NAMING THE ESKIMO: POLITICS OF NAMING IN THE NORTH OF THIS LAND NOW CALLED CANADA[1]

Mikhel Proulx

Inuit man holding a sign which reads "6008" [Arnatsiaq. He was married to Tuurnagaaluk and their daughter was Juunaisi] 30-31 August 1945 Pond Inlet, N.W.T., [Pond Inlet (Mittimatalik/Tununiq), Nunavut] Credit: Arthur H. Tweedle / Library and Archives Canada / e002344278Restrictions on use: NilCopyright: Expired <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3606623&rec_nbr_list=3606620,3198764,3198763,3606625,3606624,3606623,3606622,3606619,3606618,3606621>.

Inuit woman holding a sign which reads "6009" [Tuurnagaaluk. She was married to Arnatsiaq and their daughter was Juunaisi] 30-31 August 1945 Pond Inlet, N.W.T., [Pond Inlet (Mittimatalik/Tununiq), Nunavut] Credit: Arthur H. Tweedle / Library and Archives Canada / e002344279Restrictions on use: NilCopyright: Expired <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3606624&back_url=()>.

Inuit woman holding a sign which reads "6010" [Juunaisi. She was the daughter of Arnatsiaq (father), Tuurnagaaluk (mother)] 30-31 August 1945 Pond Inlet, N.W.T., [Pond Inlet (Mittimatalik/Tununiq), Nunavut] Credit: Arthur H. Tweedle / Library and Archives Canada / e002344280Restrictions on use: NilCopyright: Expired <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3606625&rec_nbr_list=3606620,3198764,3198763,3606625,3606624,3606623,3606622,3606619,3606618,3606621>.

Names identify, classify and convey meaning about individuals: so too do they construct divisions between people, between bodies, and between cultures. They may refine, clarify and articulate but also isolate, itemize and render inferior. Named is the butterfly pinned to the collector's cushion: the name is its own, but it comes only with its death. Conversely, names may also unify, as in the consolidation of peoples under a motto or anthem. A name may also permit self-identification and determination: when one calls oneself *I*, or their community *we*. A common, shared name may foster solidarity, or be used to erroneously designate and destructively categorize peoples. This was the case with the exonym **"**Eskimo," a name imposed outwardly on diverse peoples in the North of this land now called Canada.

Project Naming, a venture organized throughout the past decade by Library and Archives Canada (in collaboration with Nunavut Sivuniksavut and the Nunavut Department of Culture, Languages, Elders and Youth) seeks to display, share and identify thousands of photographs of ancestral Inuit and other aboriginal peoples. This pioneering project, in its exposition of thousands of photographs from a period spanning over a century, offers us the opportunity to contemplate historical and extant practices of naming in the North, and their various political implications.

The images are culled from a range of photographic collections: the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP, née NWMP), the National Film Board of Canada, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (né Department of the Interior), the Department of Health and Welfare, as well as from various private collections. They are images taken by professional and amateur photographers: ethnographers, explorers, and traders from the Hudson's Bay Company, bureaucrats, topographers and fishermen. Project Naming makes possible the repatriation of

these images through avenues for feedback and discourse in the often-remote communities from which they originate. These photographs have found a role as interfaces for intergenerational and cross-cultural communication. With them, exchanges of memories and stories are facilitated. They are a media fed back into cultures often ripe with oral traditions—storytelling, spoken word and song. Through discourse assisted by the photos, we learn stories from before and after the click of the camera's shutter, as elaborated by the "Namers" of Project Naming.

Though families are documented herein, these are not family photos. The pictures were not held closely, not cherished as precious relics in home albums, not carried in wallets, nor affixed to fridges. They were catalogued and reprinted in chilled archives by cotton-gloved curators and historians. They were selected, edited and indexed into thousands of files labelled: "Native-type," "Eskimo," and "Unidentified Indian." In these photographs, we initially see homogenized, colonial depictions of typecast "Eskimos," neither individuals nor the divergent, rich cultures from which they are derived.

In part, we may identify within these photographs effects of colonization and adverse practices of naming. Conversely, they are also a stage for the reclamation and repatriation of historical material, a means of reclaiming voice and asserting agency. Through Project Naming, traditional, meaningful names of individuals are being written down and re-transcribed to amend misspellings, strip off spurious Christian variations or to insert names where only numbers exist. By introducing Inuit and aboriginal voices to describe the depicted people, events, practices and places, Project Naming further bolsters traditions and stories that have survived colonization and assimilation tactics.

