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# EXAMINING THE NUNATUKAVUT COMMUNITY COUNCIL'S LAND CLAIM

Prepared by Darryl Leroux  
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 mostly on academic material that does so.

There is consensus in the academic material by anthropologists, sociologists, 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 only began identifying themselves as Indigenous in the mid-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 1780s and 1850s.

Kennedy (1988) 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 in 1973, 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 Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development let it be known that it would recognize only 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 (1988) 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 non-relations 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] ethno-politicians, whom they hardly knew, to an alliance with Inuit neighbours."<sup>7</sup> While northern Settlers openly discussed forming their own organization,<sup>8</sup> by 1976 they largely opted to join the LIA.

It's important to note that under the "designated communities" system first developed jointly by the governments of Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador in 1949 (and amended in 1954, 1965, 1972 and 1981), all Settlers living in Nain, Makkovik, Postville, Hopedale, Davis Inlet, Sheshatshiu and later Rigolet were considered to be Indigenous for administrative purposes.<sup>9</sup> The "designated communities" system contrasted with what was used in the rest of Canada, where status as an Indigenous person was determined primarily by an individual's parentage.

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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.

<sup>9</sup> Plaine, Evelyn. (1990). *The Native Game*. St John's, NL: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 125; Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 100.



While northern Labrador Settlers (again, the descendants of early mixed European-Inuit unions) had long been recognized as Indigenous, the same isn't true of Settlers in central and southern Labrador with similar, and sometimes, the same ancestry. Kennedy (1988) has explained that at the time of the creation of the NANL and LIA, Settlers further south "had neither involvement with nor interest in ethno-politics."<sup>10</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>11</sup> The NCC fully acknowledges in its 2010 report to the Government of Canada that its membership long denied having Indigenous ancestry, though it downplays how they may have opposed Indigenous peoples in the past.

Peter Armitage and Kennedy (1989) explain that south-central Settlers first formally referred to themselves as "Métis" in the mid-1980s (814), as part of the movement to support expansion of the Goose Bay military base.<sup>12</sup> In fact, they identify some 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 (1988) goes so far as to claim that the LMA was specifically created as part of a political strategy to support military expansion and oppose Indigenous opposition 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 Innu and Inuit in the region. 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>15</sup> All told, Kennedy was raising red flags about the LMA in the 1980s: "The extreme subjectivity of LMA membership criteria raises troubling questions about the Association's motives and legitimacy."<sup>16</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>10</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 102.

<sup>11</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 102.

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

<sup>16</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 on the southeastern coast would never join the new LMA, since they didn't consider themselves Indigenous, and certainly not Inuit.<sup>17</sup> Nearly thirty years later, 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>18</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>19</sup>

Notably, Kennedy also adamantly stated in his early work that, "it is unlikely that the Labrador Metis Association will ever submit a land claim."<sup>20</sup> But, as we now know, within only a few short years the LMA had indeed filed a land claim to Upper Lake Melville and Hamilton Inlet and the entire Labrador coast due south. By this time, Kennedy was now claiming that "feelings of disenfranchisement"<sup>21</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 members of the LIA. 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>22</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 1990s.

While Kennedy has now become one of the most supportive academics 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>23</sup> Further, Kennedy points out that the so-called Labrador Metis "shared an identical lifestyle with their Settler neighbours who had no Inuit ancestors [...]. Thus, for Metis, the task of creating a tradition distinguishing themselves from their Settler neighbours is considerable."<sup>24</sup> Inventing such a tradition is the work that the NCC has been attempting to accomplish, including in its 2010 report "Unveiling NunatuKavut."

<sup>17</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 106. <sup>18</sup> Kennedy, "Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador," 226.

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy, "Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador," 231, emphasis in original.

<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 106.

<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, "Our Heritage, Our Identity," 29.

<sup>22</sup> Kennedy, "Labrador Metis Ethnogenesis," 19.

<sup>23</sup> Kennedy, "Labrador Metis Ethnogenesis," 13.

