

Tina Piulia DeCouto

Uncomfortable Inuk - Exploring Inuit
Qaujimajatuqangit



CONTENTS

4	Tina Piulia DeCouto Biography
6	Background / Introduction ᐅᓂᐃᑦᐅᑕᐅᑕᑭᒪᓂᓄᑦ/ᑕᑭᑭᑎᑦᑎᑦᐱᓂᑭᑏᓂᓂᓂ
7	Language and Worldview ᐅᓂᐅᑭᓂ ᐱᓂᓂ ᓄᓇᓴᐱᓂᑦ ᑕᐅᑦᑐᓂᓂᓂᓂ
11	Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit in Government ᐃᓄᐱᑦ ᓂᐅᑭᒪᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂ ᓂᓇᒪᑭ
14	Transmission of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit ᐱᑦᑕᐅᓂᓄᑦ ᐃᓄᐱᑦ ᓂᐅᑭᒪᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂ
17	Inuktut in Government ᐃᓄᓂᑐᓂᓂᓂ ᓂᓇᒪᑭ
19	Inuit-Specific Programs ᐃᓄᓂᓂᓂᓂ ᐱᑦᑎᐱᑦ
22	Value for Inuit-Specific Promising Practice ᐱᓂᑎᐅᓂᓄᑦ ᐃᓄᓂᓂᓂᓂ ᐱᑕᓂᓂᑭᑎᐱᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂ ᐱᑦᓂᐅᑭᒪᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂᓂ
26	Recommendations and Necessary Next Steps
29	Footnotes



The Gordon Foundation undertakes research, leadership development and public dialogue so that public policies in Canada reflect a commitment to collaborative stewardship of our freshwater resources and to a people-driven, equitable and evolving North. Our mission is to promote innovative public policies for the North and in fresh water management based on our values of independent thought, protecting the environment, and full participation of indigenous people in the decisions that affect their well-being. Over the past quarter century The Gordon Foundation has invested over \$37 million in a wide variety of northern community initiatives and freshwater protection initiatives.



The Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship is a policy and leadership development program that recognizes leadership potential among young northern Canadians who want to address the emerging policy challenges facing the North. The two year long program is built around four regional gatherings and offers skills training, mentorship and networking opportunities. Through self-directed learning, group work and the collective sharing of knowledge, Fellows will foster a deeper understanding of important contemporary northern issues, and develop the skills and confidence to better articulate and share their ideas and policy research publicly. The Fellowship is intended for young northerners between 25 and 35 years of age, who want to build a strong North that benefits all northerners. Through the Fellowship, we hope to foster a bond among the Fellows that will endure throughout their professional lives and support a pan-northern network.



Tina Piulia DeCouto
Iqaluit, Nunavut
Canada
(Photo credit Alistair Maitland)

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Tina is currently a Jane Glassco Northern Fellow and works for Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI), a land claims organization representing the interests of Inuit in the implementation of the Nunavut Agreement since 2014. Most recently, she has taken on the role of Director for Social and Cultural Development. Prior to that, she worked in the division of Inuit Employment and Training with a focus on Article 23, where the objectives are toward a representative public service, but a majority of her time was committed to playing a pivotal role in the establishment and operation of Makigiaqta Inuit Training Corporation. Tina greatly contributed to the development and approval of Makigiaqta’s Long-term Strategy and supported the Corporation in making its first investment in 16 Nunavut organizations.

Born to an Inuk mother and a Portuguese father in Iqaluit, Tina was the first in her family of five to graduate high school in 2004. Upon graduation, she embarked on a six-month international volunteer program with Canada World Youth and after returning home in summer of 2005, Tina was accepted into Nunavut Sivuniksavut (NS), an Inuit-specific post-secondary program based in Ottawa where students learn about Inuit history, politics, and governance. Graduating NS with distinction and a new-found appreciation for her culture, education, and travel, Tina spent a year back-packing across Southern Africa and South-East Asia, and earned her Bachelor of Management at Athabasca University. A student with Pirurvik Centre’s Inuktitut Revitalization program for Inuit, and a mother of two boys who attend the only Inuktitut immersion daycare in Nunavut, Tina is always looking for creative ways to further build on her cultural foundation as an Inuk.