These amendments to the virtual spaces of images, archives and indexes are occurring alongside actual, legal alterations of erroneously assigned labels. Names of individuals, communities and places are undergoing rectification. Notably, the ill-fitting "Frobisher Bay" officially became Iqaluit (*School of Fish*) in 1987 and Broughton Island was restored as Qikiqtarjuaq (*Big Island*) in 1998**,** a year before the naming of the Nunavut territory.

In acknowledging indigenous names for places, communities and individuals, ideological implications are cast-off along with incorrect names. These designations—often skewed from phonetic languages and rendered in Latin characters—replaced traditional systems of naming by elders. In some cases names designated by government officials, church workers and other bureaucrats were patent extensions of racist, colonial practices. "Many people originally from Qikiqtarjuaq," Zebedee Nungak gives as example, "…were slapped with the surname Smith by the Qallunaat [non-Inuit]."[2]

An especially reckless, standardized colonial administrative practice was implemented from 1941 to 1978. "Eskimo disc-numbers," numbered identifications imposed by government workers to sidestep names too "difficult" for Southern Canadians, were pendants formed as dog tags to be worn around the neck. One side of the disc bore the individualized ID-number, the other an emblazoned crown encircled with the phrase "Eskimo Identification Canada." An initiative in reaction to disc-numbers that was ultimately similar in its authoritative imposition was Project Surname. Between 1969 and 1972 every Inuk was renamed; more precisely, the Canadian Government instated compulsory surnames. Needless to say, the adoption of surnames, a practice not of Inuit tradition, prompted much "confusion and resentment."[3]

The colonial heritage of Canada has seen bureaucratic, administrative and religious practices diminish traditional cultural practices of naming. In ameliorating this perversion with self-identified names, Project Naming has set forth a model with which we can consider the political capacities of names. Through its photographic collection, we may further flesh-out politics of representations of the "Eskimo."

Unidentified Inuit boy. July 1926 Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T., [Chesterfield Inlet (Igluligaarjuk), Nunavut] Credit: L.T. Burwash / Canada. Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development collection / Library and Archives Canada / PA-099442 <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3379861>.

Unidentified Inuit boy. July 1926 Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T., [Chesterfield Inlet (Igluligaarjuk), Nunavut]
<http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3379833>.

Unidentified Inuit girl. July 1926 Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T., [Chesterfield Inlet (Igluligaarjuk), Nunavut] Credit: L.T. Burwash / Canada. Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development collection / Library and Archives Canada / PA-099444 <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3379834>.

Native, Chesterfield Inlet, [N.W.T.], July, 1926. Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T., [Chesterfield Inlet (Igluligaarjuk), Nunavut] Credit: L.T. Burwash / Canada. Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development collection / Library and Archives Canada / PA-099445
<http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3379835>.

Unidentified Inuit boy. July 1926 Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T., [Chesterfield Inlet (Igluligaarjuk), Nunavut] Credit: L.T. Burwash / Canada. Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development collection / Library and Archives Canada / PA-099439 <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3379829>.

Unidentified Inuit boy. 1926 Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T., [Chesterfield Inlet (Igluligaarjuk), Nunavut] Credit: L.T. Burwash / Canada. Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development collection / Library and Archives Canada / PA-099440 <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3379830>.

Unidentified Inuk. 1926 Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T., [Chesterfield Inlet (Igluligaarjuk), Nunavut] Credit: L.T. Burwash / Canada. Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development collection / Library and Archives Canada / PA-099456 <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3379837>.

Unidentified Inuit child. July, 1926 Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T., [Chesterfield Inlet (Igluligaarjuk), Nunavut] Credit: L.T. Burwash / Library and Archives Canada / PA-099401
<http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3379802>.

Portraits from a distance: LT Burwash: Unidentified Children and Baffin Island Specimens

Not solely the naming, but also the *imaging* of another can be a dehumanizing act. In many of the photos compiled under the rubric of Project Naming we see images of persons framed by the colonial experience of them. They are the Others (or rather, Othered) encountered by pioneers of the Great White North. "Noble savage," "barbarian," or "Eskimo," the image taken of them is a dispossession, an extension of invalid historical narratives of European "discovery" of indigenous peoples.

These images were often less portraits of subjects than ethnographic analyses of bodies. They are studies of specimens' physiognomy, that is, the characterization and classification of a person's physical traits to discern aspects of personality.

This practice is evidently the case in these photographs taken by Major L.T. Burwash, explorer, engineer and scientist with the Department of the Interior, in 1926 at Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T., (present day Igluligaarjuk, Nunavut). In these impassionate registrations of bodies in frontal and profile details we may glimpse Burwash's likely supposition that he was documenting a dying culture. His was an imperial gaze, a blatant extension of colonial ambitions concerned with the domination of a people.