<sup>24</sup> Kennedy, "Labrador Metis Ethnogenesis," 13.



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><u>YEAR</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Members</u></b>
<b>1987</b>	344 (potentially 3,000) <sup>25</sup>
<b>1994</b>	2,701 adults, 5,000 total <sup>26</sup>
<b>1995</b>	3,238 adults, 4,163 total <sup>27</sup>
<b>1990s</b>	Over 6,000 (potentially 10,500) <sup>28</sup>
<b>2001</b>	Up to 10,000 <sup>29</sup>
<b>2004</b>	6,000 <sup>30</sup>
<b>2015</b>	Approximately 6,000 <sup>31</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 in Labrador could become members, which represents 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 children continue to be members today. Overall, the NCC's registry requires an independent, third-party review before political claims about its membership can be seriously considered in the public realm.

<sup>25</sup> Kennedy, "The Changing Significance of Labrador Settler Ethnicity," 104.

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy, "Our Heritage, Our Identity," 29.

<sup>27</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>28</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>29</sup> Hanharan, Maura. (2001). A Solid Past: Inuit Cultural Continuity in Labrador Communities. Report prepared for the Labrador Metis Nation, 112.

<sup>30</sup> Labrador Metis Association. 1995. *Metis Messenger*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Kennedy, "Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador," 233.



## THE CREATION OF THE “SOUTHERN INUIT”

Whatever one thinks about the existence of a “Southern Inuit” people, there’s agreement that prior to the advent of the LMA, “Labrador Settlers who now call themselves Metis were formerly ashamed of their aboriginal heritage.”<sup>32</sup> The NCC acknowledges that the large majority of its membership denied its Inuit ancestry until very recently. These facts aren’t disputed. 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>33</sup> In fact, Kennedy (2014) affirms that all that distinguishes the “Inuit-Métis” from their white neighbours “is the [recent] realization of their part-Inuit ancestry.”<sup>34</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>35</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, the overwhelming academic consensus is 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>36</sup> Most academics also agree that the Inuit retreated to north of the Strait of Belle Isle sometime by the early 1700s.<sup>37</sup> There’s also widespread consensus that pockets of Inuit along the southern Labrador coast between Hamilton Inlet and Battle Harbour until the 1850s.<sup>38</sup> However, Carol Brice-Bennett maintained that in 1905 only two “full-blooded” Inuit women, both married to European men, lived south of Hamilton Inlet,<sup>39</sup> which concords with the NCC’s own report. None of these points are controversial in the academic literature. However, the fact that Inuit lived all along the coast for a couple centuries doesn’t mean that they lived at any one location permanently. In fact, the academic material suggests the direct opposite to be true.

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<sup>32</sup> Kennedy, “Our Heritage, Our Identity,” 30.

<sup>33</sup> Kennedy, “Metis Ethnogenesis”

<sup>34</sup> Kennedy, “Identity Politics,” 248.

<sup>35</sup> NunatuKavut Community Council, Inc. 2010. Unveiling NunatuKavut: Describing the Lands and People of South/Central Labrador. Land Claim Submission, 5.

<sup>36</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>37</sup> See Fitzhugh, “The Inuit Archaeology of the Quebec Lower North Shore.”

<sup>38</sup> Kennedy, “Being and Becoming Inuit in Labrador.”

<sup>39</sup> Brice-Bennett, Carol. (1997). “The Inuit Legacy in Southern Labrador.” A commentary submitted to Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 11.





For instance, 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, has 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 known from archaeological evidence.”<sup>40</sup> Fitzhugh’s research certainly demonstrates that the Inuit lived year-round as far south and west as the Lower Shore of the St. Lawrence River. It also demonstrates that Inuit occupation was often brief given the mobile nature of Inuit society.

