

***Akutaq*¹: The Impact of Colonialism on Inuit Religiosity and Literature**

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The Spiritual Shift: Magic Songs Versus Hymns and Journals

“Above each hut waved a little white flag—signs that the inmates had relinquished their old heathen faith and become Christian” (Rasmussen 118). The shaman Aua had explained to Knud Rasmussen that traditions based on experience and generational knowledge are what the Inuit adhere to. The harsh Arctic life is reflected in Aua’s description of Inuit beliefs. The shaman explains that fear is the primary guiding force of life:

“We fear the elements with which we have to fight in their fury to wrest out food from land and sea.

We fear cold and famine in our snow huts.

We fear the sickness that is daily to be seen amongst us.

We fear the souls of the dead of human and animals alike.” (Rasmussen 130)

This summary of Inuit faith is not foreign to Christianity where god-fearing is an often-used term. All of the things feared by Aua—such as illness and a variety of hardships—are feared by Christians as well. While Christians believe that everything is governed by the will of God, the Inuit are less certain why things happen the way they do (Rasmussen 129-130). The existence of the spirit world—something divine that is beyond the material world— that intertwines all is not unknown to Inuit faith. To be a good person is what the Christian commandments teach people, similarly Inuit teachings rest upon proper behaviour and avoidance of evil doings (Piercey-Lewis 252-253).

Riding the wave of this mutual comparability, a variety of Christian faiths attempted to spiritually colonize the Canadian Arctic: Moravian, Pentecostal, Holy Alliance, Anglican, Roman Catholic all sent their brothers to learn about and evangelize the Inuit (Whidden 1). Sometimes many different Christian religions were present in one community. According to Oosten and Remie, in the

1 Akutaq is a Yup’ik word in the Aleut-Eskimo languages meaning mixture, here as of languages and cultures.

case of the Pelly Bay (present-day Kugaartuk) settlement, which was reached by Catholic missions, the Oblates² of the church were more invested in warding off Anglican influences than making sure if Inuit converts of the faith really believed and practiced their new religion (109). Naturally, the Natives of the vast tundra implemented Catholicism to their arctic realities as it best fit them, creating a sort of religious mixture or *akutaq* in their spiritual tradition adapting elements from Christianity and in a way that best fit the already existing Inuit system of belief. However, evidence points to the fact that missionaries in Kugaartuk believed themselves to be superior to the Inuit by way of spiritual intelligence transmitted through Christianity (Oosten, Remie 3) and were largely oblivious to the actual religiosity of the Inuit they thought to have converted. It is possible that the protection of the Inuit from their own paganism or the influences of non-Catholic missionaries barred the Oblates from inquiries into the spiritual lives of those to be converted to see if there was compatibility between the two religious traditions. This is of no surprise and is a common method of a culture thinking of themselves as better in some way than the inhabitants of the land it arrives to colonize. However benign the motivations of these missionaries were, it can easily be seen, how a certain sensitivity was missing from their approach.

Unlike in other historical examples of colonial efforts, in the case of the Arctic, not only did Christian missionaries learn Inuktitut to deliver the message of the Bible to the Inuit, but they gave them writing through introducing Cree syllabics. The purely oral culture of the Inuit thus transitioned into a written period, altering the shape of how Inuit traditional knowledge, *qaujimajatuqangit* is delivered. The first things written down—even before Inuit traditions—were religious hymns translated from German into Inuktitut by the Moravian Brethren. Music, dance and poetry are intertwined in Inuit tradition; thus, for the purposes of this study, I will treat hymns and song lyrics as poetry—similarly to Rasmussen and Boas, who identified Inuit songs as poems (Martin 165).

Although most of the first hymns sung by Inuit believers were translations, less frequently some were written by Inuit authors as well. Hymn 478 was composed by Anne Paedlo and is the only Inuit composition in the Anglican hymnal:

My father in heaven
Is my only source of confidence
I am extremely happy
I have someone who feels for me

2 In Christian monasticism, especially in Catholicism, an oblate is a person who is specifically dedicated to God's service.