Elderly Padleimuit woman in the last stages of starvation. 1949 or 1950 1 photograph ; 61 x 98 mmNegatives - film - b/w Credit: Richard Harrington / Library and Archives Canada / PA-176703 <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3256569&rec_nbr_list=3256569>.

[Kinaryuak (left) and Kipsiyak (right).]. Padlei, N.W.T., [Akunijuaq/Akuniyuaq, near Padlei, Nunavut] Credit: Richard Harrington / Library and Archives Canada / PA-129943 <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3194001&back_url=()>.

Starving Padleimiut. 1949-1950 vicinity of Padlei, N.W.T., [Nunavut] 1 photograph ; 60 x 90 mmNegative Film B/W - safety film Credit: Richard Harrington/Library and Archives Canada/PA-143918 <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3576259&rec_nbr_list=3576259>.

Starving Padleimiut woman at camp on South Henik Lake near Padlei, N.W.T.] [Nunavut] ca. February 1950.Graphic (photo)[ca. February 1950]. / Padlei, N.W.T. [Nunavut] Credit: Richard Harrington / Library and Archives Canada / PA-112083 <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/inuit-research/001027-119.01-e.php?&mikan_nbr=3193769>.

Padleimuit Inuit woman just before death.Graphic (photo)1950. / Padlei, N.W.T., [Nunavut]: Credit: Richard Harrington / Library and Archives Canada / PA-129023 <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/inuit-research/001027-119.01-e.php?&mikan_nbr=3560151>.

Richard Harrington's Famine: Neo-Colonial Reportage or Documentary Activism

Beginning in the late 1940s and lasting for several years, overshadowed by a booming economy in southern Canada, a famine surfaced in the dwindling Padleimiut population in the North, due to changes in caribou migration routes, and the introduction of dietary changes and European diseases. Photojournalist Richard Harrington (1911-2005), working for the National Film Board, documented their starvation 200 km inland from Eskimo Point (modern-day Arviat). Purportedly, he was given the name "Adderiorli" ("the man with a box") during one of his dogsleds journeys to the often-remote communities he documented.

Harrington endeavoured to raise the national alarm on suffering in the North, exposing these severe images in the *Toronto Star*, and later writing of them in his 1952 book, *The Face of the Arctic*: "These pictures would, I hope, show the outside world what real suffering was. They would also show the strength, endurance, courage and ingenuity of an almost exhausted people."

The famine, an episode that does not does not easily fit into the dominant history of Canada or recent Canadian collective memory, is given a face in the photographs of Harrington, but not a name. Within these disquieting, poignant images Harrington himself wants to disappear: his seems an impassionate, objective eye documenting a tragedy. These are unarguably aestheticized, indeed beautiful images, cultivated and picturesque in a stylized harmony not analogous to the harsh reality of their depicted subjects.

Can we locate a neo-colonial agenda in the starving Padlei photographs of Richard Harrington? Unnamed, the people in these may be collapsed into mere objects and thus contribute legitimacy to oppressive representational structures. Is his an implicit use of colonial pictorial devices? With an emphasis on rich textures and skilful rendering of depth and form in these highly controlled compositions, these images may alternately be read as activist reportage or disinterested documentary. How are we to interpret these images: as a call for humanitarian compassion for the Padlei, or as a naturalization of their starvation into an image of the great, white, natural North?

Graves of two Inuit children who died in 1923 at Craig Harbour, Ellesmere Island, N.W.T. [Nunavut], 1924. Credit: Roy Tash / Library and Archives Canada / PA-1727151 photograph ; 97 x 122 mm Positive Paper Silver - gelatine <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3251035>.

Cross with Inuit inscription at the grave of an Inuit child, Craig Harbour, Ellesmere Island, N.W.T. [Nunavut], 1924.
1 photograph ; 123 x 100 mm Positive Paper Silver - gelatine Credit: Roy Tash / Library and Archives Canada / PA-172716
<http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3251034>.

Colonial Landscaping

The various intersections of Indigenous peoples and Euro-Canadians –some inventive and hybridised, others observably catastrophic– have produced alterations in the socio-topological landscape—in both cultural and physical spaces.

Commercialization and assimilation, fishing industries and nationalist imperatives alike, mutated both cultural and physical landscapes in the North. Where the predominance of economic and religious imperatives saw the eradication of time-honoured practices, education and enculturation meant the suppression of cultural customs and traditional ways of living.

