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TUNATSIAVUT

# EXAMINING THE NUNATUKAVUT COMMUNITY COUNCIL'S LAND CLAIM

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For the Nunatsiavut Government  
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## SUMMARY

This report provides a socio-historical analysis of the NunatuKavut Community Council's (NCC) proposed land claim, through an examination of the following: 1) the NCC's (2010) report titled, "Unveiling NunatuKavut: Document in Pursuit of Reclaiming a Homeland, Describing the Lands and People of South/Central Labrador"; and 2) the academic material cited in "Unveiling NunatuKavut." Through my analysis, I uncovered a range of inconsistencies in the NCC's political claims that I explore in some detail in the report. My final assessment is that the nature and scale of the NCC's claims aren't supported by the evidence that they bring forward. Notably, their claim to the existence of a distinct "Southern Inuit" people is baseless.



## **HISTORY OF THE NUNATUKAVUT COMMUNITY COUNCIL, INC.**

Before examining its land claim report, it's important to review the NCC's origins. The NCC doesn't document its history in "Unveiling NunatuKavut," therefore I've relied on academic research that does so.

There is agreement in the scholarly literature by anthropologists and historians that the descendants of those known previously as "Planters" and more recently as "Settlers" from Upper Lake Melville and Hamilton Inlet down the Labrador Coast to near the Straits of Belle Isle began identifying themselves as Indigenous in the 1980s. Anthropologist John C. Kennedy, who conducted fieldwork in Labrador for forty years between 1972 and 2013, provides the most in-depth overview of the origins of these claims.<sup>1</sup> Reading through the body of Kennedy's work is eye-opening, since it traces the history of the south-central Labrador coast Settlers, that is, the descendants of unions between European men and Inuit women mostly between the 1790s and 1830s.

Kennedy explains that representatives of the Northern Quebec Inuit Association travelled overland to northern Labrador Inuit communities in 1972 with the hopes of setting up a regional affiliate of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC) in Labrador.<sup>2</sup> At this time, Settlers were not included in recruitment plans. Yet, when the Newfoundland-based Native Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (NANL) visited the Labrador coast a year later, it recruited some northern Labrador Settlers to join, as well as a few Inuit.<sup>3</sup> Kennedy explains that when the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA) was founded a few months later in September 1973, it included a few bilingual (English-Inuktitut) Settlers from Nain but no other Settlers, since ITC recommended that the LIA only accept Inuktitut-speaking Settlers.<sup>4</sup>

Around the same time, the federal government decided that it would only recognize one organization with Inuit members in Labrador.<sup>5</sup> It was at this point that the LIA offered all northern Labrador Settlers membership in October 1974.<sup>6</sup> Kennedy explains that initially, few northern Settlers accepted the invitation, preferring to remain members of the NANL: "Settler hesitation about which native organization to join was partially the legacy of nonrelations between Inuit and Settlers in communities where relocation brought the groups into continuous contact in the late 1950s. Many Settlers preferred a political association with NANL's [Innu and Mi'kmaw] ethnopoliticians, whom they hardly knew, to an alliance with Inuit neighbours."<sup>7</sup> Northern Settlers openly discussed forming their own organization,<sup>8</sup> but by 1976 they largely opted to join the LIA.

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<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, John. C. 1988. The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity. *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Études ethniques au Canada*, 20(3), 94–111; Kennedy, John. C. 1996. "Our Heritage, Our Identity" The case of the Labrador Metis Association. *Acta Borealia*, 13(1), 23–34; Kennedy, John. C. 1997. Labrador Metis Ethnogenesis. *Ethnos*, 62(3-4), 5–23; Kennedy, John. C. 2014. Identity Politics. In *History and Renewal of Labrador's Inuit-Métis*. (241–62). St John's, NL: Institute of Social and Economic Research; Kennedy, John. C. 2015. Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador. *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 39(1), 225–42.

<sup>2</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 101.

<sup>3</sup> Kennedy, "Our Heritage, Our Identity," 28.

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy, "Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador," 230.

<sup>5</sup> Kennedy, "Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador," 230.

<sup>6</sup> Kennedy, "Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador," 230.

<sup>7</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 102.

<sup>8</sup> Kennedy, "Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador," 230.



While northern Labrador Settlers (again, the descendants of early mixed European-Inuit unions) living in today's Nunatsiavut have long been recognized as Indigenous, the same isn't true of Settlers in central and southern Labrador. Kennedy explains that at the time of the creation of the NANL and LIA, Settlers further south "had neither involvement with nor interest in ethnopolitics."<sup>9</sup> In fact, he asserts that his conversations with Settlers on the south-central coast between 1979–83 confirmed that they "resented Labrador [Indigenous] peoples" because of the perception that they received too much public funding.<sup>10</sup> The NCC fully acknowledges in its 2010 report to the Government of Canada that its membership long denied having Indigenous ancestry,<sup>11</sup> though it downplays how they may have opposed Indigenous peoples in the past.

