

AN INTERLUDE OF FREEDOM

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AN
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OF
FREEDOM

THE WHITE FOX TRADE, INUIT SOVEREIGNTY, AND
THE CANADIAN STATE IN THE EASTERN ARCTIC,
1900–60

DANIELLA F. BASSI

MISES INSTITUTE
AUBURN, ALABAMA

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Published 2026 by the Mises Institute

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Mises Institute
518 W. Magnolia Ave.
Auburn, AL 36832
mises.org
contact@mises.org

ISBN: 978-1-61016-791-8 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-61016-800-7 (ebook)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35297/ABJJ5883>

To state subjects across time.

May our successors revel
in the unhindered right
to person and property!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Every piece of writing has uncountable people behind it. In addition to the labors of my intellectual predecessors in the fields of history, economics, and political economy, whose research is cited throughout the footnotes, this book would not have been possible without the direct support of many people.

David Massell of the University of Vermont, Simon Middleton of the College of William and Mary, and Toby Morantz, then of McGill University, encouraged my project as it grew from an idea into a term paper and finally into a book. Toby, an expert on the eastern Arctic, undertook a thorough and unrelenting critique of an early draft, and she also graciously shared PDFs of all the Hudson's Bay Company post journals she'd gathered for her own research. Archivist James Gorton of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba patiently responded to my numerous emails over the last few years and helped me access sources that usually can only be consulted on-site in Winnipeg. Editor Sean Guistini of Nunavut Arctic College Media sent me a copy of *Niurrutiqarniq* and encouraged my work.

At the Mises Institute, fellows Misty Peñuelas and Kristoffer Moustén Hansen provided helpful comments on terminology and on applying Austrian economic theory. Executive editor Ryan McMaken, senior fellow David Gordon, and academic vice president Joseph Salerno vetted the text. Copyeditor Christina Nichols went above and beyond to polish it, and Roger Bissell created the index. executive director Judy Thommesen oversaw the typesetting, which was done by 1106 Design, and arranged the licensing and printing. Bob Volek carefully proofread it, and Brian Smith designed the cover. The Mises Institute's supporters, donors, and friends funded the publication of this radical text. Thank you for aiding the rebels in the war of ideas.

At home, my husband, Daniel Diefenbach, critiqued numerous iterations of the text and was ever a source of encouragement.

Thank you all for making this antistate, promarket rereading of the Arctic fur trade possible!

CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	x
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
<i>Chronology</i>	xv
<i>Note on Capitalization</i>	xxv
Introduction	1
<i>An Interlude of Nearly Free Trade</i>	3
<i>The End of Private Trade and Inuit Life on the Land</i>	6
<i>A Radical Liberal Perspective on Colonialism</i>	8
Part 1 Context: Inuit Sovereignty, Government Territorial Claims, and Early Trades.	13
Chapter 1 Law and Order in Inuit Societies: Private Property and Natural Law.	17
<i>Natural Law in the Arctic</i>	20
<i>Private Property in Land</i>	22
<i>Private Property in Movable Items</i>	28
<i>Restorative Justice in the Arctic</i>	30
<i>Inuit Violations of Natural Law</i>	36
<i>Self-Rule as a Precondition for Free Trade</i>	41
Chapter 2 No-Man's-Land? Northern Statelessness, Corporate Privilege, and Market Freedom	43
<i>The Crown, the Company, and Canada</i>	44
<i>Sovereignty Claims in the North American Arctic</i>	53

	<i>Canadian Police Presence in the Arctic</i>	56
	<i>Police Policy toward Inuit Crime</i>	60
Chapter 3	A History of Voluntary Market Interaction: Arctic Whaling and the Early Subarctic Fur Trade	67
	<i>Voluntary Trade and the Subjectivity of Value</i>	68
	<i>Nonaggression in the Eastern Arctic Whaling Era</i>	70
	<i>Cultural Accommodation in the Subarctic Fur Trade</i>	74
	<i>A Tailored Trade Ritual</i>	76
	<i>Gift Giving and Gratuities</i>	80
	<i>The Credit System in the Fur Trade</i>	83
Part 2	The Pursuit of Mutual Gain: Semifree Trade and Collaboration in the Eastern Arctic	87
Chapter 4	Establishing the Arctic Trade: Opening Posts and Forming Relationships	89
	<i>Selling a New Rhythm of Life</i>	91
	<i>Opening Posts with Inuit Input</i>	94
	<i>Grubstaking Inuit Trappers</i>	101
Chapter 5	An Interlude of Peace and Prosperity: Cultural Accommodation and Nonintervention.	111
	<i>Learning to Communicate</i>	112
	<i>Becoming Generous Partners</i>	114
	<i>Respecting Native Autonomy</i>	124
Part 3	Canadian Government Intervention in the Fur Trade and Inuit Lives.	133
Chapter 6	Destabilizing the Market: Wartime Restrictions and Bubbles	135
	<i>World War I Economic Restrictions and Changes in the Fur Trade</i>	135
	<i>British Credit Expansion in the Interwar Period: A Lesson in Austrian Economic Theory</i>	140
	<i>The White Fox Bubble and Crash</i>	146

	<i>The Depression and Interventionism in the Eastern Arctic . .</i>	149
	<i>World War II Economic Restrictions and the Fur Trade . . .</i>	152
	<i>The World War II Military Boom in the Canadian Arctic . .</i>	155
	<i>The Cold War Pop-Up Public Sector</i>	158
Chapter 7	Smothering the Trade: Forced Animal Conservation and Inuit Relocation	165
	<i>Animal Conservation Policies and Legislated Starvation. . .</i>	166
	<i>The High Arctic Relocations and State-Imposed Suffering . .</i>	174
	<i>The Ennadai Lake Inuit Relocations and Canadian Political Law</i>	179
	<i>Semiprivate Animal Conservation Schemes</i>	186
Chapter 8	The Carrot and the Stick: Government-Sponsored Relief . .	195
	<i>A Semiprivate Relief System</i>	196
	<i>The Postwar Family Allowance Program</i>	203
	<i>Government-Incentivized Schooling and Settlement</i>	214
Chapter 9	Ultima Thule: The Transformation of the Fur Trade and Inuit Societies.	219
	<i>The Welfare Economy Dwarfs the Fur Trade.</i>	219
	<i>HBC Posts Rebrand as Department Stores</i>	224
	<i>State Housing in Inuit Settlements</i>	228
	<i>Private Nonfur Ventures and Carving in the Eastern Arctic .</i>	231
	<i>Private Sector Mining in the North</i>	235
	<i>Central Planning in the North.</i>	237
	<i>State Dominance in the North Today.</i>	242
	Epilogue.	247
	<i>Bibliography.</i>	253
	<i>Index.</i>	267

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. <i>Canada and Rupert's Land, 1870–98.</i>	51
2. <i>Arctic and northeastern weather stations, airfields, loran stations, and communications centers, summer 1948</i>	159
3. <i>DEW Line radar sites (black dots)</i>	163
4. <i>Canada, 1912–99</i>	167
5. <i>Territorial game preserves, 1945</i>	171