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As a product of colonization, I am an uncomfortable Inuk. Many people have questioned my ethnicity based on my appearance. Many have questioned my ethnicity based on the level of my Inuktitut language ability. I myself have questioned my inuuniq (Inuk-ness) based on my inability to meaningfully communicate with Inuit Elders, and thus, have found myself feeling as though I do not fully embody Inuit ways of being. I often wonder: am I really rooted in my experiences of Inuktitut (language) and Inuit knowledge?

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ): often referred to as Inuit traditional knowledge. IQ is about a set of values and practices, the relevance and importance of these, and ways of being and looking at things that are timeless.

Inuit Societal Values (ISV): Eight guiding principles that are used to guide the Government of Nunavut in the delivery of government programs and services (see Figure 1).

This very personal question is what drove me to focus my policy research on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, in particular within the Government of Nunavut (GN). Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is referenced in many Government of Nunavut (GN) documents. There has been some significant work done to define Inuit Societal Values (ISV) within the Government of Nunavut, which some people may assume to be the epitome of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit. However, Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit goes far beyond ISV. I wanted to further explore the intent and, more practically, application of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and ISV throughout the territorial government administration and delivery of territorial government services. Born and raised predominantly in Nunavut, I wanted to understand why I – like many of my peers –

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felt disconnected from my culture. In relation, I wanted to explore further the efforts of the Government of Nunavut¹ through the creation of their first mandate, *Pinasuaqtavut : That Which We've Set Out to Do : Our Hopes and Dreams for Nunavut*, to ensure "Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit will provide the context in which we develop an open, responsive and accountable government"; and that "Inuktitut, in all its forms, is the working language of the government of Nunavut." More specifically, I wanted to explore how those efforts have influenced my experience and the strength of my roots to Inuktitut and Inuit knowledge. Efforts in achieving the Nunavut dream for a territorial governance structure that is based on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, inclusive of language and culture, have waned. It is reflected through analysis of the Government of Nunavut's first mandate in achieving the commitments mentioned above. This has led me to provide four recommendations on the basis of Inuit maligait.

“It is very important to have rules and laws to live by: live by a set plan, set of beliefs and values”—Joe Karetak ²

"Inunnguiausimajuq development is confused when there are opposing systems of belief and outside influences, such as peer pressure" -Atuat Akittingq ³

LANGUAGE AND WORLDVIEW

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), for the purpose of this paper, represents Inuit worldview in its entirety: knowledge, values, language, perspective, and way of life. Therefore, it is more than the eight societal values as defined and utilized symbolically in government application.

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Although important, the eight values do not capture the complete epistemology of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit. In addition, when referencing Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit in this article, it includes Inuktitut (the Inuit language in all dialects) because language is intricately tied to the transmission of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit. Alexina Kublu, a former Language Commissioner for Nunavut, and her husband Mick Mallon, a linguist who has dedicated his life to learning and teaching Inuktitut, speak about the difference in literal translation from English to Inuktitut and Inuktitut to English in “Our Language, Our Selves.” Literal translations from one language to another can be significantly misconstrued and do not always reflect the intent or meaning behind the use of each respective language.⁴ For Kublu, and many other Inuit, language and culture are inextricably entwined in the perception of who we are as Inuit.

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Many Inuit strive for biculturalism, which has been described by Seth J. Schwartz and Jennifer B. Unger as comfort and proficiency with both one's heritage culture and the culture of the country or region in which one has settled;⁵ or more specifically for our case as Inuit, Indigenous and first people of Canada, through the process of colonization. Schwartz and Unger have further expanded the definition to include cultural practices, values, and identifications. Someone who is bicultural can function effectively in two cultural contexts, but may feel Inuk in comparison to qallunaat (non-Inuit) counterparts and feel qallunaat in comparison to Inuit peers.