Peter Armitage and Kennedy explain that south-central Settlers first formally referred to themselves as "Métis" in the mid-1980s, as part of the movement to support expansion of the Goose Bay military base.<sup>12</sup> In fact, they identify prominent Settlers who led the movement to support military expansion by openly disparaging the Innu opposition to low-level flying in quite racist terms.<sup>13</sup> Kennedy goes so far as to claim that the Labrador Metis Association (LMA) was specifically created as part of a political strategy to support military expansion and oppose Indigenous resistance to the expansion: "The actual formation of the LMA appears to have occurred in 1985 when an influential white civil servant in Goose Bay, who actively promotes military expansion in Labrador, helped form a new native organization, so as to dilute native opposition to militarization."<sup>14</sup> The LMA's original Articles of Association (1986) appear to support Kennedy's argument, since they granted membership to anybody "settled North of the Pinware River prior to 1940, who has remained there since, and their descendants." In other words, the LMA expressly empowered white Labradorians with no Indigenous ancestry to claim to be "Indigenous," in what appears to have been a political strategy to oppose the successful Innu-led resistance to military expansion in the region.<sup>15</sup> Kennedy confirms that the LMA president in 1988 stated that eligibility for membership "doesn't necessarily mean to have to have native blood."<sup>16</sup>

Apparently, the LMA was quite successful in mobilizing federal government sympathies, receiving \$1.5 million in funding (\$3.1 million adjusted for inflation) in its first two years of operation.<sup>17</sup> All told, Kennedy was raising red flags about the LMA in the immediate aftermath of its creation: "The extreme subjectivity of LMA membership criteria raises troubling questions about the Association's motives and legitimacy."<sup>18</sup> At this point in time, the LMA was primarily an organization concentrated in the Upper Lake Melville (especially North West River and Happy Valley-Goose Bay) area.

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<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 102.

<sup>10</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 102.

<sup>11</sup> NunatuKavut Community Council, Inc. 2010. Unveiling NunatuKavut: Describing the Lands and People of South/Central Labrador. Land Claim Submission, 308–309.

<sup>12</sup> Armitage, Peter and John C. Kennedy, J. C. 1989. Redbaiting and Racism on our Frontier: Military Expansion in Labrador and Quebec. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 26(5), 814.

<sup>13</sup> Armitage and Kennedy, "Redbaiting and Racism on our Frontier," 809–810.

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 103.

<sup>15</sup> Evelyn Plaice wrote a book outlining the political dynamics of Settler identity in North West River in the two years prior to the creation of the LMA. She outlines how mixed-race Settlers mobilized their Inuit ancestry to oppose Innu land claims, even going so far as to claim that they were in the region first. Plaice, Evelyn. 1990. *The Native Game*. St John's, NL: ISER, 101–123.

<sup>16</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 104.

<sup>17</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 106.

<sup>18</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 107.



After nearly twenty years of fieldwork on the Labrador coast, Kennedy expressed confidence that the Settler descendants of the earliest European-Inuit unions further south on the coast would never join the new LMA, since they didn't consider themselves Indigenous, and certainly not Inuit.<sup>19</sup> In his research funded in partnership with the NCC, Kennedy confirmed that recent “sociocultural outcomes [...] would have been unimaginable when I began my research.”<sup>20</sup> As he went on to explain, “it appears that *if* the NANL or the LIA had attempted to recruit members from Sandwich Bay or further south [in the 1970s], the stigma of being ‘Skimo’ would have prevented those of mixed Inuit-European ancestry from joining.”<sup>21</sup>

Kennedy also adamantly stated in his early work that, “it is unlikely that the Labrador Metis Association will ever submit a land claim.”<sup>22</sup> But, as we now know, within five short years of its incorporation, the LMA had indeed filed a land claim to Upper Lake Melville and Hamilton Inlet and the entire Labrador Coast due south. However, nearly a decade later, Kennedy was claiming that “feelings of disenfranchisement”<sup>23</sup> ultimately led to the creation of the LMA. These feelings were said to have developed since many Labrador Settlers, especially in the Hamilton Inlet and Upper Lake Melville area, could not join the LIA, even though some had the same or similar Inuit ancestry as their Settler peers who were already members. Kennedy began arguing that the LMA was founded “to correct the inequities of the designated community system, which conferred Aboriginality on their Settler counterparts in northern Labrador yet excluded them.”<sup>24</sup> Any academic concern about the LMA's origins as a pro-military expansion entity funded heavily by the Canadian government that also happened to accept individuals with no known Indigenous ancestry as members seems to have subsided by the late 1990s.

While over time Kennedy became one of the most supportive scholars of the NCC's political claims—he was one of the main academics on the NCC's Community-University Research Alliance research project that led to the publication of “Unveiling NunatuKavut”—his early work poses some incontrovertible barriers to NCC's present-day claims. For instance, he repeatedly argued that while there is evidence for the existence of small Inuit enclaves on the south coast (notably at Sandwich Bay and Battle Harbour), “a more problematic question is whether mixed Settlers now calling themselves Metis had a sense of group consciousness prior to the establishment of the Labrador Metis Association in 1985.”<sup>25</sup> Further, Kennedy points out that the so-called Labrador Metis “shared an identical lifestyle with their Settler neighbours who had no Inuit ancestors. Both fished, spoke English, attended either the Pentecostal or Anglican church, married, and belonged to the same political organizations. Thus, for Metis, the task of creating a tradition distinguishing themselves from their Settler neighbours is considerable.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kennedy, “The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity,” 106.

<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, “Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador,” 226.

<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, “Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador,” 231, emphasis in original.

<sup>22</sup> Kennedy, “The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity,” 106.

<sup>23</sup> Kennedy, “Our Heritage, Our Identity,” 29.

<sup>24</sup> Kennedy, “Labrador Metis Ethnogenesis,” 19.

<sup>25</sup> Kennedy, “Labrador Metis Ethnogenesis,” 13.

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy, “Labrador Metis Ethnogenesis,” 14.