ABBREVIATIONS

- AM-BS Hudson's Bay Company Archives biographical sheets, Archives of Manitoba, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/index.html>
- AM-RC Hudson's Bay Company record creators, Archives of Manitoba, https://pam.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/PAM_AUTHORITY?DIRECTSEARCH
- HBCA Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Archives of Manitoba, <https://pam.minisisinc.com/pam/search.htm>
- CDPJ Cape Dorset Post Journals, 1913–41, Post Journals, 1705–1949, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/525245078/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/14573?JUMP
- CSPJ Cape Smith Post Journals, 1922–39, Post Journals, 1705–1949, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/125249086/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/14479?JUMP
- FBPJ Frobisher Bay Post Journals, 1920–29, Post Journals, 1705–1949, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/325243087/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/14574?JUMP
- HB Helen Burgess Oral Interview Recordings, 1966, HB1994/24, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/525245081/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/19907?JUMP
- JWA J. W. Anderson Fonds, 1923–63, 1981/28, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/125249089/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/19007?JUMP

ABBREVIATIONS

- LHPJ Lake Harbour Post Journals, 1914–39, Post Journals, 1705–1949, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/225246098/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/14588?JUMP
- OHI Oral History Interviews with Long-Service Employees of the Hudson's Bay Company Fur Trade and Northern Stores Departments, 1978–83, HB1984/15, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/525245085/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/19399?JUMP
- SBPJ Stupart's Bay Post Journals, 1914–40, Post Journals, 1705–1949, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/125249093/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/14554?JUMP
- SWPJ Sugluk West Post Journals, 1930–49, Post Journals, 1705–1949, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/125249091/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/14493?JUMP
- WPJ Wolstenholme Post Journals, 1909–46, Post Journals, 1705–1949, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/425242089/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/9603?JUMP
- WPR Wolstenholme Post Reports, 1909–13, https://pam.minisisinc.com/SCRIPTS/MWIMAIN.DLL/325243090/LISTINGS_WEB2/DESC_REFD/9601?JUMP



Source: Shelagh D. Grant, *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), xxi, map 1.



Source: Grant, *Arctic Justice*, xxii, map 2.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1452 *Dum diversas* papal bull gives the Catholic Portuguese crown the right to conquer the lands of and enslave Muslims, pagans, and other non-Christians (issued in light of Portuguese exploration of lower West African coast)
- 1455 *Romanus pontifex* bull explicitly expands the 1452 legal privileges to the West African coast
- 1456 *Inter caetera* bull expands the 1452 privileges to the New World
- 1493 New *Inter caetera* bull clarifies that the Catholic Spanish crown also has the rights of conquest and enslavement in all places not claimed by a Christian ruler
Inter caetera bull divides the non-Christian world into Portuguese and Spanish spheres; the Spanish crown gets the New World, and the Portuguese crown gets Africa and Asia
Inter caetera papal bull forms the basis for the doctrine of discovery used by European states to take possession of non-Christians' lands
- 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas between Portuguese and Spanish crowns modifies the 1493 bull's division of non-Christians' lands in Portugal's favor
- 1506 Pope Julius II ratifies Treaty of Tordesillas
- 1576 Martin Frobisher discovers present-day Resolution Island, southern Baffin Island, and Frobisher Bay
- 1585 John Davis discovers present-day Davis Strait and eastern Baffin Island

CHRONOLOGY

- 1587 Davis reaches present-day Frobisher Bay, Hudson Strait, and north-western Greenland
- 1590s First whalers active in Davis Strait and Hudson Strait
- 1610–11 Henry Hudson discovers Hudson Bay and James Bay
- 1611 Mutineers from Hudson's expedition make contact with northern Quebec Inuit
- 1668 Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) opens its first post, Charles Fort (later Rupert House), on western James Bay
- 1670 HBC chartered
English crown grants Rupert's Land to HBC
- 1694 Bank of England established
- 1701 Act of Union
England and Scotland become Great Britain
- 1702 Queen Anne's War begins
- 1713 Queen Anne's War ends
French crown cedes eastern Hudson Bay area, Newfoundland, and Acadia (present-day Nova Scotia and New Brunswick) to British crown
French crown retains fishing rights off eastern Newfoundland (the French Shore)
- 1730 HBC ships start trading with Hudson Strait Inuit
- 1756 Seven Years' War begins
- 1763 Seven Years' War ends
French crown cedes Quebec, Île-Royale (present-day Cape Breton Island), Île Saint-Jean (present-day Prince Edward Island), Great Lakes basin, and lands east of the Mississippi River to British crown
British crown cedes Saint-Pierre and Miquelon to French crown
British crown places Labrador under the jurisdiction of Newfoundland
- 1776 American independence
- 1779 North West Company officially forms

- 1791 Constitutional Act
Quebec divided into Lower Canada and Upper Canada
- 1801 Act of Union
Great Britain and Ireland become the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland
- 1803 British Act for Extending the Jurisdiction of the Courts of Justice in the Provinces of Lower and Upper Canada, to the Trial and Punishment of Persons Guilty of Crimes and Offences within certain Parts of North America Adjoining to the Said Provinces

Indian territories and all parts of North America not under US jurisdiction come under British jurisdiction via Lower and Upper Canadian courts
- 1820s Whalers in the Hudson Strait begin trading with Inuit
- 1821 British Act for Regulating the Fur Trade and Establishing a Criminal and Civil Jurisdiction within Certain Parts of North America

HBC explicitly loses civil and criminal jurisdiction over lands it controls, and its charter must now be renewed every twenty-one years

British government declares right to regulate the fur trade

HBC gains control of what becomes North-Western Territory

HBC merges with North West Company
- 1829–33 John Ross discovers Boothia Peninsula, King William Island, and Gulf of Boothia and locates northern magnetic pole
- 1840 Act of Union

Lower Canada and Upper Canada become Province of Canada

Lower Canada renamed Canada East, and Upper Canada renamed Canada West
- 1858 British Columbia territory created (present-day boundaries established 1866)

Canadian pound replaced by Canadian dollar, which is pegged to US dollar until 1938
- 1859 Indian Territories Act

- Land not in Rupert's Land or British Columbia becomes the North-Western Territory
- North-Western Territory comes under British jurisdiction
- 1867 British North America Act
- Canadian Confederation
- Canada, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia become the self-governed Dominion of Canada
- Canada East becomes Quebec, and Canada West becomes Ontario (present-day boundaries established 1912)
- Canadian dollar becomes the currency of Dominion of Canada
- 1869 United Kingdom buys Rupert's Land from HBC
- 1870 Rupert's Land Act
- Rupert's Land and North-Western Territory transferred to Canada
- Rupert's Land and North-Western Territory become North-West Territory
- Manitoba joins Confederation (present-day boundaries established 1912)
- 1871 British Columbia becomes a province and joins Confederation
- 1873 North-West Mounted Police created
- Department of the Interior created and encompasses Indian Affairs and Northern Affairs branches
- Prince Edward Island becomes a province and joins Confederation
- 1876 Keewatin District created in North-West Territory
- 1880 Arctic Islands Act
- Britain transfers all British North American islands to Canada except Newfoundland (which includes Labrador)
- 1882 North-West Territory subdivided into Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Athabasca Districts
- 1890 Canadian police presence arrives in the Yukon and western Arctic
- 1895 North-West Territory further subdivided into Ungava, Keewatin, Franklin, Mackenzie, and Yukon Districts