Archaeologist Marianne Stopp, who has been leading fieldwork on the southern Labrador coast for a couple decades, argues against the very category of “permanence” in reference to historical Inuit occupation in the region: “‘Permanence’ applies a colonialist criterion of belonging to a place. In reference to Inuit occupation, it obscures the reality of forager adaptation, of the distances covered to obtain resources, and of the seasonal flux of the forager group.”<sup>41</sup> All told, the same researchers who the NCC rely on to make their case for the permanent presence of an Inuit population along the south coast generally don’t support their claims, which are the basis for their creation of a distinct “Southern Inuit” people.<sup>42</sup>

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 Labrador Inuit homeland,<sup>43</sup> since this would suggest that there is only one Inuit people in Labrador. Here are some examples of the NCC’s creation of 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>44</sup> The only citation is to research conducted for their report and thus, unavailable to the broader research community. I have found no evidence to support this statement.
- 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>45</sup> There’s no citation to support this statement, which, as we will see, 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>46</sup> The citation for this statement is to research conducted for their report, unavailable to the broader research community.

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

<sup>41</sup> Stopp, “Reconsidering Inuit Presence in Southern Labrador,” 96.

<sup>42</sup> See also Rankin, Lisa. (2014). Inuit Settlement on the Southern Frontier. In *History and Renewal of Labrador’s Inuit-Métis*. (38–61), John C. Kennedy, (ed). St John’s, NL: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 57.

<sup>43</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 114.

<sup>44</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 6.

<sup>45</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 6.

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



- 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>47</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>48</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>49</sup> There’s no citation to support this statement.

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.

Conversely, the NCC openly undermines its own creation of a “Southern Inuit” population 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 they know nothing of the name Esquimaux.”<sup>50</sup> The same representatives of what the NCC now call the “Southern Inuit” themselves inform the Moravians that they are one people who inhabit the entire Labrador coast from the Strait 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>51</sup> Later, the NCC cites Cartwright’s observations that Inuit in the “north” and “south” regularly bartered for goods between 1770–75.<sup>52</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” (93). 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>53</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.

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<sup>47</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 35.

<sup>48</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 45.

<sup>49</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 45.

<sup>50</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 48.

<sup>51</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 78.

<sup>52</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 82.

<sup>53</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 93.



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” population. 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:

*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>54</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 people, 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 distinction between north and south, 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.

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 – NCC NORTH-SOUTH CLAIMS**

<u>Northern boundary</u>	<u>Claim</u>	<u>Page #</u>
<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>

<sup>54</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 187.



	“Esquimaux Bay was the location with the greatest Inuit demographic concentration in the south”	39
	Repeatedly in their discussion of “treaty of 1765”	48
	Discussion of Cartwright’s journal	80
<b>Hopedale</b>	Discussion of Cartwright’s journal	80 & 81
	South of Hopedale is non-Moravian Inuit territory	109

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 leaps of logic 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” population/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>55</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, has in many ways continued the tradition of creating false (historical) boundaries between Inuit people 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>56</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, as evidenced when they argue that, “The Inuit of northern Labrador never entered into Treaty with the British.”<sup>57</sup> Usefully, according to the NCC, today’s “Southern Inuit” are now the only beneficiaries of the so-called treaty.

<sup>55</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>56</sup> Labrador Metis Association, “Completing the Circle,” 80

<sup>57</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 187.



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 the Inuit people writ large, not the "Southern Inuit" people that the NCC clearly favour. For instance, they acknowledge that Inuit at Chateau Bay "treaty" negotiations were from Rigolet<sup>58</sup> and later, from Hamilton Inlet.<sup>59</sup> Further, the Inuit are reported to have answered that their stuff is "in the north with our houses"<sup>60</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 people 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 "Inuit of Southern Labrador."<sup>61</sup>

Importantly, the NCC repeatedly uses the "treaty" as the basis for their legal claims: "The Labrador Inuit Treaty of 1765 was formally reported by the Lords of Trade to the Privy Council of the Britain [sic] in May 1769. The Treaty 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>62</sup> 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.