In Table 1 below, I've collected all of the data that I could find about LMA/LMN/NCC membership. The most common figure that I've come across for the number of present-day members is around 6,000.

**TABLE 1 – TRACKING LMA/LIA/NCC MEMBERSHIP**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>Number of Members</b>
<b>1987</b>	344 (potentially 3,000) <sup>27</sup>
<b>1988</b>	8,000 potential members <sup>28</sup>
<b>1994</b>	2,701 adults, 5,000 total <sup>29</sup>
<b>1995</b>	3,238 adults, 4,163 total <sup>30</sup>
<b>1990s</b>	Over 6,000 (potentially 10,500) <sup>31</sup>
<b>2001</b>	Up to 10,000 <sup>32</sup>
<b>2004</b>	6,000 <sup>33</sup>
<b>2015</b>	Approximately 6,000 <sup>34</sup>

While figures certainly vary, what's noteworthy is the number of *potential* members put forward by academics and/or the NCC since its founding in 1986. Besides the fact that NCC's membership grew by a factor of seventeen (17) between 1987 and 2004, there's a belief that up to 10,500 individuals could become members, which would represent about 35% of the population of Labrador according to the 2016 Census of Canada. In addition, the NCC hasn't been forthcoming about how many individuals without Indigenous ancestry became members and whether they and their descendants continue to be members today. Overall, the NCC's registry requires an independent, third-party review before any political claims about its membership can be considered.

<sup>27</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 104.

<sup>28</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 94.

<sup>29</sup> Kennedy, "Our Heritage, Our Identity," 29.

<sup>30</sup> Labrador Metis Association. 1995. Completing the Circle: Supplemental Research Submission for the Aboriginal Title Claim of the Inuit/Metis of South and Central Labrador.

<sup>31</sup> Hallett, Vicki. S. 2018. Reading (for) Decolonization: Engaging With Life Writing in Labrador's Them Days Magazine. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 18(5), 333. The reference is to an undated presentation that Doris Saunders gave to the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.

<sup>32</sup> Hanharan, Maura. 2001. A Solid Past: Inuit Cultural Continuity in Labrador Communities. Report prepared for the Labrador Metis Nation, 112.

<sup>33</sup> Labrador Metis Association. 1995. *Metis Messenger*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Kennedy, "Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador," 233.





## THE CREATION OF THE “SOUTHERN INUIT”

Whatever one thinks about the existence of a distinct “Southern Inuit” people, there’s general agreement that prior to the advent of the LMA, “Labrador Settlers who now call themselves Metis were formerly ashamed of their aboriginal heritage.”<sup>35</sup> The NCC itself acknowledges that most of its membership denied its Inuit ancestry until recently.<sup>36</sup>

As Kennedy anticipated over two decades ago, the task of creating a culture and traditions distinguishing the so-called “Southern Inuit” from their white Labradorian neighbours has been considerable.<sup>37</sup> In fact, Kennedy affirms that all that distinguishes the “Inuit-Métis” from their white neighbours “is the [recent] realization of their part-Inuit ancestry.”<sup>38</sup> That is, the so-called Inuit-Métis are culturally indistinguishable from their white neighbours. One must therefore interpret the NCC’s report as an integral part of the process to imagine and create a new people. If one approaches the NCC’s report with that understanding, then the obvious contradictions in their argumentation are laid bare.

First, the NCC claims repeatedly that the Inuit occupation of what they call southern Labrador was permanent: “The Inuit occupations [sic] of southern Labrador were of a permanent nature.”<sup>39</sup> Still, the archaeological evidence that the NCC cites in no way suggests that the Inuit lived permanently in any one location prior to the 1770s, let alone in what they identify as “southern” Labrador. To be clear, archaeologists generally agree that Inuit populations lived down the Labrador coast all the way to the Lower Shore of the St-Lawrence River in present-day Quebec.<sup>40</sup> Most academics also agree that the Inuit retreated to north of the Straits of Belle Isle sometime by the early 1700s.<sup>41</sup> There’s also widespread agreement that pockets of Inuit lived along the southern Labrador coast between Hamilton Inlet and Battle Harbour until the 1850s.<sup>42</sup> However, Carol Brice-Bennett maintained that by 1905 only two “full-blooded” Inuit women, both married to European men, lived south of Hamilton Inlet,<sup>43</sup> which concords with the NCC’s own report.

Archaeologist William Fitzhugh has been involved in nearly five decades of archaeological fieldwork on the southern Labrador coast. In many ways, his research there has been pathbreaking. The NCC acknowledges as much in their extensive use of his research in “Unveiling NunatuKavut.” Fitzhugh, however, recently argued that, “it remains to be seen whether the formal term ‘Southern Inuit,’ which implies a degree of cultural autonomy and distinction from ‘Labrador Inuit,’ is appropriate for the brief types of occupation currently

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<sup>35</sup> Kennedy, “Our Heritage, Our Identity,” 30.

<sup>36</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 248.

<sup>37</sup> Kennedy, “Labrador Metis Ethnogenesis.”

<sup>38</sup> Kennedy, “Identity Politics,” 248.

<sup>39</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 5.

<sup>40</sup> Fitzhugh, William W. 2015. The Inuit Archaeology of the Quebec Lower North Shore. *Études/ Inuit/Studies*, 39(1), 37–62; Stopp, Marianne P. 2002. Reconsidering Inuit Presence in Southern Labrador. *Études/ Inuit/Studies*, 26(2), 71–106; Stopp, Marianne P. 2015. Faceted Inuit-European contact in southern Labrador. *Études/ Inuit/Studies*, 39(1), 63–89; Rankin, Lisa. 2015. Identity Markers: Interpreting Sod-house Occupation in Sandwich Bay, Labrador. *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 39(1), 91–116.

