktitut, is passed around at the family and community levels [...] It is about a peculiar relationship with the natural milieu, reproduced by education, and it helps the youth to develop respectful and modest attitudes towards the whole of the natural environment, far from any appropriation feeling. (Therrien 1999: 47–49, *my translation*)

The naming of their land among the Inuit is even a case for internal conflicts. In the 1970s, Inuit representatives of Northern Quebec negotiated the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, according to which today's Nunavik territory would be split in different categories of land on which Inuit would have differentiated rights—and would receive financial compensation in return. A group of Inuit from three communities then proclaimed themselves “dissidents” to the Agreement and refused what they deemed to be an abandoning of the proper Inuit meaning of the land, which could not be divided or sold. These dissidents named themselves Inuit Tungavingat *Nunamini* (ITN), which means ‘the ones who stand *on their land*.’ In their view, the proper territoriality embedded in *nuna* is at the heart of Inuit cultural identity. Documents produced by ITN all put forward *nuna* in its “internal” meaning—see for instance the documentary film (Bulbulian 1983) in which ITN members display traditional Inuit practices in interaction with the land (hunting, fishing, and the associated social practices of sharing); or the brochure insisting that

the relationship of the Inuit to the land is not characterized by property feeling but rather attachment to a nourishing land to which all and everyone traditionally had access, on the basis of a balanced relationship between human beings and available resources (ITN 1983: 11, *my translation*)

These declarations were targeted against the organizations who negotiated the extinction of land claims in the 1970s. Claiming this meaning of *nuna* was a way for ITN to affirm their legitimacy for representing Inuit people.

Focusing on *nuna* eventually helps understanding a contemporary challenge for Inuit identity, that of the building of a transnational community. The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) nowadays tries to materialize an Inuit nationalistic feeling across nation-state borders. Its first explicit purpose is “to strengthen unity among the Inuit of the Circumpolar region” (ICC’s charter), and it soon stated that Inuit “constitute a nation” sharing a “common land.”<sup>11</sup> This reference to *nuna* can be interpreted as a technique for effectively building the community the ICC is supposed to represent, out of a geographical imaginary. That such international organizations casually talk about an *Inuit Nunaat* (or *Inuit Nunangat*) makes it clear that *nuna* has become such a widespread vocable and a symbol for local Inuit identities—a banner—that it is a tool for building a pan-Inuit identity, supposedly shared beyond national and linguistic boundaries. To what extent Inuit people today adhere to this and effectively consider the indigenous circumpolar region as *nuna*, is still to be researched.



## Conclusion

There is more to *nuna* than just the Inuit territory. This vocable, common to all Inuit languages and included in all Inuit regionyms, ratifying a certain degree of political and territorial recognition, allows anthropological and political understandings of what the linguistics of place do to identity and community. *Nuna* highlights the peculiarity of the Inuit linguistic landscape, embedded in the characteristics of Arctic indigenous cultures and environment. Thus, it provides ground for collective identification in every Inuit localized community as well as on the regional level, all the more when external words and concepts (the “Great White North”) are at odds with the indigenous worldview.

Focusing on the links between language and territoriality, the importance of the very process of naming places and regions is made clear. Recognizing the legitimacy of indigenous toponyms is in itself a recognition of the existence of Inuit communities as cultural and historical meaningful entities, but also as a politically relevant group. Linguistic identity politics may also include the promotion of a vocable as a banner for transnational (here, pan-Inuit) identity, making *nuna* a key component of the imagination of these northern communities.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> ICC 1975, quoted on <http://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/iccs-beginning.html>; access date 16 March 2017.

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