- 1897 Canadian government begins to reimburse fur traders for relief issued to native trappers
- 1898 Yukon Territory created (present-day boundaries established 1901)
- 1899–1902 Otto Sverdrup claims Sverdrup Islands and parts of Ellesmere Island for Norwegian government
- 1903 Revillon Frères Trading Company (RF) expands into Canada
First western Arctic police detachments established at Herschel Island, Fort McPherson, and Fullerton Harbour
- 1904 North-West Mounted Police becomes Royal North-West Mounted Police
A. P. Low claims Beechey Island, Somerset Island, and Ellesmere Island and its surrounds for Canada
- 1905 Northwest Territories Act
North-West Territory becomes Northwest Territories
Northwest Territories to be singlehandedly governed by a commissioner in Ottawa
Alberta and Saskatchewan Provinces created and join Confederation
- 1906 Fisheries Act declares Hudson Bay Canadian water and imposes licensing requirement for all fishing vessels
RF formally incorporated in Canada
- 1909 Robert E. Peary claims entire Canadian North for the United States
HBC opens its first Arctic trading post, Wolstenholme, on lower Hudson Strait
- 1910 Canadian government begins to issue native relief from its own warehouses
Lead-zinc ore deposits found on Baffin Island
- 1911 Sabellum Trading Company founded
- 1912 US Federal Reserve System established
- 1914 World War I begins
Great Britain passes Defence of the Realm Act
British Board of Trade suspends London fur auctions
War Measures Act passed in Canada (in effect until 1920)

- HBC puts a moratorium on fur purchases and credit issues to trappers
- HBC starts purchasing ivory
- 1915 British Board of Trade allows fur auctions to resume
- HBC begins buying small quantities of furs and issues limited credit
- Arctic whaling era ends
- 1916 Great Britain adopts military conscription
- HBC opens auction house in Montreal
- HBC incorporated in US as HBC Fur Sales
- 1917 Canada adopts conscription
- Sinnisiak and Uluksuk become first Inuit to be tried under Canadian law
- Sinnisiak and Uluksuk found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment (they are released in 1919)
- Northwest Game Act passed
- Migratory Birds Convention Act passed
- HBC suspends fur sales in Canada and US
- 1918 World War I ends
- Lamson and Hubbard (LH) expands into Canada
- 1920 Northwest Territories Act revised
- Northwest Territories to be governed by a commissioner and six-person council
- Royal North-West Mounted Police becomes Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- Sabellum Trading Company folds
- 1921 Irish independence
- United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland becomes United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Northwest Territories Council created
- 1922 Annual Eastern Arctic Patrol begins
- First eastern Arctic police detachments established at Craig Harbour and Pond Inlet

CHRONOLOGY

- 1923 Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch of Department of Interior organized
- 1924 Alikomiak and Tatamigana hanged for murder
Alikomiak and Tatamigana become first and only Inuit to be executed by Canadian state
HBC buys out LH
HBC fur sales resume in Canada and US
- 1925 NWT Council imposes seasons on fur animals and prohibits caribou skin exports
- 1926 NWT Council declares Arctic Islands a musk ox preserve exclusively for native use
RF agrees to allow the HBC to purchase controlling interest in RF over the next eight years
- 1927 NWT Council creates Thelon Game Sanctuary
- 1930 Fur prices crash
- 1931 Statute of Westminster
Canadian foreign policy becomes independent of British foreign policy
- 1931–32 Nickel discovered in Arctic Quebec
- 1934 Bank of Canada established
- 1936 HBC absorbs RF
Ungava Trading Company established
Northern Affairs branch becomes part of Department of Mines and Resources
- 1938 Canadian dollar exchange rate becomes free floating
First weekly widow's rations issued to native women
HBC establishes muskrat persevered on land leased from Saskatchewan government
- 1939 World War II begins
Sealskin prices crash
Baffin Trading Company established
Ungava Trading Company fails

- Re: Eskimos* finds Inuit to be Indians for legal purposes and therefore wards of the federal government
 Emergency Powers (Defence) Act passed in Great Britain
 War Measures Act reinvoked in Canada
 Defence of Canada Regulations imposed
 Canadian Wartime Prices and Trade Board created
- 1940 Emergency Powers (Defence) Act expanded
 British Board of Trade bars fur imports and imposes clothing rations and a 100 percent purchase tax on furs
 US-Canadian Permanent Joint Board on Defence created
- 1941 US enters World War II
 US begins building defensive military installations in Alaska and Canadian Arctic
- 1944 Family Allowance Act
 All Canadian parents entitled to a monthly allowance for each child
 US transfers Northern military installations to Canada and withdraws
- 1945 World War II ends
- 1946 Dr. Percy Moore of the Department of Health and Welfare testifies before the Special Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Indian Act that Canadian indigenous people are malnourished
- 1947 Department of Health and Welfare begins campaign to encourage Inuit parents to feed their children milk and Pablum
- 1949 Newfoundland (renamed Newfoundland and Labrador in 2001) becomes a province and joins Confederation
 Northwest Game Act repealed and replaced with new legislation
 Baffin Trading Company folds
 Inuit carvings gain notoriety after James Houston's collection sells out at a Montreal show
- 1950 Northern Affairs becomes part of Department of Resources and Development
 Ennadai Lake Inuit families relocated to Nueltin Lake against their wishes

- 1951 Northwest Territories Council dissolved and replaced by Legislative Council of the Northwest Territories
- 1953 Department of Resources and Development becomes Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources
Pond Inlet and Inukjuak Inuit families relocated to High Arctic under false pretenses and not allowed to return home
- 1954 Construction of DEW Line posts begins
- 1955 Relatives of first High Arctic exiles also relocated against their wishes
- 1957 Ennadai Lake families relocated again, to Henik Lake, after having returned home; seven die of starvation or exposure and five are hospitalized
DEW Line becomes operational
North Rankin Nickel Mine opens on northwestern Hudson Bay
Asbestos discovered in Arctic Quebec
- 1958 *Regina v. Kikkik*
Kikkik found not guilty of murder and child neglect
Surviving Ennadai Lake families moved to Arviat
- 1959 First government-sponsored Inuit co-ops open
- 1962 Canadian dollar repegged to US dollar (until 1970)
High-grade iron ore discovered on Baffin Island
- 1966 Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources becomes Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
- 1971 First sealing quota set in Canada
- 1972 Asbestos Hill mine opens in Arctic Quebec
- 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement signed (amended 1978)
Federal government guarantees the right of Crees, Inuit, and Naskapis to hunt, fish, and trap on their territories
Federal environmental and social protections enacted for Cree, Inuit, and Naskapi territories
The first modern Canadian land claims agreement becomes the model for those that follow

CHRONOLOGY

- 1984 Inuvialuit Final Agreement signed
Asbestos Hill mine closes
- 1985 North Warning System succeeds DEW Line
DEW Line phaseout begins
- 1986 Arctic Co-operative Development Fund created
- 1987 HBC sells its Northern Stores Department, which is rebranded as
Hudson's Bay Northern Stores
- 1989 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild
Fauna and Flora bans international ivory trade
- 1990 Hudson's Bay Northern Stores renamed North West Company
- 1991 HBC stops selling fur
- 1992 Family Allowance replaced by income-based Child Tax Benefit
- 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement signed
Nunavut Act
DEW Line phaseout complete
- 1997 Raglan nickel mine completes phase 1 development in Arctic Quebec
- 1999 Nunavut territory created
- 2005 Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement signed
- 2007 Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement signed
- 2015 Mary River iron mine begins operations on Baffin Island
- 2019 North West Company announces it will stop buying fur but reneges
three days later amid native protests

NOTE ON CAPITALIZATION

Although for about a decade now it has been common practice to capitalize *Native*, and more recently *indigenous* and *aboriginal*, in reference to the native peoples of the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand, I have elected to lowercase these terms. I rebel against the trend because capitalizing words is a frivolous substitute for the battles that native peoples have been fighting and must continue to fight to achieve freedom from the state, the underwriter of native oppression. Capitalizing these terms is also harmful because it recenters indigenous struggles around the ancillary issue of racial prejudice—ancillary in light of the truth that history is foremost a long sequence of conquests that have culminated in the near-total domination and exploitation of every ethnic group on the planet by a privileged political class.