<sup>41</sup> See Fitzhugh, “The Inuit Archaeology of the Quebec Lower North Shore.”

<sup>42</sup> Kennedy, “Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador.”

<sup>43</sup> Brice-Bennett, Carol. 1997. “The Inuit Legacy in Southern Labrador.” A commentary submitted to Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 11; see also Kennedy, “Our Heritage, Our Identity,” 26.



known from archaeological evidence.”<sup>44</sup> Fitzhugh’s research demonstrates both that the Inuit lived year-round as far south and west as the Lower Shore of the St. Lawrence River *and* that Inuit occupation was often brief given the mobile nature of Inuit society. Given this context, Fitzhugh explains how the archaeological record simply doesn’t support the creation of the “Southern Inuit” as a distinct social and political entity.

Second, throughout the report, the NCC maintains that a strong division existed between Inuit in the so-called south and north. They even go so far as to argue *against* the idea of there being a single Labrador Inuit homeland,<sup>45</sup> since this would suggest that there is only one Inuit people in Labrador. Here are some examples of the NCC’s attempt to create a distinct “Southern Inuit” population:

- Early in the report, the NCC claims that, “The Inuit of south and central Labrador had a different language system than those of northern Labrador.”<sup>46</sup> The only citation is to research conducted for their report and thus, unavailable to the broader research community.
- Later in the same section, they also state that, “By 1765, the Inuit of south and central Labrador seemed unfamiliar with toponyms for the area north of Groswater Bay.”<sup>47</sup> There’s no citation to support this statement, which, is common for most of the key elements of the NCC’s claims about the “Southern Inuit.”
- They continue: “The Inuit themselves identified the existence of different culture groups, with little social interaction (and in fact hostility) between them.”<sup>48</sup> The only citation is to research conducted for their report and thus, unavailable to the broader research community.
- Later in the report, the NCC claims that “Inuit in south and central Labrador saw themselves as distinct from a collectivity of Inuit who inhabited northern Labrador.”<sup>49</sup> There’s no citation to support this statement.
- They claim that Inuit from Hamilton Inlet/Lake Melville/Sandwich Bay “did not have good relations with the Inuit in the north. The two populations were distinct and hostile.”<sup>50</sup> There’s no citation to support this statement.
- They go on: “The separation between the southern Labrador Inuit and the Inuit further north (in the vicinity of 57 N) was believed to have existed for centuries.”<sup>51</sup> There’s no citation to support this statement.
- Near the end of the report, they argue, “The southern Inuit were in 1763 a separate (but related) group from those [Inuit] of the north, with their own home territory.”<sup>52</sup> There’s no citation to support this statement.

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<sup>44</sup> Fitzhugh, “The Inuit Archaeology of the Quebec Lower North Shore,” 40.

<sup>45</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 114.

<sup>46</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 6.

<sup>47</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 6.

<sup>48</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 6.

<sup>49</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 35.

<sup>50</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 45.

<sup>51</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 45.

<sup>52</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 321.



These are just a few of the many examples from the report in which the NCC attempts to create a distinct “Southern Inuit” population, virtually none of which rely on peer-reviewed, academic research.

Notably, the NCC openly undermines its own creation of the “Southern Inuit” regularly throughout the report by highlighting Inuit mobility along the coast. Here are some examples:

- In their chapter on the “Treaty of 1765,” they continuously refer to division between two (or more) Inuit “peoples.” Yet, they report that the Inuit response to a missionary question (“What do they call themselves?”) was: “By this name [Caralit] they call themselves all along the Coast as far as 72 [degrees] north.”<sup>53</sup> The same representatives of what the NCC now call the “Southern Inuit” themselves informed the Moravians that they are one people who inhabit the entire Labrador coast from the Straits of Belle Isle (52 degrees north) all the way to northern Baffin Island (72 degrees north).
- In paraphrasing Lt. Roger Curtis (in 1773), we find out that Inuit from Nain normally travelled to Newfoundland in the summer and were upset that they were being forbidden to do so by British and Moravian authorities.<sup>54</sup> Again, Inuit regularly travel north to south.
- Later, the NCC cites Cartwright’s observations that Inuit in the “north” and “south” regularly bartered for goods between 1770–75.<sup>55</sup>
- In the same chapter, the NCC argues that, “There was consistent movement in both [north <-> south] directions, from south into the Moravian settlements, and from the Moravians [sic] missions to the south.”<sup>56</sup> They provide a few examples from 1780s–1810 in the same paragraph and then argue that there was “a persistent pattern of movement throughout Inuit territory.”<sup>57</sup>

By way of explanation, the NCC strongly suggests not only that travel from north to south was common, but that the same individuals could be either in the “north” or “south” at any given time in the 1700s and 1800s. In addition, the documentary evidence brought forward by the NCC clearly establishes that relations among Inuit throughout their territory were generally positive.