This 1924 photograph, *Cross at grave of Eskimo child,* embodies this mutation. The image confirms how means and modes of identification crudely served the needs of Euro-Canadians. Here, the grave-marker gestures a redefinition of the landscape from wild space to colonized place in an act of architectural authority that asserts dominance over the spiritual and cultural space that indwells the land.

Not a flagpole struck into the cold earth, bearing signs of nation-states or heraldry, the grave marker asserts that this is a Christian place. Not a consecrated, above-ground resting-place, as was the convention in much of the traditional North: it is a Christian burial, likely shallow underground, above the shifting permafrost. The colonial centralization of burial sites as cemeteries in the North administered the location of bodies in death; as much it demanded enculturation in life.

Despite the harsh impositions and deleterious practices of colonial settlers, this cross may also denote the perseverance of culture, history and language in the North. The child's grave-marker –an unmistakable crucifix– is inscribed with Inuktitut syllabics, a 19th-century invention by Moravian and Anglican missionaries. While colonial distortion reads loudly in the image, so too does the perseverance of cultural practices that survived it.

[Kinalik is learning how to make patterns by her mother Paalak.]. 1949-1950 / Padlei, N.W.T., [Saningayuaq, near Padlei, Nunavut], Credit: Richard Harrington / Library and Archives Canada / PA-166872 <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/inuit-research/001027-119.01-e.php?&mikan_nbr=3194878>.

[Kautak (left) and her mother Atatsiak (right). Atatsiak, who was married to Koomayuak, is teaching Kautak how to sew.]. 1949-1950 Eskimo Point, N.W.T., [now Arviat, Nunavut] 6 X 9 CM. Credit: Richard Harrington / Library and Archives Canada / PA-166829 <http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3194874&rec_nbr_list=3194874>.

[Rosie Iggi, also called Niakrok (left), and Kablu (right). Kablu is sewing "kamiks", and Niakrok is taking Kablu's braids. In the past, there were no sewing machines.] 1949-1950 / Padlei, N.W.T., [Kingayualik, near Padlei, Nunavut], Credit: Richard Harrington / Library and Archives Canada / PA-147246 <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/inuit-research/001027-119.01-e.php?&mikan_nbr=3195356>.

To portra (y/it): Attribution as Decolonization

Not by the de-accessioning of objects, but in the repatriation of images, Project Naming attempts to undo systemic inequalities, remove pernicious structures, and denounce dependencies on the methods and categories of oppressive regimes. This act of restitution partakes in the decolonization of the Inuit and related indigenous groups, and contributes to the self-determination of various peoples affected adversely by colonialism. In the re-contextualization of colonial documents, we may witness the reification of identity through the amelioration of erroneously labelled images, and the restitution of images of ancestral rituals and practices.

While images in Project Naming document technologies and practices from the past that may have not survived through colonization, they now partake in more resilient modes of exchange and education. In his photographs of matrilineal crafting traditions, Richard Harrington effectively documents the reverse of his famine photographs. Here, a rich, meaningful cultural practice is disclosed and laid open with each of the depicted individuals in these images identified through Project Naming.

This reparation illustrates current photographic experience in the North, where a mediated history involves learning from the document and carrying on a shared discourse informed by the past. While photographs, archives and indexes may be at odds with traditional oral histories, they may also lend a hand in contributing to new stories and means of sharing them. Naming, after all, is not just labelling: it is recalling, retelling and appreciating those who have come before us. “So in fact,” as Kangiqliniq resident Quluaq Pilikapsi has said, **“**there are things in storage, but they are also in storage with people who are still alive [in the memories of the Elders]. This is

something that has become very. . . [important to us] because. . . our future, our *Sivuniksavut* [is connected to our past]."

NOTES

[1] This paper has been written with the generous guidance of Dr. Loren Lerner and Dr. Heather Igloliorte.
[2] Zebedee Nungak, *Inuktitut Magazine* 88, E9-1956 (Ottawa: Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, 2000) 34.
[3] DeNeen L. Brown, "In Old Names, a Legacy Reclaimed: Inuit Go to Court to Cast Off Government-Issued Identities," *Washington Post Foreign Service* 7 (July 2002) A15.

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LESSON PLAN

Have the students find and bring to class a family photograph.

Have them answer as many questions as they are able to:

Who took this photograph?

How might the photographer be standing?

Is the photographer above the people in the image or below? To the left or to the right?

Do the people in the image know they are being photographed?

How do you think they feel about being photographed?

What is the relationship between the person behind the camera (who has taken the photograph) and the people in the image?

Do they speak the same language?

Do they know each other? Perhaps even love each other?

Can you see this familiarity in the image?

Does the sitter smile?

To the photographer?

It can be difficult, perhaps impossible to tell.