INTRODUCTION

From roughly the early 1900s to the 1960s, the rocky coasts of what is now the Canadian Arctic were dotted with fur-trading posts. Most of them were run by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), Revillon Frères, and Lamson and Hubbard, but several were operated by smaller companies and by independent "free traders," as the larger interests scornfully called them. Most of the Arctic traders were white men from Newfoundland, Labrador, Scotland, and England, though there were also a handful of indigenous traders (Angulalik, an Inuk who traded for the Canalska Trading Company, was one of the best known) and possibly also some Labrador Inuit-Metis traders.¹ Although the traders purchased all kinds of raw furs—polar bear, caribou, ermine, wolverine, and even seal—their main source of income was the arctic fox. The cleaned, stretched, and dried fox hides, white, silver, and sometimes blue, made their way to southern Canada, the United States, and Great Britain, where they were auctioned off to furriers, who transformed them into luxurious gloves, hats, muffs, stoles, and coats.

¹ Labrador Inuit-Metis, who historically called themselves Settlers but now refer to themselves as Southern Inuit or NunatuKavummiut, are people of mixed Inuit and European (mostly British) heritage. Their culture is the product of intermarriage and peaceful coexistence between Inuit and Europeans, combining customs and practices from both cultures. For an overview of Labrador Inuit-Metis history and culture, see "Southern Inuit of NunatuKavut Culture," Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage, Memorial University of Newfoundland, last modified July 2021, <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/indigenous/southern-inuit-culture.php>; and "Southern Inuit of NunatuKavut History," Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage, Memorial University of Newfoundland, last modified July 2021, <https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/indigenous/southern-inuit-history.php>.

The people who sold these animal products were the forebears of contemporary Canadian Inuit (historically referred to as Eskimos). In this period, Inuit societies were cashless, so the traders bartered with the trappers. Inuit were interested in metalwork—knives, awls, needles, and other labor-saving tools that they had previously made of bone, stone, and other local materials. They especially valued firearms and ammunition. They also wanted dry foodstuffs (flour, sugar, and tea), textiles (such as duffel), and tobacco. These were the staples, as Barbara Heslop, who lived and worked in the Arctic from 1940 to 1962, put it.² Rifles and sewing machines became a foundation of the seminomadic Inuit household, and peterhead boats became a valued group possession.³ Over time, Inuit purchased an even greater variety of goods: candy, Scotch tartan shawls, clocks, perfume (for hunting and later for women), long underwear, silk underwear (which were worn four or five at a time!), sanitary pads, musical instruments, and even gramophones.

As in the subarctic fur trade and the Arctic whaling industry of earlier days, the relationship between Inuit and whites in the Arctic fur trade was characterized by peaceful, voluntary association. The two groups engaged in mutually beneficial commerce but continued to observe their own customs and to forge their own paths. Inuit communities remained centered around seasonal migration in pursuit of traditional staple foods. They continued to be organized by kinship and to be governed by the tenets of restorative justice, which was enforced directly by community members rather than top-down by a state.

However far they were from “civilization,” as many traders referred to the relatively urban world they’d left behind, anglophone customs and Canadian law structured post life. But there were no settler colonies in the Arctic. Most of the traders, being company employees rather than owners of the trading posts, were transient. HBC men were transferred to a different

² Barbara Heslop, interview by Barbara Kilvert, June 1963, tape 2 of 2, T6-36, HBCA-JWA. Quotes from archival sources have not been edited or modified in any way.

³ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 6, 1983, tape 7 of 8, T11-60, HBCA-OHI; and George Cleveland, “Conducting a Trading Post Farthest North—a Life That Gets into the Blood of a Man,” *New Bedford Sunday Standard*, May 18, 1924, <https://web.archive.org/web/20101127033028/http://oldtimeislands.org/Cleveland/article6.html>.

post every few years, and even after living in the Arctic for decades, they inevitably circled in on southern Canada as their careers drew to a close. Most of the trader interviews that this study draws on were conducted in Winnipeg; only one was done in the Canadian North.⁴ As temporary residents of the Arctic, traders did not try to force their lifeways on the local Inuit. Instead, they learned the local language and respected local conventions while retaining their own identities and cultural preferences.

In a time when Western and especially North American societies are reconsidering the origins of inequality, injustice, and intergroup strife and seeking justice, reconciliation, and progress, it's worth asking why white-Inuit relations were so harmonious in the grand scheme of interethnic relations in the Americas. I contend that there are two reasons: the relationship was essentially forged by free trade (that is, by mutual self-interest); and even though the Canadian state claimed sovereignty over the Arctic and began attempting to exert legal power over its peoples long before then, there was no significant government presence there until the World War II era.

An Interlude of Nearly Free Trade

In the radical liberal tradition, I define a state as a coercive institution that claims control of a territorial area and its people. Based on this claim of sovereignty, a state alleges the exclusive right to make law, adjudicate legal disputes, and administer punishment, as well as the right to take a portion of the people's productive labor in the form of tribute (taxes) or forced labor (such as jury duty, *corvée* labor, and mandatory military and community service).

All states are essentially violent impositions over inherently free people because states' sovereignty originates in conquest (the original sin). States divide people into two broad classes: the government and the governed. The natural rights of the governed are often severely limited by the dictates of the government. The governed can never raise their hands against the government or its agents in self-defense. In fact, they are severely restricted

⁴ The lone exception that I encountered is Gordon Rennie, who married an Inuk and stayed in the North. He was interviewed in Iqaluit, Nunavut. See George Pitseolak et al., *Niurritiqarniq: Trading with the Hudson's Bay Company*, ed. Shannon Partridge, interviews supervised by François Trudel (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2009), pt. 2.

even in their ability to defend themselves against private aggression: with few exceptions, criminal disputes must be resolved in the state's courts, by the judges on its payroll, and according to laws that most of the governed have not freely consented to live by.⁵ And every criminal must be punished by the state too—fined by its bureaucrats, held in its prisons, or executed by its paid mercenaries. The legal environment under most states ensures that wrongdoers are almost always shielded from direct punishment by their victims, and thus that there is no true justice. That the state is fundamentally based on force and inequality is proven by subjects' basic choices: submission, emigration, or defiance at the risk of fines, imprisonment, or execution.

The English crown claimed what is now the Canadian Arctic in the late sixteenth century by right of discovery—finders keepers, essentially—based on the geographic “discoveries” of Martin Frobisher (1576–78) and Henry Hudson (1610–11). In doing so, the crown wrongfully superimposed its claims over Inuit communities' preexisting land claims, and it also usurped unoccupied land that no Englishman had ever seen, let alone inhabited.

In 1670, without having any true right to the land, the English crown granted the HBC the ownership of and the exclusive right to trade on Rupert's Land, a vast tract comprising the drainage basin of Hudson Bay. Rupert's Land extended as far north as Baffin Island (present-day northern Nunavut, across the Hudson Strait from Arctic Quebec) and dipped down past the present-day US border. Rupert's Land abutted present-day British Columbia and included most of present-day Quebec and Ontario. In 1821, the British Empire,⁶ still without having concrete property rights in the land, essentially expanded the HBC's landholdings by giving the company administrative control of the North-Western Territory, which included the present-day Yukon and Northwest Territories and the northern reaches of present-day Alberta and Saskatchewan. But importantly, it also explicitly declared Rupert's Land to be under British civil and criminal jurisdiction, which significantly diluted the HBC's original property rights in the land.