My father told me
How he was making a place for me
I am extremely happy
To be saved (McGrath 62)

Both Inuit thinking and writing are regarded as clear and simple but not without depth, which is reflected in Paedlo's hymn. Hymns—whether Moravian, Anglican or Catholic—substituted for the old songs of the people and the magic songs of *angakoqs*, shamans. Paedlo's hymn satisfies the criteria for *akutaq* since the Christian hymn was written by an Inuit poet. Having grown up in Inuit tradition, Paedlo incorporated in her poetry elements of the outside influence present in the area at the time. I shall compare Paedlo's hymn to a magic song collected by Arctic explorer and anthropologist, Rasmussen, during his anthropological expedition of the Canadian extreme North from 1921 to 24:

This is blood from the little sparrow's mother.
Wipe it away!
This is blood
That flowed from a piece of wood.
Wipe it away! (Petronne 7)

Both poems are concrete, instead of alluding, they say what they mean, whether that be happiness over finding God or a wish to stop bleeding. Anne Paedlo's hymn is but four short lines with a partial repetition, and Aua, the Igloodik shaman's "Words to Stop Bleeding" is also four curtly put sentences creating a magic song. Of course, there is no one specific God this incantation is pleading to, rather, as is in animism, the very source of the problem is addressed: in this case, bleeding. Another song performed by Aua as a birth ritual is also worth mentioning as it is comparable to the overall message of words a priest might say during a Christian baptism ceremony:

I arise from rest with movements swift
As the beat of a raven's wings
I arise
To meet the day
Wa—wa.
My face is turned from the dark of night
To gaze at the dawn of day
Now whitening in the sky. (Rasmussen 47)

When asked if he believed in God, Aua said that the Inuit did not believe, they feared. This wording seems to be reminiscent of the term “god-fearing” as it is used in the Bible. One must not forget that at the time of his interview, he might have been under the influence of Christian missionaries and he, along with many others, is known to have later converted to Christianity (Kleivan, Sonne 32). Inuit poems in the oral period were rather spontaneous, so it is possible that as the influence of the missionaries was growing, shaman poems became closer in style to Christian hymns.

At first glance, the Inuit identity as it emerges in religious rituals, does not seem to have been influenced to a great degree by the insertion of a foreign religion into the local culture, as it appears in the similarity between the shaman’s song and that of the Christian Inuit hymn. However, Inuit songs were accompanied by drum dance, and it cannot be forgotten that any kind of “heathen” music and singing was forbidden by the Moravians for nearly two hundred years (Artiss 33). Hence ages-long Inuit oral traditions were seriously interfered with by the well-intended modernization of the arctic dwellers of Canada, with it permanently sending the original Inuit song tradition into oblivion. Young Inuit are largely ignorant of their ancestral song-making³ traditions, although the very same can be said about youth in any Southern Canadian or Western European setting. If this hypothesis is valid, it is worth pondering whether this means a loss of traditions or the enrichment of them with outside influences. As is well-observed, there is no one culture that is entirely uninfluenced by others, unless enforced by law, as seen in rare cases.

The Inuit are a highly musical people, and we know from reading only the lyrics to any song—Inuit or otherwise—without the accompanying music that the words have rather different affect. The repetitiveness and simplicity of the poems are apparent without the music playing, but this makes them not different, but similar to poems from the time before Christianity reached the North. If we consider both magic songs and hymns as musical poems, lyrics to music, then old magic songs are the ancestors of Christian hymns: they both are simple songs about things we do not understand claiming magical power and sung by or led by an *angakoq* (as Western priests too were referred to by the Inuit).

The value of the simple inspirational hymns is exactly in their open and direct expression. According to McGrath, Moravian translations of hymns into Inuktitut are not really inspiring, such as the one entitled “Bringing in the Sheaves:”

3 Based on discussions with students in English classes in the hamlet of Igloodik, Nunavut in 2016.

We will come bringing things
And we'll be happy
With our Lord Jesus
We will come
We will come
We'll be happy
With our Lord Jesus (McGrath 61)

However, I must disagree, especially if one considers the simplicity of magic songs from before and during the time of Christian missionaries; those songs are as straightforward as the English translation of the Inuktitut version of “Sheaves.” In Southern and Western culture “Sheaves” might do with a bit more allusion, but the translation back from Inuktitut to English seems to transmit the same clear wording as most Inuit song-poems or magic songs sung by *angakoqs*. If they did not impress the Inuit, they would not have worked as efficiently as they did, as is evidenced by the conversion of Aua, the guide and shaman with whom Rasmussen carried on a friendship during the *Fifth Thule Expedition*, a project led by the Inuktitut-speaking ethnographer, Knud Rasmussen in order to complete the first comprehensive recording of traditional Inuit societies in Canada.