More to the point, the bulk of Chapter 4 (pages 118–87) is an analysis of the movement of Inuit individuals along the Labrador Coast (including Hamilton Inlet/Upper Lake Melville) recorded by the Moravians. The entire section provides a compelling argument *against* the NCC’s previous efforts in the report to create a distinct “Southern Inuit” people, either geographically or culturally. The large majority of the individuals named in the Moravian Records lived in today’s Nunatsiavut, especially in Upper Hamilton Inlet (53 degrees north). For the purpose of this part of their analysis, the NCC considers all locations south of Hopedale (55 degrees north) as “south.” The conclusion from their analysis is worth quoting at length:

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<sup>53</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 48.

<sup>54</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 78.

<sup>55</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 82.

<sup>56</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 93.

<sup>57</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 93.



The Moravian Records have been exhausted [sic] for Inuit movements north and south for the period of 1772 to 1840. Results from the research shows [sic] that there were 1,040 person trips moving north and 1,182 person trips moving to the south during the period.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, the NCC itself concludes that there was regular, north-south movement between all Inuit settlements on the Labrador coast in the period most salient to their study. What they expose in their analysis of the Moravian Records is that Inuit, whether born or raised in the “north” or “south,” lived highly mobile lives that saw them make regular, sometimes annual trips along the coast. The NCC itself argues that, “the concept that Inuit were ‘from’ somewhere up until recent times is an error. From these documents, it appears that Inuit were ‘from’ all of Labrador with their incredible mobility and long distance relations.”<sup>59</sup> The distinction between north and south—and the idea that there were multiple Inuit homelands in Labrador—so key to the NCC’s arguments, evaporates by the halfway point of their report. We are left with one Inuit people living throughout their territory, a point confirmed by archaeologist Marianne Stopp, who worked closely with the NCC on its land claim report: “Inuit were long-distance travellers and the archival record indicates that regular voyages from regions north of Hamilton Inlet were made to the Strait of Belle Isle [before the arrival of Europeans].”<sup>60</sup>

Third, the NCC’s boundary between north and south is constantly shifting in the report, which makes their creation of a “Southern Inuit” people that much more confusing and questionable. Table 2 tracks some of their claims.

**TABLE 2 – THE CHANGING BOUNDARY BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH**

<b>Northern boundary</b>	<b>Claim</b>	<b>Page number</b>
<b>Groswater Bay</b>	“By 1765, the Inuit of south and central Labrador seemed unfamiliar with toponyms for the area north of Groswater Bay.”	<b>6</b>
<b>Davis Inlet</b>	“Inhospitable coastline around Davis Inlet may have served as a permeable buffer zone between the two Inuit populations”	<b>6</b>
<b>Nain</b>	“Southern Inuit (between what is now Nain and Strait of Belle Isle) practiced a dual economy of hunting and trading”	<b>12</b>
<b>Hamilton Inlet (also, Esquimaux Bay)</b>	“Principal area of Inuit settlement of Haven’s 1765 information was [Hamilton Inlet].”	<b>21</b>
	“Esquimaux Bay was the location with the greatest Inuit demographic concentration in the south”	<b>39</b>
	Repeatedly in their discussion of “treaty of 1765”	<b>48</b>
	Discussion of Cartwright’s journal	<b>80</b>
<b>Hopedale</b>	Discussion of Cartwright’s journal	<b>80 &amp; 81</b>
	South of Hopedale is non-Moravian Inuit territory	<b>109</b>

<sup>58</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 187.

<sup>59</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 193.

<sup>60</sup> Stopp, “Faceted Inuit-European contact in southern Labrador,” 64.



According to the NCC, the northern boundary between “north” and “south” stretches anywhere from Nain (57 degrees north) to Hamilton Inlet (53 degrees north)—about 400 kilometres north-south in a straight line—encompassing virtually all of today’s Nunatsiavut and all five of its permanent settlements. The inconsistencies in the NCC’s definition of what counts geographically as “south” exposes the flaws at the basis of their creation of the “Southern Inuit.”

Overall, the NCC’s argument that there existed and continues to exist a distinct, “Southern Inuit” people isn’t supported by evidence. It’s worth considering historian Kurt Korneski’s research about the Hudson’s Bay Company’s (HBC) first two decades in Labrador (1830–1850), in which he illustrates how “HBC traders helped to fix, and to infuse with particularly harsh and derogatory meanings, a longstanding tendency to see northern and southern Inuit bands as racially distinct.”<sup>61</sup> Korneski’s deep engagement with the HBC archives unveils how the company favoured the mixed-race descendants of the earliest Inuit-European unions and by doing so, established a lasting racial hierarchy that saw Inuit and Innu treated as inferior. The NCC, which largely represents the descendants of those who gained economic and social privilege through the HBC, appears to continue the tradition of creating false (historical) boundaries among the Inuit to its ultimate advantage.

## **LABRADOR TREATY OF 1765 (“INUIT TREATY OF 1765”)**

One of the cornerstones of the NCC’s land claim submission is the existence of what they call the “Labrador Treaty of 1765.” They dedicate an entire chapter (Chapter 2) to the so-called treaty and refer to it throughout their report. The inclusion of the “Labrador Treaty” in “Unveiling NunatuKavut” is directly opposed to their position in their previous land claim submission in 1995 (“Completing the Circle”), in which the then-Labrador Metis Association argued that there had never been any treaties signed in Labrador: “It can be seen by the historical evidence presented in this document that no treaty respecting Aboriginal title exists in Labrador.”<sup>62</sup>

In following their main line of argumentation in 2010, they suggest that the “treaty” was an agreement between the British Crown (represented by Governor Hugh Palliser) and the “Southern Inuit.” It’s said to have been negotiated near present-day Chateau Bay on August 21, 1765. As I’ve discussed previously, there’s no evidence that a distinct “Southern Inuit” people ever existed, despite the NCC’s efforts to create such a group. Nevertheless, the NCC’s argument relies heavily on their creation of distinct Inuit peoples, since they now argue that only “the Inuit of northern Labrador never entered into Treaty with the British.”<sup>63</sup> Usefully, according to the NCC, today’s “Southern Inuit” are now the sole beneficiaries of the so-called treaty.