⁵ In theory, a criminal dispute could be resolved privately if the parties involved agreed not to go to the police or if the victim of a crime agreed not to press charges against the aggressor.

⁶ In 1701, the English and Scottish crowns united to form Great Britain, and in 1801, Great Britain absorbed Ireland and became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, hence my use of the term *British* instead of *English* when discussing events occurring after 1701.

In 1859, the empire declared the North-Western Territory to be under its jurisdiction as well, and in 1869 it bought Rupert's Land back from the HBC. In 1870, the empire ceded the North-West Territory (consisting of the old North-Western Territory and Rupert's Land) to the Dominion of Canada, which had just been created in 1867. Then, in 1880, the British Empire transferred the Arctic Archipelago to Canada, rounding out the country's borders.

A state can extend its exceptional power to new areas through its subjects, over whom it claims authority. Rather than order its agents to subdue others, it can simply order its subjects to obey its laws even in a distant land. And if they do, a new legal realm—a new territorial monopoly of justice—is born. But though the British and Canadian states did indeed grasp for sovereignty over the Arctic through the explorers, traders, and missionaries who came into the region, their reach came up short due to the low number of subjects, the lack of state agents that typically accompany colonization, and the enduring influence of the Inuit sociolegal order.

The Canadian political class merely claimed the Arctic on paper, from a great distance, without owning so much as a hovel there. Nor was the Canadian government much interested in the region except to own it. Ignorant of the Arctic's rich subterranean resources (copper, nickel, iron, gold, silver, diamonds, oil, and uranium⁷—to name a just few), Canada considered fur and game the land's only valuable resources, so it practiced a policy that scholars commonly call benign neglect.⁸

Canada limited its expressions of sovereignty over the Arctic largely to surveys and patrols. There would be no Canadian police presence in the western Arctic until 1903, and none in the eastern Arctic until 1922. Although the police certainly began trying to enforce Canadian law upon their arrival, the initial policy of the Canadian mounted police was leniency

⁷ On uranium in the region, see Ed Struzik, "A Vast Canadian Wilderness Poised for a Uranium Boom," *Yale Environment* 360, January 13, 2012, https://e360.yale.edu/features/a_vast_canadian_wilderness_poised_for_a_uranium_boom.

⁸ For example, the term appears in Shelagh D. Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936–1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 48; and Peter Kulchyski and Frank James Tester, *Kiumajut (Talking Back): Game Management and Inuit Rights, 1900–70* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 275.

toward Inuit infractions, the goal being to gradually bring the free peoples of the Arctic into the Canadian pale.

The vast lands that lay beyond the limits of Canadian law were in practice governed by Inuit customary law. Inuit societies were stateless communities strictly governed by a legal code of kinship-based private property and restorative justice based on the tenets of natural law. The statelessness of Inuit communities meant that Inuit could exercise their natural rights freely and fully. It meant that there was true justice in Inuit societies. Victims and their families could exact full retribution from criminals directly. The most significant expression of the fullness of Inuit natural rights was each person's right to avenge murder and, if necessary, to execute someone who threatened his life.

Although the near statelessness of the Inuit homeland may sound like an incubator for disorder, violence, and stark power imbalances, it had just the opposite effect on the Arctic fur trade. The statelessness of Inuit societies and the limited power of the Canadian state in the Arctic created an environment of accountability and mutual respect for others' persons and property. When disputes arose between Inuit and traders, Inuit applied the rules that kept order in their own camps to the traders as well. And although the traders were all state subjects, their distance from the heart of the state's power gave them extra leeway to defend themselves and to act when there was no time to wait for instructions—though at “ship time,” traders would of course have to answer to company and state authorities. Traders could not simply run to the state for protection if they wronged the locals or found themselves threatened. They had to act. Because everyone was liable for his actions, peaceful collaboration was the best option—and the trade depended on it as well. In the first several decades of the twentieth century, then, near statelessness gave rise to peaceful trade, economic growth, and cross-cultural understanding between Inuit and whites in the “Canadian” Arctic. Conquest was delayed until the true arrival of the state in the postwar and early Cold War eras.

The End of Private Trade and Inuit Life on the Land

Concerned with defending its claims to the area, the Canadian state began to open police detachments in the western Arctic in the 1900s and in the

eastern Arctic in the 1920s.⁹ These detachments represented the arrival of the state in the Inuit homeland and the beginning of the conquest of Inuit peoples.

The Canadian police began to administer relief, to patrol the Arctic, and to investigate crimes. Although the police often got along with traders and Inuit, they reported to the state on Inuit living conditions and traders' practices, which prompted bureaucrats to act on the region more aggressively over time, eventually moving in to administer welfare, health services, education, housing, and other state services—with the caveat, of course, that Inuit had to live as the state commanded in order to receive these “free” gifts. And even though the police were sometimes helpful to Inuit communities in apprehending threatening individuals and murderers, police power was ultimately an affront to Inuit justice that would usher in the domination of the Canadian legal system. Inuit would soon find themselves in Canadian prisons and courts, their rights severely restricted and their political autonomy at an end.

As the government began to rend the legal and cultural fabric of Inuit communities, its economic interventions, including wartime trading prohibitions, regional conservationist policies, new relief schemes, and monetary inflation in concert with other governments, wreaked havoc on the traditional Arctic economy. Passed in 1944, the landmark Family Allowance Act quickly expanded the Canadian welfare state, altering the economic landscape of the Arctic to an unprecedented extent and ushering in the twilight of the traditional arctic fox trade. Family Allowances drew Inuit off the land and into permanent coastal settlements built by the government and complete with schools, hospitals, welfare offices, and low-cost housing. Inuit families' growing welfare income and altered living arrangements prompted the transformation of the fur trade into a retail industry fueled by government credit. The government lured Inuit into its paternalistic embrace even as the market adjusted to their changing needs as town shoppers. Almost overnight, Inuit found themselves in a desperate struggle against patronizing bureaucrats to regain a modicum of a say in their own affairs.

⁹ See footnote 8.

Today, Inuit are merely as unfree as other Canadians. They are as shackled, indeed, as all other subjects of liberal democracy—reduced from fully autonomous individuals, families, and communities to wards of the state in all but name.

A Radical Liberal Perspective on Colonialism

Scholars often use the lenses of capitalism and colonialism to interpret indigenous pasts. Employing the concept of totalization—the state’s absorption and assimilation of social groups—indigenous studies scholars Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski characterize the Inuit struggle against the Canadian government as but “a moment in a broader historical process . . . [that] begins with the development of capitalism in Europe.”¹⁰ Tester and Kulchyski’s words exemplify the Marxist framework that has dominated the historical discipline since the days of the Annales school, which posits that capitalism’s hunger for growth and wealth is what drove Europeans to colonize the world, commodifying people and nature for profit.

Indigenous histories in the Marxist tradition often explicitly critique the state, ably revealing its hand in the atrocities that colonized peoples have endured. But although Marxist interpretations excoriate the state, they ultimately blame capitalism for indigenous suffering. The theory is that the state—institutionalized coercion—is capitalism’s creation, established to protect private property, which is the bedrock of the free market.¹¹ In the end, the thinking goes, it was the potent greed engendered by private property and markets (which these scholars imply that indigenous peoples lacked) that gave rise to a racist disregard for indigenous communities’ own private property rights in their lands and spurred the violent conquest and dispossession of native peoples.