The many magic songs used by particularly the shamans are good examples for obvious wording, such as the one aimed at healing one’s knees after falling, collected among the Copper Inuit by anthropologist, Diamond Jeness:

Falling tears
Falling tears
The old knee down there
The old knee down there
It splashes on it; it splashes on it. (Leechman 68)

While, according to McGrath, religious fervour did not inspire a substantial amount of poetry in the far North—although I would argue that religiosity has a certain place within Inuit poetry—Christian sentiments were a great source of motivation for Inuit writers of prose, especially those in the genre of letters and journals (62). Kingminguse, who was the very first Moravian convert, wrote about Jesus with great faith in his journals, confessing that all his confidence was in Him, (only to forget about Christianity as soon as the missionaries moved on). Aua, another Inuit who had witnessed the conversion, followed up as such: “I believe very much, but at present I want a knife” (Petronne 61). As it is seen in such cases, it was not easy for the missionaries to spiritually colonialize the Inuit, which might be beneficial if outside cultural influences are regarded as a negative impact.

Still, the Inuit did incorporate Christianity in their belief system, their poetry and prose, writing poems for the first time, which I regard as the enrichment of their expression in language and writing, rather than a loss.

Christian imagery first appeared in the journals of the Inuit converts from Nain, Labrador in the early twentieth century. Abraham, one such convert who was even taken to Europe, frequently used Christian imagery in his writing: “The believers here in Germany are our brethren. They even called us brothers and sisters. They even cried in front of us so that we would not get lost through Satan” (Petrone 109). Since the old faith of the Inuit recognized no God or Satan, this is a clear indication of the influence of the missionaries. The very first book published by an Inuit woman was the diary of Lydia Campbell. The work of the Moravian Brethren lies hidden in her writing: “I have seen many ups and downs, but the good Lord has safely brought me through” (Petrone 113), as she wrote upon losing nearly her whole family. It is obvious that belief in the Christian God was a great deal of comfort for her in the hardships suffered in the High Arctic. Both journals and autobiographies were new forms of transmitting intellectual culture for the Inuit using English, a new language, hence the amalgamation of the two resulted in yet another form of *akutaq*. What was gained here is the ability to remember; writing became an important source of Inuit tradition for posterity. Journals and autobiographies seem as the first steps toward a wider range of prose styles.

Moravians believed that shamanistic music should not be played as they were not compatible with their evangelization. This certainly meant the loss of many magic songs that *angakoqs* sang for a variety of purposes. Since the Inuit are highly musical, hymnals became the substitute. Some hymns, just like magic songs, were performed only on certain days or at special occasions overseen by church elders (Artiss 19). When Nunatsiavut (the Inuit-governed part of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador) was asked to represent the semi-autonomous region for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver by sending throat singers⁴ or drum dancers, some elders thought that the Moravian Church Choir should have been sent instead (Artiss 1). This is a clear shift in Inuit poetry and music as well as traditions from shamanistic to Christian. While the adoption of Christian gospels can be regarded as the enrichment of Inuit culture, the neglect of old songs represents a definite loss of traditions.

Recently deceased Inuit folk singer, Charlie Panigoniak was from a community of less than five hundred people (Chesterfield Inlet or Igluligarrjuk) with missions

4 Inuit throat singing is a form of musical performance consisting of two women who sing duets in a close face-to-face formation with no instrumental accompaniment using a variety of guttural sounds in a certain rhythm.

present from the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Holy Alliance Churches. These data show how intensively a variety of churches pursued the religious capacity of the Inuit to claim for their own, and with how much success. Panigoniak is mentioned in this context because he had famously put a song based on John 3:16, starting with “God so Loved the World” in his repertoire and referenced God in many of his songs, whose lyrics are treated for our purpose as poetry the same way as shamanistic songs are. Panigoniak’s musical poetry is a unique fusion of religious and traditional topics. In an interview given about Inuit music, William Tagoona, a musical friend emphasized the importance of Panigoniak’s lyrics as they helped the Inuit remember their culture as well as provided solace in times of hardship with treatments of Christian hymns (Whidden 1). Tagoona’s comment suggests that Christianity does not necessarily generate a negative literary impact on Inuit writing and music.