The NCC’s own discussion of the “treaty” negotiations, narrated through the eyes of Moravian missionaries, suggests repeatedly that the Inuit meeting with Palliser’s party had travelled south from where they lived in the Hamilton Inlet region. As such, any “treaty” would include all Labrador Inuit, not the “Southern Inuit” people that the NCC clearly favour. For instance, the

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<sup>61</sup> Korneski, Kurt. 2016. Planters, Eskimos, and Indians: Race and the Organization of Trade under the Hudson’s Bay Company in Labrador, 1830–50. *Journal of Social History*, 50(2), 316.

<sup>62</sup> Labrador Metis Association, “Completing the Circle,” 80.

<sup>63</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 56.



NCC acknowledges that Inuit at Chateau Bay “treaty” negotiations were from Rigolet<sup>64</sup> and later, from Hamilton Inlet.<sup>65</sup> Further, the Inuit are reported to have answered that their stuff is “in the north with our houses”<sup>66</sup> to Moravian queries at the 1765 meeting. Again, the NCC’s efforts to create a distinct “Southern Inuit” people cannot withstand the historical facts at hand: by the mid-1700s, Inuit travelled along the coast from “north” to “south” with relative ease. As such, the Inuit who met with Palliser in 1765, whether to negotiate a treaty or not, mostly came from within the present-day boundaries of Nunatsiavut. Nonetheless, by the next chapter (Chapter 3), the NCC is claiming that the “Treaty of Labrador” was with the “Inuit of Southern Labrador.”<sup>67</sup>

The NCC repeatedly uses the “treaty” as the basis for their legal claims: “The Labrador Inuit Treaty of 1765 [...] is now protected by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. The member communities of NunatuKavut are the current holders and beneficiaries of this Treaty Right.”<sup>68</sup> Simply put, the actual evidence that the NCC produces in their report doesn’t support their claims about beneficiaries: the Inuit who were at Chateau Bay in August 1765 indicated that they lived in today’s Nunatsiavut territory. The NCC’s claims about potential beneficiaries of what they call the “Labrador Treaty” are highly misleading.

Despite the NCC’s stated confidence, the entire chapter is devoid of any citations to academic work. In fact, I’ve been unable to locate an academic study that discusses a so-called “Labrador Treaty of 1765.” Certainly, several scholars discuss the changes in British policy on the coast of Labrador brought by Palliser following the Treaty of Paris in 1763. For instance, in her earlier work, Stopp argues that Palliser applied a gentler approach than the French by displacing the Inuit further north “through Moravian intervention.”<sup>69</sup> In her later work, Stopp again references this specific period, arguing that, “expanded (and aggressive) English and American fishing presence and permanent fishing communities along the Strait of Belle Isle impeded Inuit movement south of St. Lewis Inlet and Chateau Bay.”<sup>70</sup> The point here is that Stopp, who worked closely with the NCC’s leadership during the land claim research, has repeatedly discussed large-scale transformations in Inuit settlement following Governor Palliser’s ascension in 1765, without ever mentioning a treaty relationship. Anthropologist Evelyn Plaice specifically refers to how Palliser introduced a new set of policies called the “Regulations for the Coast of Labrador” in 1765,<sup>71</sup> which regulated a range of matters on the south Labrador coast. However, despite marking 1765 as a key turning point in Labrador politics, neither Stopp nor Plaice ever mention a “treaty” being negotiated.

Notably, my research also includes all of the studies published so far by the team of researchers assembled by the NCC to prepare their land claim submission. None of these researchers, working under the supervision of Dr. Lisa Rankin on a Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) research project with the NCC generously funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council,<sup>72</sup> ever discuss this “treaty.” How is it possible that of the dozen or

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<sup>64</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 39.

<sup>65</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 48.

<sup>66</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 41.

<sup>67</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 76.

<sup>68</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 27.

<sup>69</sup> Stopp, “Reconsidering Inuit Presence in Southern Labrador,” 77.

<sup>70</sup> Stopp, “Faceted Inuit-European contact in southern Labrador,” 69.

<sup>71</sup> Plaice, *The Native Game*, 14

<sup>72</sup> Kennedy, “Identity Politics,” 1.



so peer-reviewed, publicly accessible studies flowing directly from the NCC’s project in support of their 2010 report, none corroborate the existence of the “Labrador Treaty”?

The NCC’s predecessor, the Labrador Metis Nation, first discussed its discovery of what it then called the “Esquimeaux – British Treaty of Southern Labrador” in an issue of its newsletter, *Metis Messenger*, in Spring 2005. Since the CURA project was at that point still several years from completion, the NCC had ample opportunity to direct researchers to produce peer-reviewed, historical research to support its case. However, not only does Chapter 2 contain the fewest citations of the entire NCC report, but the only citations are to a few reports commissioned by the NCC. These reports are unavailable to the public or to the research community.<sup>73</sup>

Overall, it’s my assessment that without reliable peer-reviewed research, the NCC’s claims about the existence of a “Labrador Treaty of 1765” are inconclusive. However, *even if* a treaty had been negotiated with the Inuit in 1765, it would have been with the Inuit of Labrador, not with some segment now being called the “Southern Inuit” by the NCC.