Informed by radical liberal theory and ethics, I seek to expand on the work of Marxist scholars of Inuit history and indigenous history more broadly by rejecting the distinction between the colonized subjects of an empire and the ordinary subjects of a state. I begin the story of the Arctic fur trade

¹⁰ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 5.

¹¹ Marxist theory understands private property as an imposition—an artificial step away from the common ownership and statelessness (communism) that was supposedly man’s original state.

with the premise that both colonial and domestic subjecthood originate in conquest and are characterized by the state's wrongful superimposition of property claims (and restrictions) over land that is already owned. The Canadian government's increasing power and abuses in the Arctic are illuminated by the radical liberal theory of natural law that undergirds my thesis—that is, by the idea that freedom is the total absence of coercion; the full control of one's body and other property; and the unimpeded right to trade, gift, and defend what is rightfully one's own.

In stark disagreement with Marxist theory, I approach market activity as collaborative and private property as a form of order and a source of harmony. I acknowledge market activity and private property as universal phenomena that predate state rule and are found in all societies, not only in Eurasian, North African, and Westernized societies. With the understanding that people can accomplish precious little in isolation and that they tend to collaborate to reach their goals, I also reject readings of market activity as a harmful dependence on others. Instead, following the Austrian school of economics, I understand self-sufficiency as an exhausting and unnatural isolation that yields little more than the bare minimum necessary to survive, because no one can do it all and do it well. I understand markets as a victory in humanity's struggle to extricate ourselves from the unending drudgery that is self-sufficiency, and I understand change as a fact of existence and markets.¹² Accordingly, the fur trade and its transformation of Inuit life are here interpreted as simply another thing the people had to navigate, and certainly not as a destructive force. The fur trade here is recast as fully mutual and fully beneficial, surpassing even the most generous interpretations of scholars such as Daniel Francis, Toby Morantz, Arthur J. Ray, Ann M. Carlos, and Frank D. Lewis.¹³

¹² Most people today are *interdependent*, and that is not an unnatural or a bad thing. We depend on trade to live good lives, and this means that we must respect one another. During wartime, politicians trumpet the need for autarky, for large-scale self-sufficiency, but this would only allow governments to be more bellicose while depriving their subjects of the infinitely greater choices and well-being that global peace and trade provide.

¹³ See Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay, 1600–1870* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983); Arthur J. Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); and Ann M. Carlos and Frank D. Lewis, *Commerce by a Frozen Sea: Native Americans and the European Fur Trade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

I argue that during the Arctic fur trade there was a brief window—from about 1900 to 1945—in which something very close to free trade (trade completely unsupervised by a state) reigned and that it was precisely the near absence of government and the centrality of market activity that fostered peaceful white-Inuit collaboration.¹⁴ I focus on the eastern Arctic and on the operations of the HBC, the largest and longest-lived fur-trading company in that area, to make my case, drawing on HBC trading post records, HBC employees' published memoirs, Canadian government publications, and oral interviews with HBC employees and Inuit elders to show that the practically stateless context of the Arctic fur trade allowed Inuit to prosper while maintaining the basic structure of their societies and approaching new opportunities as they saw fit. Rather than leading to a dependence on European goods and to colonization, market activity was a nexus for peaceful interaction and cooperation between Inuit and whites. Each group's desire for the other's goods made collaboration and cross-cultural understanding necessary.

The near statelessness of the Arctic enhanced the benefits of commerce-based interaction by creating an environment of mutual respect and accountability. When disagreements or crime arose, the parties concerned worked through the problems themselves. Trouble came in the form of the Canadian state, which increasingly intervened in Inuit justice and in the fur trade with the goal of asserting Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic and "protecting" Inuit from their traditional life and its challenges.

This book is divided into three parts. Part 1 establishes the near-stateless context of the Arctic fur trade. Chapter 1 describes the stateless politlegal framework of Inuit societies. Chapter 2 tells the history of competing nonnative claims to what is now the Canadian Arctic. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the eastern Arctic whaling industry (1820–1915) and the subarctic fur trade (1668–1870) and shows that the customs surrounding

¹⁴ I focus my study on the eastern Arctic, but I exclude the Fort Chimo region because of its different climate and even more different history, which is distinguished by an early HBC presence (from 1830 to 1844 and 1866 to 1952), an early Moravian missionary presence starting in the 1870s, and even early state intervention in the form of welfare, which was first issued to the sick and destitute there in the 1890s, decades before Inuit in other regions began to receive this kind of sporadic aid.

the eastern Arctic fur trade—most notably gift giving, grubstaking, and private aid—were only the latest iteration of industry practices developed to adapt commerce to native cultures. Part 2 describes the era of near-stateless fur trading in the eastern Arctic (1900–1945). Chapter 4 traces the rise of the eastern Arctic fur trade in the first decade of the twentieth century, focusing on the founding of Wolstenholme (1909) and Lake Harbour (1911) posts, the HBC’s earliest Arctic trading posts. Chapter 5 explains how the twentieth-century eastern Arctic fox trade functioned and how Inuit law maintained peace in the absence of police coercion. Part 3 describes the Canadian state’s multipronged attack on the traditional fur trade through wartime restrictions and bubble economies (1914–55, chapter 6), conservation measures and state-imposed Inuit relocations (1910–65, chapter 7), and relief policies (1910–65, chapter 8). Chapter 9 depicts the traditional Arctic fur industry’s transformation into a retail trade based on government relief income and Inuit families’ migration into coastal settlements (1940–65), which marked the end of their political autonomy and the beginning of their struggle against cultural annihilation and for political representation under Canadian rule.

In the final analysis, it was the Canadian state that destabilized Inuit societies and forcibly altered the economic and political trajectory of the Arctic, not voluntary market activity. By looking at the eastern Arctic during this brief period in Canadian and Inuit history, we can gain understanding of how state involvement affected the Inuit homeland more broadly, as well as appreciation of the destructive nature of the leviathan. My hope is that this antistate, promarket reading of modern Inuit and Canadian history will encourage historians of the Americas to more fully weigh the role of states in the conquest of native peoples and the gradual but utter transformation of the Western Hemisphere.

PART 1

Context: Inuit Sovereignty, Government Territorial Claims, and Early Trades

Northwestern European expeditioners made contact with the Inuit of the southern shore of Hudson Strait as early as 1611, when Henry Hudson's mutineers stopped at the Digges Islands (two islands in present-day Nunavut that are just off the tip of northern Quebec) on their way back to England.¹ By the end of the seventeenth century, Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) supply ships were passing through the strait every year or so on their way to the subarctic trading posts on James Bay and lower Hudson Bay. These ships traded with Inuit from southern Baffin Island and northern Nunavik, though the commerce was fairly sporadic.² But beginning in the early eighteenth century, HBC ships were specifically instructed to trade

¹ Susan Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluiliq Project: Historical Overview of Post-Contact Occupation in the Parc National Iluiliq Project Study Area" (unpublished report submitted to the Kativik Regional Government, Nunavik Parks Division, Nunavik, QC, 2017), 11–12; and Toby Morantz, *Relations on Southeastern Hudson Bay: An Illustrated History of Inuit, Cree and Eurocanadian Interaction, 1740–1970* (Westmount, QC: Avataq Cultural Institute, 2010), 2.

² Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluiliq Project," 13. Lofthouse notes that Inuit crossed the strait "relatively often, as seen in oral histories and historical documents" (20–21). See

with Inuit, who offered baleen, whale oil, seal oil, ivory, and occasionally furs in return for needles, knives, fishhooks, scissors, beads, and other European goods.³ In the mid-nineteenth century, American and Scottish whalers in search of baleen joined the regular traffic passing through the strait. The whalers had more prolonged contact with Inuit, whom they recruited to help hunt and process whales, and this led to more significant trading. The white fox trade began at the turn of the twentieth century, at the twilight of the whaling era.

The long period of steady trade in the eastern Arctic—from roughly 1700 to 1960—was marked by peace and cooperation. It was also distinguished by a context of near statelessness: the Arctic was formally under English and later Canadian rule (see chapter 2), but this rule was little more than nominal until after World War II. The Canadian Arctic was claimed from a great distance, with virtually no state agents on the ground even after the first far-flung police posts were established in the western Arctic around 1900 and in the eastern Arctic around 1920, meaning that there was no true monopoly of justice in the area. The state's rigid dictates about how people must interact and its imperative that whenever possible none but its hired mercenaries use force against others—even attackers—therefore had little standing. Instead of political *legislation*, then, Inuit *law*, a variety of stateless natural law, maintained order (discussed in chapter 1). Rather than causing discord and injustice, however, this state of affairs was essential to the peace that reigned in the Arctic.

Although the white traders came to the Arctic under the authority of the English and Canadian states, which undoubtedly influenced their behavior and their choices, neither government could shield traders from the consequences of their actions there. They could not kill or steal with the short-term (and sometimes total) impunity that is possible when one entity administers all judgments and punishments. Acts of aggression could result

also William Barr, "The Eighteenth Century Trade between the Ships of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Hudson Strait Inuit," *Arctic* 47, no. 3 (September 1994): 236.

³ Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluliliq Project," 20; Morantz, *Relations on Southeastern Hudson Bay*, 2; and Barr, "Eighteenth Century Trade," 236. Barr notes that in the eighteenth century, "the HBC was still *not* trading guns to Inuit," possibly due to earlier encounters that had resulted in deaths of Europeans (241).

in execution by the Inuit community. Moreover, the exigencies of life and survival in this place—where in an emergency no animal control would come, no ambulance would come, no police would come—meant that even the traders, as government subjects, had expanded recourse to defend their lives and property. The result was that in the remote Arctic, where ships from the Canadian South appeared only during the brief summers, Inuit and whites met on the relatively level steppe of natural law, where aggression has powerful and definite repercussions.

These realities encouraged mutual nonaggression, which held the promise not only of peace, but also of mutual aid and its many benefits. The eastern Arctic fur trade continued the robust collaboration of the whaling era that had preceded it (discussed in chapter 3), with Inuit instead harvesting and processing fur-bearing animals. The HBC and other fur traders followed the culturally accommodative customs established in the earlier fur trade of the subarctic (also discussed in chapter 3).

The combination of nominal state rule, *de facto* Inuit jurisdiction, and the history of profit-driven collaboration in the Canadian North was the context for the peaceful and productive fox trade of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 1

Law and Order in Inuit Societies: Private Property and Natural Law

In the early twentieth century, Inuit were seminomadic hunter-gatherers who lived in very small communities and migrated seasonally in pursuit of big game, marine mammals, migratory birds, and fish.

In the fall, Inuit went inland to hunt caribou and musk ox, which provided meat as well as thick furs for winter clothing and bedding, both of which wore out after a year of constant use. After “freeze-up,” when the ice was solid and people could travel by dog team, their focus shifted to walrus, narwhals, polar bears, and a variety of seals, whose ample fat stores nourished families and kept their homes warm, though they also caught arctic char and other fish. In the spring, migratory birds such as geese, terns, ptarmigan, puffins, and auks, as well as wild eggs, augmented their diet. After “breakup,” clear waterways permitted whaling, and seals and walrus continued to be taken from kayaks and umiaks (larger, canoe-like boats). People also continued fishing during the summer using weirs and harpoons. During the fleeting summers, the land also provided berries, roots, mosses, and grasses. However, diets varied depending on where people lived. Inland communities relied heavily on caribou and musk ox, while coastal communities depended on marine mammals.

During the winter season, Inuit lived in igloos (snowhouses made of hard snow blocks) or in sod houses (dugouts with foundations, walls, and

roofs made of bone, driftwood, or stone and insulated with sod, moss, or animal skins).¹ Winter sod houses seem to have been more common in the western Arctic and in Labrador than in the eastern Arctic, where people often wintered in igloos, but they were built in the eastern Arctic as well. Historian Shelagh D. Grant describes the winter sod houses of the northern Inuit of Baffin Island (present-day northern Nunavut, north of Quebec) as follows: “Stone foundations . . . were sunk into the ground for warmth. Skins were placed over whale ribs to form the roof, followed by a layer of heather for insulation, then a second layer of skins. A skin tent was attached on the inside to protect against frost buildup, and snow was packed around the outside for warmth.”² During the summer, Inuit lived in tupiks (sealskin or caribou skin tents with bone or wood frames anchored with stones).³ During the transitional seasons, they lived in *qarmat* (smaller dugouts with simple skin roofs).⁴ Winter transportation was by komatik (a wooden sled lashed together with rawhide strips and that was pulled by

¹ On igloos, see René R. Gadacz, “Igloo,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, December 19, 2006, last modified April 24, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/igloo>; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Igloo,” June 12, 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/igloo>; and Scott A. Heyes and Peter Jacobs, “Inuit Identity and the Land: Toward Distinctive Built Form in the Nunavik Homeland,” in *Memory and Landscape: Indigenous Responses to a Changing North*, ed. Kenneth L. Pratt and Scott A. Heyes (Athabasca, AB: AU Press, 2022), 251.

² Shelagh D. Grant, *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 10. The eastern Arctic dugouts Grant describes exhibit architectural continuity with Thule (precontact Inuit) winter houses. See Edward Mills and Harold D. Kalman, “Early Inuit (Thule) Winter House,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, April 30, 2020, last modified March 20, 2023, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/thule-winter-house>. On sod houses, see Heyes and Jacobs, “Inuit Identity,” 249–50. See also Sara Frizzell, “Team Excavates Sod House near Iqaluit, with Descendants of the House’s Residents Standing By,” CBC, November 4, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/archaeology-qaummaarviit-inookie-inuit-heritage-1.4383894>; and “Inuvialuit Sod House,” Qikiqtaruk / Herschel Island Digital Heritage Archive, Digital Heritage Research Group, University of Calgary, accessed August 27, 2024, <https://herschel.preserve.ucalgary.ca/sites/inuvialuit-sod-house/>.

³ On tupiks, see Edward Mills and Harold D. Kalman, “Tupiq,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/tupiq>; and Heyes and Jacobs, “Inuit Identity,” 251.

⁴ On *qarmat*, see Heyes and Jacobs, “Inuit Identity,” 252–53. For more on Inuit housing, see Molly Lee and Gregory A. Reinhardt, *Eskimo Architecture: Dwelling and Structure in the Early Historic Period* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2003).

what are today known as Canadian Eskimo dogs⁵). During the ice-free season, Inuit got around by kayak and umiak (both of which traditionally consisted of waterproof sealskins sewn together and stretched over a bone or driftwood frame). People mostly stayed put during freeze-up and breakup because unstable ice conditions made travel risky. Boats could be crushed by shifting ice, and those traveling on foot or by komatik could fall through thin ice or be carried out to sea on breaking ice.