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“Do Inuit see themselves as Inuit first or as Canadians first? I have always thought those two sentiments were one and the same. After all, during our many meetings with Inuit from countries such as Denmark, the United States or Russia, we have always been Canadian Inuit”⁶ – Jose Kusugak

In a territory where approximately 85% of the population is Inuit and 75% of those Inuit reported Inuktitut as their mother tongue according to Statistics Canada⁷, it is personally concerning how much I continually struggle to grasp fluency in Inuktitut. Nunavut is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has a homogenous majority language spoken that is a language other than French and English.⁸

Inuit who negotiated the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement that led to the creation of Nunavut wanted to ensure Inuit rights, including language and culture, were protected; that we could live with dignity in our homeland without feeling shame or inferiority existing in a worldview that is so fundamentally different from non-Inuit, and to feel unapologetic to function in Inuktitut.

If Nunavut's institutions and the systems they create truly valued Inuit culture and language, I am not sure that I, a non-fluent Inuktitut speaker, would be at the level of career that I am in now. The optimism remains that if anyone can achieve fluency in the Inuktitut language and we have a territorial government which truly works from an Inuit world view that we also guide ourselves by, then *that* will be Nunavut.

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Another example of critical work includes a book called *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: What Inuit Have Always Known to be True*.¹⁸ This book draws upon the knowledge of respected Inuit Elders from across Nunavut, many of whom have since passed away, for the purpose of ensuring

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that the knowledge of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is documented and shared with the Inuit community. The Inuit Elders involved “... were concerned that Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit was being presented in bits and pieces and that there was no single source that presented a complete version of holistic philosophy of life.”¹⁹ What struck me is the importance placed on this book by those involved in its development as a resource for Inuit who seek to decolonize and heal through the reclamation of this unique worldview and to use the knowledge to rebuild society grounded in cultural beliefs and systems.²⁰ I am forever grateful to the Inuit Elders: Atuat Akittiq, Louis Angalik, Jose Angutinngurniq, Mariano Aupilaarjuq, Norman Attangalaaq, Alice Hitkoak Ayalik, Mark Kalluak, Rhoda Karetak, Donald Uluadluak; as well as authors and editor, Frank Tester, Shirley Tagalik and Joe Karetak, for undertaking this work and publishing the book in 2017,, as I seek to gain knowledge of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and personally strengthen my roots.

TRANSMISSION OF INUIT QAUJIMAJUTUQANGIT

My past and current lived experience demonstrates the lack of opportunity many young Inuit, especially those in the larger centres of Nunavut, such as Iqaluit, Rankin Inlet, and Cambridge Bay, have to live, learn, and work in Inuktitut and learn directly from Inuit Elders and Inuit knowledge holders. In examining Nunavut's most prominent institutions, including schools and government, it is no wonder this is the case, given that they are led and implemented primarily by non-Inuit. For example, in 2018, a Government of Nunavut report commented that only 16 of 20 senior management positions within the Department of Education were filled; none of them were occupied by Inuit.²¹ This statistic does not make sense in a territory that has a majority population of Inuit.

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Because I have had very little opportunity to learn from Inuit in Nunavut institutions, I crave and value every opportunity to learn directly from Inuit about Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit. Perhaps, given my ingrained learning approach and insecurity in my personal *inuuniq*, I realize my preference is for these opportunities to be presented formally, until such a point where I have increased my confidence and established relationships enough for these opportunities to occur more naturally. As Inuit, do we not have the right to receive and access learning and acquire Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit in Nunavut's institutions, where we are expected to spend a majority of our time, in order to live good lives and contribute to our society and economy?

Janet Tamalik McGrath demonstrates the important relationship of people interactions in the process of knowledge transmission and renewal in her thesis, *Isumaksaqsuurutigijakka: Conversations with Aupilaarjuk : Towards a Theory of Inuktitut Knowledge Renewal*.²² This relationship is one of many reasons why Inuit employment in government is so critical to ensuring Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is implemented within the Nunavut government. This belief also shows the critical need for Inuit to continue to challenge the status quo and dominant institutional culture that is entrenched in government.