### **“SOUTHERN INUIT” SUPERIORITY**

Before long, the north/south split created by the NCC becomes the basis for them to express the superiority of the “Southern Inuit.”

For starters, the NCC repeatedly uses the Moravian influence on the central and north coast of Labrador as a foil through which to advance its superiority as Inuit. The NCC does so by arguing that the so-called Southern Inuit are more authentically Inuit than the “Moravianized” Inuit of northern Labrador. Here is an example from their report:

The Moravian influence certainly enhanced Inuit language retention and promoted a written form of Inuktitut. However, it also created a dependent ‘company store’ lifeway for its anchored Inuit population, which then had to give up some of its traditional transhumance land use patterns. The Inuit of south/central Labrador retained their traditional transhumance land use patterns, combining trade practices with subsistence harvest activities as their forbears [sic] had done for at least a century.<sup>74</sup>

By the second half of its report, the NCC refers to its ancestors as the “non missionized Inuit of the South”<sup>75</sup> or the “non-Moravian Inuit of Labrador”<sup>76</sup> to contrast with the “Moravianized” Inuit. The implication is clear: Nunatsiavut Inuit are the inheritors of a diminished, less authentic form of Inuit culture scarred by Moravian intervention. The “Southern Inuit,” on the other hand, are the proud inheritors of a robust Inuit heritage unsullied by Christian missionary efforts. Relying heavily on the work of Roger McDonnell, who it commissioned to conduct research on its behalf in 1995 and 2002, the NCC builds a narrative of a “Southern Inuit” culture of self-

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<sup>73</sup> I received these reports in an Access-to-Information request to Crown-Indigenous Relations in July 2020, which I shared with the Nunatsiavut Government Secretariat. I undertook an analysis of these documents in a second report delivered in 2021.

<sup>74</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 79.

<sup>75</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 190.

<sup>76</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 250.



sufficiency and freedom juxtaposed to a Nunatsiavut Inuit culture of dependency and hierarchy.<sup>77</sup>

The NCC ultimately turns to forms of evidence that are highly misleading and unreliable to demonstrate the “Southern Inuit’s” superior Inuitness. For instance, in the following passage, they compare the number of apprentice fishermen and level 2 fishermen—two forms of certification created by the Government of Canada to recognize commercial fishing skills—in the “north” and the “south” to support their claims about “southern” cultural superiority:

In the same way that outsiders had devastated the whale populations in the early generations after contact, Canada and Newfoundland had devastated the cod fishery in the 1900’s, with no thought or care for protecting the priority Aboriginal fishery rights of the Labrador Inuit descendant communities. This was particularly an issue in south/central Labrador, which had, for example, 150 apprentice fishermen and 256 level 2 fishers, while Northern Labrador had only 13 apprentices and 13 at Level 2. This demonstrates again that these south/central Labrador communities retained their original land use patterns, adaptability, and inventiveness, never being anchored to, and dependant on, the northern missions.<sup>78</sup>

Besides the fact that receiving government certification to take part in a commercial fishery doesn’t necessarily provide the type of cultural evidence that the NCC seeks, they use everybody on the south/central coast with certification in their argument, even though a significant portion of those individuals would’ve been white fishermen with no Indigenous ancestry. What’s more, there are between five to ten times more people on the south-central coast of Labrador than in the north, which accounts for a significant portion of the discrepancy. Likewise, the commercial cod fishery was more important the more south one travelled along the Labrador coast, which also explains part of the discrepancy. Finally, and most importantly, the NCC fails to take into account that its members have been privileged vis-à-vis their Inuit and Innu neighbours at least since the time of the Hudson’s Bay Company in the region, and therefore, were more likely to be able to access the necessary socio-economic supports needed to become certified in the first place.

Specifically, the NCC’s argument about the cultural superiority of the “Southern Inuit” relies on them denying the fact that for the better part of two centuries, their membership benefitted from identifying themselves and being identified as Settlers to the detriment of their Inuit and Innu neighbours. For instance, Stopp confirms that mixed-descent settlers were quite successful in the nineteenth century: “Early mixed-descent families in Hamilton Inlet emerged as overwhelmingly successful competitors for jobs in the fur trade; as already noted, ethnicity became tied to economic success through employability.”<sup>79</sup> Mixed-descent family success was underwritten by a system of racial discrimination practiced by the HBC, which ensured that Inuit and Innu people were unemployable. Strictly speaking, what Stopp calls “ethnicity” wasn’t passively tied to

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<sup>77</sup> See McDonnell, Roger F. 1995. “Aspects of Labrador Metis Social Organization 1800–1940,” p. 34, 35 & 58; McDonnell, Roger F. 2002. “Further Considerations on the Social Organization of the Descendants of Non-missionized Inuit in Sub-arctic Labrador,” p. 59 & 81.

<sup>78</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 98.

<sup>79</sup> Stopp, Marianne, P. 2014. “I, Old Lydia Campbell”: A Labrador Woman of National Historic Significance. In *History and Renewal of Labrador’s Inuit-Métis*. (155–79). John C. Kennedy, (ed). St John’s, NL: ISER, 169.





economic success, but it became an active determinant of success due to HBC policy from the 1830s to the 1920s.