The frequently sung Hymn 219, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” is an example of well-liked translated hymns. Translated back from Inuktitut to English, the hymn reads as follows: “What a Friend we have in Jesus/All our sins and griefs to bear/What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!” (Piercey-Lewis 280). Jesus appears as the invisible friend helping in times of need of which there is many in the Arctic. However, original Inuit Christian compositions provide an even closer understanding of what the Inuit worshipper feels and needs. “Never Failing” by Ellen Pameolik (Piercey-Lewis 112) is one such hymn that also meets the definition of *akutaq*:

Deep inside her heart she felt alone
And the soul in her life faded like a light
And the days seemed so long
Even though she hasn’t realized
That the dark side has told her not to go
But all it takes to bring a heart of life to love
Is a dream of hope to meet Jesus Christ
And here I am never failing

One of the hymns which has lyrics that shows a striking difference between the English original and the Inuktitut versions is “The Old Rugged Cross,” a Methodist hymn written by George Bennard in 1915:

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

Ch. So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it someday for a crown.

However, the Inuit translation by Arviat native, Sandy Okatsiak slightly differs, and when translated back to English its elusiveness is apparent and it reads as an entirely new poem:

A cross that is from the tree
A wood from the tree that I saw
Jesus was hanging there
Because he loves people in the world
I stopped near the cross
I give all my sins
He loves me so much
I want to follow Jesus (Piercey-Lewis 134)

This discrepancy is partially due to the Inuit avoidance of explicitly naming things that might bring bad luck, such as *nanuk*, the polar bear is often referred to as the “big, white one.” Unlike straight-forward *ayaya* songs (Inuit mood songs), spiritual songs tend to be allusive. The highly symbolic nature of expression that is ever-present in poetry written in the English language is very different if translated to Inuktitut that belongs to an entirely different language family and is spoken by people with vastly different realities than those of most Southern Canada. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or linguistic relativity, as linguists based on this hypothesis argue (Campbell), language is the shape in which our thoughts appear; its structure as well as our cultural background and belief system influence the way we speak and write, which I suspect is the reason for the difference between the original English hymn and its translation back from Inuktitut to English. All things considered, the result is an *akutaq* of the original Moravian hymn and the Inuit understanding of it. “Looking back, our ancestors, although they had never heard of God, they were taught to always do what was good” said the elder, Suluk, in a 1983 December issue of *Inuktitut* magazine (27). This observation is important if we consider that one of the possible reasons for the relative success of the evangelization of the North was the similarity between the concept of good and God in Inuit shamanistic traditions and Christianity. Both traditions feared an omniscient being (or spirit in the Inuit tradition) to whom if one pleads to admitting wrongdoing, will be healed, and with the help of priests (*angakoqs*) and through hymns (magic songs) believers might connect to something larger than

themselves (Piercey-Lewis 188). Music and lyrics, both in the old tradition and the new, provide the medium for communicating with the holy spirit of the land and help to come to terms with wrongdoings and relieve the singer of guilt, which can be considered as a form of confession. Another resemblance between the old Inuit religion and certain forms of Christianity is the ability of priests or *angakoqs* to cast out evil (Inuktitut 43).

The great unseen power of the Arctic with whom the *angakoqs* communicate through songs is very similar to the role of priest in relation to God. As Jesus left his body and flew to heaven, shamans were thought to have left their body during magic songs entering a trance which allowed them to communicate with the power they all feared. I believe that this similarity might be the cause of the popularity⁵ of hymns like the Anglican “Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God”, in which such spiritual states are addressed:

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from Thy presence;
Take not Thy holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation;
And renew a right spirit within me. (hymnal.net)

Martha Nutarasungni of Arviat explains as such: “Singing comes from the heart; it comes from our soul; we use our voices to speak to God; when we all make beautiful music together, the Holy Spirit comes around us and we can feel it” (Piercey-Lewis 208). This notion is in synthesis with the communal spirit of Inuit living in pre-contact, early contact and transitional times and to a certain extent, even today. Musical performance of songs, just like in the case of those sung by *angaqok* ancestors, reinforces tradition and continuity and brings the local Inuit together strengthening the bond of family, community and *Inummariit*, the “real Inuit” in an age of the onslaught of outside influences.