“Outside of individual personal initiatives, surprisingly very little is in place at this time to support the middle generation’s immense contribution of skills and lived experiences and their capacity to access elders directly.”²³ As a result, one can safely assume that if a young Inuk does not have direct access to a familial or societal network that is grounded in Inuit culture and language, Inuit knowledge and value transmission is interrupted.

Statistics demonstrate that Inuit continue to suffer more from social determinants of health

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Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Physical Needs

- food and drink
- sleep
- health
- body needs
- exercise and rest
- sex



Safety Needs

- security
- protection
- comfort and peace
- no threats or danger
- orderly and neat surroundings



Attachment Needs

- acceptance
- belonging
- membership
- affection
- group participation



Self-Esteem Needs

- recognition
- confidence
- competence and success
- strength and intelligence



Self-Actualization Needs

- fulfillment of potential
- acting for challenge of accomplishment
- intellectual fulfillment
- aesthetic appreciation
- acceptance of reality

Figure 3 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs,), Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Hierarchy of Needs. Government of Nunavut: Arviat, Nunavut. Reprinted with permission from the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre's Inunnguiniq Parenting Program Curriculum Manual (2018).

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What Inuit Have Always Known to be True. Oddly enough, the Elders Advisory Committee was established in order to re-design Nunavut's K-12 Education system so that teaching and student learning is founded on the perspective of Inuit culture, something that many Inuit feel the Government of Nunavut Department of Education has failed to do.

Through my participation with *Inunnguiniq*, I learned practical underlying concepts that would be applicable for policy development purposes. For example, “sharing” for Inuit has very intentional meaning in how it is applied; sharing is applied in the context of perceiving a need and not putting others in a position to have to request something. This fosters our values and ensures Inuit are able to keep our dignity intact. In addition, although Inuit who share do so without expectation, there is also the practice that the receiver finds a way to give back, by providing something that they are able, no matter how big or small. Territorial government policies, such as those for income assistance, could reflect the concept practically by training public servants and equipping them with this knowledge, so that needs are recognized and government procedures can be mitigated to ensure people are not put in positions to have to request the assistance.

In addition, the *Inunnguiniq* program taught me about Inuit maligait (laws):

1. Working for the common good;
2. Maintaining harmony;
3. Continually planning for the future; and
4. Respect for all living things.

Learning about the four *maligait* in a formal program, rather than hearing Inuit *maligait* (Inuit laws) referenced in passing or reading it from a government poster with no context,

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1. $\Delta^{\mathfrak{b}}\mathfrak{b}\mathfrak{a}\Delta^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{b}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{a}\sigma\ \Delta\mathfrak{a}\Delta^{\mathfrak{c}}\ \wedge\mathfrak{b}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{f}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{C}\mathfrak{D}\mathfrak{a}\mathfrak{c}\mathfrak{c}\mathfrak{L}\mathfrak{C};$
2. $\mathfrak{h}\Delta\mathfrak{L}\mathfrak{f}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{N}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{a}\sigma;$
3. $\mathfrak{c}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{a}\Delta^{\mathfrak{a}}\mathfrak{a}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{a}\sigma\ \mathfrak{r}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{a}\mathfrak{b}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{h}\mathfrak{J}^{\mathfrak{c}},\ \mathfrak{d}\mathfrak{h}\mathfrak{L}\mathfrak{a};$
4. $\Delta^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{h}\mathfrak{J}\mathfrak{r}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{d}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{a}\sigma\ \mathfrak{C}\mathfrak{L}\Delta^{\mathfrak{a}}\sigma\mathfrak{c}\mathfrak{L}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{d}^{\mathfrak{c}}\mathfrak{b}\ \mathfrak{b}\mathfrak{L}\mathfrak{d}\mathfrak{a}^{\mathfrak{b}}.$