Again, Korneski is clearest about the ways in which the forebears of today’s “Southern Inuit” benefitted from the HBC’s creation of a racial hierarchy specific to the region:

[Mixed-race Settlers] could get access to significant amounts of credit, and their ability to do so underwrote their standing. Indeed, access to credit itself signaled that a person was in many ways the opposite of an ‘Indian.’ Rather than indolent, unclean, and unreliable, [mixed race Settlers] were honest, industrious, loyal, and disciplined. These inner qualities and characteristics justified the trust of company officers in extending credit, and the holding of debt became an essential sign of civility.”<sup>80</sup>

While their Inuit and Innu neighbours were unafforded the privileges of credit, mixed-race Settlers gained “a more stable material existence than [Innu] and [Inuit] and also [...] had greater access to medicine. Those privileges further distanced one group from another, creating divisions that widened and hardened over time.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, many of the forebears of today’s NCC membership were afforded significant economic and social privilege that most often relegated their Inuit and Innu neighbours to abject poverty and attendant high rates of morbidity. At minimum, denying their Inuit ancestry for several generations helped maintain this privilege over time.

The NCC is aware of the relative privilege of their membership vis-à-vis the Inuit, since they themselves have presented research to the Government of Canada that confirms as much. For instance, their Supplemental Research Submission for the Aboriginal Title Claim of the Inuit/Metis of South and Central Labrador (“Completing the Circle”) that it submitted to the Government of Canada in 1995, featured an analysis of data from the 1991 Census of Canada.<sup>82</sup> They compared a variety of socio-economic indicators for those who identified as “Métis” and “Inuit” in the census. What’s clear from their own analysis is that those identifying as “Métis” were generally far better off socially and economically than their Inuit peers. Table 3 provides some of that data from 1991.

**TABLE 3:** CENSUS DATA, 1991 (LABRADOR METIS ASSOCIATION 1995)

	<b>Port Hope-Simpson/Charlotte- town/Subdivision B/North West River (Metis)</b>	<b>Happy Valley- Goose Bay (Metis)</b>	<b>Makkovik/Hopedale/ Nain (Inuit)</b>
<b>Less than Grade 9 education</b>	33%	14%	40.7%
<b>In labour force</b>	74.5%	66.3%	44.8%
<b>Annual income &lt;\$9,999</b>	44.2%	47.6%	70.4%
<b>Annual income \$40,000 or more</b>	8.1%	12.9%	0.0%

<sup>80</sup> Korneski, “Planters, Eskimos, and Indians,” 323.

<sup>81</sup> Korneski, “Planters, Eskimos, and Indians,” 323.

<sup>82</sup> Labrador Metis Association, “Completing the Circle,”



The NCC’s prior research appears to demonstrate several socio-economic indicators that are the legacy of deep-seated, historical inequalities between today’s so-called Southern Inuit and the Inuit. From lower educational attainment through to lower labour force participation and annual income, by 1991 the “Southern Inuit/Metis” had established a clear pattern of material advantage over the Inuit in Labrador. According to data from the 2016 Census of Canada featured in Table 4, those same inequalities persist even though more than a decade has passed the signing of the Nunatsiavut land claim agreement.

**TABLE 4:** CENSUS DATA, 2016 (STATISTICS CANADA 2017)

	<b>Nunatsiavut beneficiaries</b>	<b>Happy Valley-Goose Bay (Metis)</b>	<b>North West River (Metis)</b>
<b>With high school diploma or equivalency</b>	51.3%	73.5%	75%
<b>In labour force</b>	58.2%	76.1%	81.8%
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	29.7%	11.2%	22.2%
<b>Median after-tax income in 2015</b>	\$24,608	\$41,684	\$41,088
<b>Average after-tax income in 2015</b>	\$31,089	\$45,370	\$42,624
<b>Total Income Under \$10,000</b>	21.8%	12.8%	N/A
<b>Total Income \$100,000 and over</b>	5.3%	15.4%	N/A

Without a more forthcoming discussion about how its membership appears to benefit from intergenerational forms of privilege, one is left wondering what type of relationship that Nunatsiavut can build with the NCC. In “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” the NCC gives little indication that it’s committed to building bridges with Nunatsiavut’s Inuit citizens.



## CONCLUSION

There's no doubt that some of the NCC's membership has Inuit ancestry, though without access to their membership records it's impossible to verify to what extent. Another aspect of their membership that remains opaque relates to individuals with no Indigenous ancestry who may have enrolled under the LMN's original Articles of Association. Did the NCC "grandfather" those members (and their children) into the organization?

The social, political, and economic role that the earliest ancestors of today's NCC members played in the advent of settler colonialism in Labrador is also noteworthy. It's apparent that the mixed-descent population, especially in the Hamilton Inlet region, existed atop a racial hierarchy that favoured them over their Inuit and Innu neighbours. If we accept that Indigenous identity is about much more than "blood" or "genes," as Indigenous scholars have been arguing now for several decades,<sup>83</sup> then the fact that mixed-descent settlers appear to have historically benefitted from settler colonialism into the present, raises some difficult questions.

Whatever position that the Nunatsiavut Government takes on the NCC's land claims moving forward, one thing appears clear: despite the weakness of their claims in "Unveiling NunatuKavut," the NCC is riding a wave of support from a range of institutions, including in the political and academic realms. Without a clear public position on its relationship to the NCC by the Nunatsiavut Government and/or by other Inuit organizations, it seems likely that the NCC will succeed in most of their political claims.

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<sup>83</sup> See TallBear, Kim. 2013. *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Palmater, Pamela. 2011. *Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Identity*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