5 Pentecostal, more spiritual renderings of hymns are preferred by many Inuit as they are claimed to be better tools of communion with God than conventional Anglican service or Roman Catholic mass (Piercey Lewis 246).

“Akutaq” in Modern Inuit Music, Poetry and Prose

Both religious and pop culture influences—especially if the folklore, the traditional song-poetry and traditions of the Inuit people as a whole are retained in the style, form or lyrics—result in a certain mixture of cultures, an *akutaq*. In an interchange between cultures both parties have something to gain, but an eventual loss of some aspects of one’s cultural heritage might also be a part of the process. In the case of the Inuit and the Western culture that imposed itself on them, it is fair to say that the Inuit have suffered the partial loss of their native culture through contact with the whalers, fur traders and missionaries. For example, elder, Davidee Aningmiuq, as part of a cultural revitalization group in the Nunavut capital, Iqaluit, expressed her sadness when overhearing priests describing the Inuit as not even being able to make *kamik* (traditional footwear) or not knowing about the traditional wisdom of their people. Aningmiuq feels negatively impacted by her Christian upbringing and grieves her loss of tradition which she feels is due to having been uprooted from her community in order to receive Christian education (Hickey CBC).

Survival in the harsh Arctic climate has always been one of the main driving forces of Inuit life and literary tradition, and today cultural survival is a prime motivation for poets. In Alootok Ipellie’s short story, “When God Sings the Blues”, the narrator performs a chant after which he undertakes a spirit journey in which he meets the Christian God introduced to the Inuit by the Western missionaries. The tone of the story is sarcastic; which is not foreign to Inuit oral tradition. *Iviutiit* or songs of derision were traditional Inuit song-poems that were made to make fun of people using, among others, sarcasm. The blues in the title is played by Satan to entertain the Inuit, which might be understood as a metaphor for the influence of different cultures on each other and shows how these customs can be borrowed and made part of one’s tradition.

Inuit customs have long been threatened by early colonization of North America; especially the Christian prohibition on some of the fundamental oral traditions, such as drum dance and shaman songs. But even before Christianity’s involvement in the oral literature of the Inuit, whalers and trappers had intervened in the Inuit way of life, especially hunting, by introducing the concept of commerce in the area. The nomadic lifestyle of the Inuit was banned, and families were forcibly relocated to unfamiliar parts of the Arctic around military outposts to establish Canada’s northern sovereignty. But certain traditions have never changed; the way poems are born seems to remain identical to the times before Christianity’s arrival to the North. Panigoniak, a musician and poet describes the way he composes poetry as such: “You listen to mother nature, it’s like these spirits that go through your body and speak to you ... that’s where those songs come from, in terms of the

spirit world...it's like a dream" (Williams 252). The fusion of music and poetry is a way to express, like Karina Møller, a Greenlandic Inuit rock musician, the anti-colonial sentiments many Inuit have today. She, however, does not relate to some of the separationist sentiments:

Anything that has more aggressive energy and has the idea of saying them-and-us, separation from other people, I'm always very careful. Because I think it's good if you have pride as a human being. You can be proud of your culture, but it's always dangerous to create separation. And if you are saying it's because you are so upset at the white people for what they have done, [creating separation] does the same thing ... so that's why I really like Ulali and Native Roots ... their music communicates that it's not about separation. (Perea 203)

While the Oblates and Brethren are long gone, Western culture has not stopped influencing the Inuit, some of whom are not fully aware that they are in Canada⁶, treating the semi-sovereign Nunavut as a separate Inuit Homeland. However, the arrival of the satellite TV connection, Internet, and especially the cheaper broadband services in all the hamlets in 2019 have changed the Inuit one more time. The influence of folk and contemporary chart music is as apparent on Inuit poetry as once the Christian hymns were when they burst through the igloos in the age of shamans. Panigoniak's songs are heavily influenced by seventies North American folk music, albeit his lyrics feature distinctly Inuit topics as well as renderings of Christian hymns. His stature in the *Inuit Nunaat*, the Inuit homeland, and his style is reminiscent of Bob Dylan's. Alexis Utatnaq's lyrics, which I will treat as a poem, entitled "Blood-thirsty Enemies," published in the 1974 issue of the now derelict *Keewatin Echo* displays a rap-like rhyme:

Our enemy
Our enemy
They're so many
Our blood they spill
They make us ill
Help us, oh god
From their piercing rods
Our sworn foes
The mosquitoes

⁶ During my conversations with the *Iglulingmiut* while living in Igloolik in 2016, the Inuit that I have talked to referred to taking the trip from Nunavut to Ontario as "going to Canada."