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allowed me to meaningfully apply and reflect on the four *maligait* in my personal experiences. For example, maintaining harmony can be applied in many different ways, yet it can be quite challenging in practice. The *Inunnguiniq* program encouraged drawing on examples from my relationship with my son's father and how maintaining harmony is critical to raising a healthy, happy human being. *Inunnguiniq* participants referenced values such as communication, honesty, and understanding as it relates to Inuit *maligait* through the personal examples. This contributed greatly to providing context, heightened my learning, and further connected my mind and heart to my Inuit culture.

There is absolutely no reason that Inuit knowledge cannot be the foundation for, or embedded in, Nunavut's institutional learning. This can be done in both Inuktitut and English and should be taught by Inuit. The *Inunnguiniq* program was delivered in both English and Inuktitut. This allowed me to comprehend the delivery of content but also build my Inuktitut. A majority of the participants were fluent Inuktitut speakers. I could not help but feel guilt that English was being used to accommodate my inability to speak fluent Inuktitut. Yet, the content was derived predominantly from Inuit knowledge; this built my Inuit knowledge base significantly. By participating with Inuit and fluent Inuktitut speakers, I was able to expand my connections and relationships with Inuit from other communities. That was more meaningful to me than receiving formal post-secondary education in southern institutions.

Indeed, Tamalik argues that “... it is critical to understand the importance of knowledge in context; without the story of relationships or without relationships to transmit the stories, knowledge becomes informational, fact and data-based.”³² Tamalik argues that knowledge in that context, void of relational value, does not support the ethical dimensions required

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Building *Nunavut* Together
Nunavut iuqatigiingniq
Bâtir le *Nunavut* ensemble

GOVERNMENT OF NUNAVUT EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Title: Health Promotion Specialist

Department: Health

Community: Iqaluit

Reference Number: 10-505533

Type of Employment: Indeterminate

Salary: \$92,196.00 per annum for 37.5 hour/week

Northern Allowance: \$15,016.00 per annum

Union Status: Nunavut Employees Union

Housing: Subsidized Staff Housing is not Available

Closing date: August 16th, 2019 @ 12:00AM EST

This employment opportunity is open to all applicants.

Reporting to the Territorial Director, Population Health, the Health Promotion Specialist provides leadership in health and wellness promotion and supports community development. The position has a focus of health education throughout the life span of Nunavummiut, from early childhood education, school-aged children to adult education. The Specialist is responsible for ensuring that developed strategies are consistent with Inuit traditional knowledge within national frameworks developed by key Inuit organizations. The Specialist will also work with Department of Health community staff and others who are active in the area of community development and health promotion.

The Specialist is vital to the vision of Nunavut - developing healthy communities, and the vision of Department of Health and shifting from treatment to prevention of wellness. The incumbent is accountable for ensuring that the main determinants of health and wellbeing are strengthened, and that opportunities for partnership both within and outside government are maintained and enhanced to reflect the complexities of the environment. The incumbent will liaise with non-governmental agencies, government departments and other key stakeholders to ensure the ongoing work proceeds systematically, by producing updates of activities and ongoing work.

The knowledge, skills, and abilities required for this job are usually obtained through an undergraduate degree from a recognized university in health science, education or a related field along with two (2) years related experience. A Master's Degree in Public Health or health related field is considered an asset.

The Official Languages of Nunavut are Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, English and French. Fluency in more than one of Nunavut's official language would be considered an asset. Knowledge of Inuit language, communities, culture, land and Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit would also be considered an asset.

Equivalencies that consist of an acceptable combination of education and experience may be considered.

An eligibility list may be created to fill future vacancies.



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[illegible]**ბადაყრა**

with appropriate expertise and ensure control of these teams is maintained by Inuit. The appropriate “western” expertise would then act in an advisory capacity. This type of system would foster an ethical space of engagement and ensure the dominant culture does not impede Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit.

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FOOTNOTES

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