They later go on to state that Palliser reported back to Britain and "announced the achievement of the Treaty publicly. Governor Palliser proudly reported his Treaty with the Inuit to the Lords of Trade by his letter in March 19, 1766."<sup>63</sup> 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 a single academic study that discusses any so-called "Labrador Treaty of 1765." Certainly, a number of 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>64</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>65</sup> The point here is that Stopp, who has worked with the NCC's leadership for at least two decades, has repeatedly discussed large-scale transformations in Inuit settlement following Governor Palliser's ascension in 1765, without ever mentioning a treaty relationship. Anthropologist Evelyn Plaise specifically refers to how Palliser introduced a new set of policies called the "Regulations for the Coast of Labrador" in 1765,<sup>66</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 Plaise ever mention anything resembling a "treaty" being negotiated.

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<sup>58</sup> NCC, "Unveiling NunatuKavut," 39.

<sup>59</sup> NCC, "Unveiling NunatuKavut," 48.

<sup>60</sup> NCC, "Unveiling NunatuKavut," 41.

<sup>61</sup> NCC, "Unveiling NunatuKavut," 76.

<sup>62</sup> NCC, "Unveiling NunatuKavut," 27.

<sup>63</sup> NCC, "Unveiling NunatuKavut," 52.

<sup>64</sup> Stopp, "Reconsidering Inuit Presence in Southern Labrador," 77.

<sup>65</sup> Stopp, "Faceted Inuit-European contact in southern Labrador," 69.

<sup>66</sup> Plaise, *The Native Game*, 14.



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>67</sup> ever discuss this “treaty.” How is it possible that of the dozen or so peer-reviewed, publicly accessible studies flowing from the NCC’s research project in support of their 2010 report, not even one mentions the existence of the “Labrador Treaty”?

The NCC’s predecessor, the Labrador Metis Nation, first discussed its discovery of what it then called the “Esquimaux – 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 solid peer-reviewed, historical research to support its case. However, such academic research simply doesn’t exist. 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 the research community.<sup>68</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. In addition, *even if* a “treaty” had been negotiated with the Inuit in 1765, it would have been with the Inuit people writ large, 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.” I have documented similar efforts to undermine existing First Nations sovereignty and/or self-determination by emerging “Métis” organizations in Québec.<sup>69</sup>

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 people. The NCC does so by arguing that the so-called Southern Inuit are more authentically Inuit than the “Moravianized” Inuit of northern Labrador. Here are some examples 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>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Kennedy, “Identity Politics,” 1.

<sup>68</sup> I received these reports in an Access-to-Information request to Crown-Indigenous Relations in July 2020, which I promptly shared with the Nunatsiavut Government Secretariat. I undertook an analysis of these documents in a second report delivered in 2021.

<sup>69</sup> Leroux, Darryl. 2019. *Distorted Descent: White Claims to Indigenous Identity*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

<sup>70</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 79.





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 1900s, 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>71</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 much 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>72</sup> Unfortunately, Stopp doesn’t seem to consider how 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 economic success, but it became an active determinant of success due to HBC policy from the 1830s to the 1920s.

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<sup>71</sup> NCC, “Unveiling NunatuKavut,” 98.

<sup>72</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: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 169.



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>73</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>74</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 can be understood as part and parcel of a strategy to 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. 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.

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<sup>73</sup> Korneski, "Planters, Eskimos, and Indians," 323.

<sup>74</sup> Korneski, "Planters, Eskimos, and Indians," 323.





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

	<b>Port Hope-Simpson/ Charlottetown/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%

The NCC's prior research clearly demonstrates several socio-economic indicators that are without a doubt the legacy of deep-seated, historical inequities 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, those same inequalities persist despite more than a decade since the signing of the Nunatsiavut land claims 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 honest and meaningful discussion about its membership's role in the maintenance of social and economic inequality in Labrador, one is left wondering what type of relationship the Inuit and Innu in Labrador can build with the NCC. In "Unveiling NunatuKavut," the NCC gives no 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>75</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.