The poem's rhythm is not unlike lyrics for a rap song. Although Utatnaq's poem predates the now mainstream rap culture, rapping has roots in slave songs and first appeared in blues songs in the fifties, such as in Joe Hill Louis's "Gotta Let You Go" (Reese 11). The blending of the Inuit theme of the mosquito problem of long summer days and the use of rap-like rhythm creates a modern *akutaq* with a catchy rhythm that is easy to remember.

The syncretism of ancient and modern emerges in the music and lyrics of contemporary Inuit artists such as Pangnirtung-based Riit or Silla&Rise from Kimmirut and Igloolik, the late Kelly Fraser from Sanikiluaq and The Jerry Cans from Iqaluit. All of these artists build upon Inuit song traditions either in their singing technique or themes and the language they use to perform their songs. It is worth noting that all of these acts mix Inuit roots with pop culture or Canadian folk music and find an international audience with this approach. It appears that blending contemporary musical styles with Inuit song traditions does not seem to take away from the cultural merit of these acts, rather building on traditional Inuit elements highlights and brings focus to the Inuit.

Riit sings in Inuktitut to ensure that her Pangnirtung dialect remains alive⁷ by incorporating in her songs a guttural, traditional singing technique called *katajjaq*. Her songs are a way of preserving the Inuit language (Wheeler 1). Since dialects within the Inuit homeland differ so greatly that residents from different communities do not always understand each other without using some English as a linguistic mediator, we can say with certainty that keeping the entire range of Inuit dialects and cultures alive is an immense endeavour. In this sense, it might be called beneficial that the English-Inuktitut mixed or *akutaq* language can be used to communicate between distant places within the Inuit homeland. Also, it is a difficulty to keep traditions and language alive when there is no uniform nationhood and language across the Arctic, rather there is a connection between related peoples that weaves the Inuit together by their shared experiences.

Although Silla&Rise, whose art also features the ancient Inuit singing style of *katajjaq* and some traditional themes sung or rapped to a futuristic dubstep music, sing in English, they are equally keen on maintaining their Inuit identity by adding throat singing to their repertoire. Silla&Rise pay homage to their Inuit roots in their choice of name as well as "Silla" means weather in their dialect. Weather is of special importance in the far North as it connects all Inuit to the land and its wildlife along with the quintessential theme of survival. Silla,

7 Having talked to Igloolik residents in 2020, they have explained to me that they do not understand Riit's dialect at all.

the singing duo part of the band, made it their goal to write new throat songs, on top of performing old ones, thus continuing the age-old Inuit tradition into the future.

Probably the most famous artist using the *akutaq* approach to language, culture and art is award-winning singer, Kelly Fraser, who wrote some of her songs in Inuktitut with an agenda to use pop music but sung in her native language as a means of deepening her cultural heritage. She also wanted to make her music as accessible to as many people as possible, Inuit and non-Inuit alike. In an effort to reach wide audiences, she mixed English and Inuktitut in some of her lyrics and blended traditional Inuit singing techniques and themes with contemporary music (“The Guardian”).

In the case of The Jerry Cans, Inuit and non-Inuit musicians play together in a musical group using Inuktitut language in their lyrics and adding *katajjaq* to their songs. Additionally, The Jerry Cans wrote a children’s book entitled *Mamaqtuq!* based on their song of the same name. *Mamaqtuq!* is bilingual, written in Inuktitut and English, providing a perfect amalgamation of North and South. Language preservation is one of the important goals of the band’s project. Singer Andrew Morrison explains that:

Nancy and I have two daughters together and her late father insisted that I learn Inuktitut and learn how to hunt...he would wake me up at 5 a.m. to go seal hunting, or always make fun of me when I spoke English...he was making sure that his future granddaughters would have every opportunity to learn Inuktitut and be brought up in their culture. I guess the band is one expression of this. (“20 Questions”).

Hence the fusion of the two cultures through the use of two distinct languages seems to mesh together in a mutually respectful manner emphasizing the crucial message: here the majority adheres to the minority in order to help the cultural survival of the latter.

Canadian fans, Inuit or non-Inuit alike are delighted to embrace these Inuit folklore-influenced bands. Maintaining cultural continuity and retaining integrity as an Inuk while embracing the idea of Canada as one nation is probably one of the most life-affirming approaches. To some extent, Canadians regardless of their background live by this creed, creating a very special mosaic or *akutaq* everyone can call home. Based on the many examples of contemporary artists successfully blending cultures, I argue that colonial narratives can be challenged by asking if only recognizably traditional—such as throat singing or *katajjaq*—Inuit poetry and song-making are means of cultural reaffirmation.

I agree with Renee Hulan (90) that cultures intersect and influence each other in a natural process. Western Christian literature, whether in the form of hymns, popular song lyrics or journal writing has influenced Inuit literature, starting with the initiation of the written tradition by the use of syllabics. However, as seen in Rasmussen's rich collection of literary and anthropological material during the Fifth Thule Expedition, there is plenty to learn from the Inuit. I disagree with Edmund Carpenter's assertion in *Eskimo Realities* (13) that there is no Inuit literature, only Inuit oral traditions that involve songs that ethnographers collected regarding them as poetry. While I agree that oral tradition carries a fluidity foreign to poetry composed for the page only, it is in no way a less valuable representation of a culture's literary efforts.

I concur with John Robert Colombo's high opinion on the merit of Inuit writing as a valuable part of the Canadian literary mosaic. If our hypothesis is manifold in the sense that we either assume that Christian contact had an enriching effect on Inuit writing or that it had no effect whatsoever, we can see—based on poetry that was printed in the past hundred years—that while there is frequent reference to God, these are individual poems by some poets rather than a trend. Singer-poet Panigoniak and his wife wrote both traditional songs and Christian-influenced ones and both styles were well-liked. In a considerable amount of Inuit Christian songs, Christianity is infused with the old spirituality of the Inuit creating a special fusion of religiosity manifesting in song lyrics, hymns and poetry.

I share Hulan's opinion, that post-contact Inuit poetry has not been influenced by Western contact to an extensive degree. Techniques of the oral tradition and traditionally Inuit themes appear in transitional and contemporary writing in a manner not dissimilar to pre-contact song-poems (94): *katajjaq*, the significance of hunting and the cultural importance of survival (both as people on the land with a harsh climate and as those with a distinct identity), are just two of these themes. While I agree with Hulan that the Inuit play a dual role in Canadian culture, "that of the ultimate of identification and the ultimate of difference" (95), I believe that this is not specific to Inuit, but generally to aboriginal cultures of any multicultural society. The Inuit homeland is located within the borders of Canada and internationally Canadians distinguish themselves—among many things—with being hosts to a very special culture. Most Inuit poets and writers, however, seem to be less concerned with their role within Canada than their Inuit identity as in relation to the land, not necessarily regarding themselves anything other than Inuit in the Inuit Homeland, the Arctic North⁸.

8 Based on personal conversations with local residents in Igloodik, Nunavut, in 2016

Thus, it might be concluded that acculturation has never fully⁹ happened in a far North where very few Southerners travel, if ever, and where until recently no cellular and internet service have existed to transmit outside influences. Up until today, laws allow only for the Inuit to hunt whale, seal and walrus. Although hunting is done with updated harpoons and new Western tools, people still prefer country food and speaking Inuktitut, two highly beneficial trends for preserving Inuit culture. Similarly, in poetry and prose, the resilience of the Inuit is ever-present in the unchanged forms of poetry. Albeit Inuit artists write words on paper now, the themes and forms are the same, even if some Christian elements are present in the rich Inuit poetic tradition. Inuit are not a homogenous nation, not every Inuit community is the same and neither are the effects of colonial contact, as Tom Artiss asserts in the title of his study of the musical traditions of the Nunatsiavut community, *Nain*: “more white does not always mean less Inuit” (Artiss). As in the case of the Yup’ik dish, *akutaq*, adding an extra spice for some is a loss of the original flavour, yet for others it is a gain.

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9 Based on Berry’s Fourfold Model, assimilation is stage four full acculturation

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