Until about the 1950s, when Inuit began to abandon traditional camps to move into permanent settlements, Inuit societies had no state of any kind. They had no chieftaincy or kingdoms as other native societies did, and there was no extraction of tribute (taxation) from within or without. There were so-called camp bosses, but as Gordon Rogers, who in 1966 was Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNA) administrator for Pond Inlet (originally called Pond's Inlet; present-day Pond Inlet, Nunavut, on northern Baffin Island), explained, these leaders did not have any "trap-pings of leadership such as the white man would consider normal, . . . and there's very little in the way of order giving, just that he leads and people follow, generally."⁶ Moreover, Inuit camps were often family units, so the camp boss was a respected kinsman rather than a political or legal authority with the unique distinction of indisputable coercive power. Inuit communities governed themselves and worked for themselves. People settled their own disputes—sometimes with the help of mediators, other times among themselves. Great hunters, medicine men, and elders were looked up to, and they were influential in their communities. These natural community leaders came together to help settle disputes and to resolve other issues, but they did so provisionally and with group consent. Although they did not enforce any laws, the community could and did ask them to carry out some of its judgments.⁷

⁵ For an overview of the Canadian Eskimo dog, see "Canadian Eskimo Dog," Canadian Kennel Club, accessed November 19, 2024, <https://www.ckc.ca/en/Choosing-a-Dog/Choosing-a-Breed/Working-Dogs/Canadian-Eskimo-Dog>; and "Canadian Eskimo Dog," Canadian Eskimo Dog Club, accessed November 19, 2024, <https://canadianeskimodogclub.ca/breed/>.

⁶ Gordon Rogers, interview by Helen Burgess, summer 1966, T39-12, HBCA-HB.

⁷ Renée Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled: Inuit of the Central Arctic, 1550 to 1940* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 208–10; Atuat Akittiq and Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak, "Inunnguiniq (Making a Human Being)," and Rhoda Akpaliapik Karetak, "Healing Unresolved

Natural Law in the Arctic

Inuit societies were free of government, but they were far from lawless. They possessed a clear legal code that people enforced at their discretion—individually and in groups—as they reacted to transgressions and violations. The Inuit legal code was essentially a form of natural law adapted to the particularities of Inuit custom.

Natural law is the minimal set of ethics thought to apply to all human beings, regardless of their place, time, or culture, and it is called *natural* because it predates state and other institutional law (better known as legislation, manmade law, or, more critically, political law).⁸ As the libertarian political philosopher and Austrian economist Murray N. Rothbard explains, these rules are “natural” and universal because they are equally applicable to all human beings regardless of their social status: “These rules . . . can be clearly applied, and such ownership defended, regardless of the time or place, and regardless of the economic attainments of the society. It is impossible for any other social system to qualify as universal natural law; for if there is any coercive *rule* by one person or group over another (and *all* rule partakes of such hegemony), then it is impossible to apply the same rule for all; only a rulerless . . . world can fulfill the conditions of a universal ethic for all mankind.”⁹ All Inuit were equally subject to retribution for their crimes, regardless of their position in society. Only the clemency of victims and their kin could shield an offender from retribution and the obligation to make restitution. This true equality is the unmistakable mark of natural law, under which there are no coercive legal barriers to the meting out of justice or the free selection of mediators.

The basic tenets of natural law are the rights to person and property. Rothbard distills natural law into three simple rules: all people have ownership of their body; ownership of “the previously unused resources which [they have] occupied and transformed”; and ownership of “all titles derived from that basic ownership—either through voluntary exchanges or voluntary

Issues,” both in *Inuit Qaujimaqatugangit: What Inuit Have Always Known to Be True*, ed. Joe Karetak, Frank Tester, and Shirley Tagalik (Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2017), 125, 194.

⁸ Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 42 (emphases original). See also *Merriam-Webster Unabridged*, s.v. “natural law (n.).”

⁹ Rothbard, *Ethics of Liberty*, 44.

gifts.”¹⁰ Natural law is noticeably built on private property, which begins in the body and spreads via an individual’s labor to the goods and land an individual creates and tends (according to basic Lockean theory). Because people own their labor, which cannot be extricated from the soil they tend, they come to own land and resources that they act on and transform, even though they did not create them from nothing.¹¹

The concept of property is what allows conflicts to be averted or resolved, which is the purpose of law. As Rothbard and the private law theorist and Austrian economist Hans-Hermann Hoppe argue, every conflict is essentially a property dispute resting on the question of who is the rightful owner of something—and therefore rightfully its exclusive controller. Rothbard notes that private property’s purpose is to “establish physically separate domains of exclusive jurisdiction (so as to avoid possible conflicts concerning the use of scarce resources).”¹² Hoppe elaborates that if a person is presumed to own “all those goods that he already, in fact, and so far undisputed, controls and possesses[,] . . . he has . . . a better claim to the things in question than anyone else—and consequently, if someone else interferes . . . , then this person is *prima facie* in the wrong and the burden of proof . . . is on him.”¹³

Of course, people who borrow goods or otherwise acquire limited or temporary rights to them don’t have full property rights in them; and more important, those who acquire property illegitimately, by conquest or smaller-scale theft, have no property rights in what they hold, regardless of what constitutions, legislation, and other contrived law may trumpet.¹⁴ Hoppe describes precisely how private property can theoretically prevent conflict no matter how different people’s ideas and interests are, so long as people stick to working with what is theirs:

Theoretically, all conflicts regarding the use of any good can be avoided, if only . . . it is always clear which thing is owned and by whom, and

¹⁰ Rothbard, *Ethics of Liberty*, 42–43.

¹¹ Rothbard, *Ethics of Liberty*, 48–49.

¹² Rothbard, *Ethics of Liberty*, xx.

¹³ Hans-Hermann Hoppe, *A Short History of Man: Progress and Decline* (Auburn, AL: Mises Institute, 2015), 107.

¹⁴ Hoppe, *Short History of Man*, 107–8.

which is not. . . . No conflict arises, insofar as [people's] interests and ideas are concerned always and exclusively with their own, separate property. . . . And in order to avoid all conflicts from the beginning of mankind on, it must be further always clear how private property is originally established (and here the obvious answer is: by original and thus undisputed appropriation of previously unowned resources) and how property then can or cannot be transferred . . . (obviously: by mutual consent and trading rather than unilateral robbery).¹⁵

Until the British and Canadian governments claimed the Arctic, Inuit largely lived in undisputed territory that their forebears had legitimately acquired. They had ceded no rights to a state, so they had full, exclusive control of their land. In order to show how natural law kept order in Inuit societies, we must show how private property delineated individual and community jurisdiction. And we must show that Inuit were no different from Eurasian peoples and other human beings regarding the institution of private property—that it existed in their societies, albeit taking a locally and culturally contingent form.

Private Property in Land

Many historians distinguish indigenous land use, regardless of its exclusivity, from land ownership and claim that the indigenous peoples of North America had usufruct land tenure rather than private property in land. For example, historian Matthew Dennis explains Iroquois land tenure as follows: “Land could be occupied, used, and shaped, but not really owned. It was shared communally, entrusted to the group as a whole and distributed temporarily according to need and use.” William A. Starna goes further, boldly declaring that Indians “lacked entirely a concept of land ownership. . . . For all intents and purposes, the world of these native people was absent metes and bounds. In their place . . . stood ‘usufruct[,]’ . . . a claim laid . . . to lands on the basis of how they were managed and to what ends . . . individuals or collectives might use or extract resources from a given territory that they did not or could not hold in perpetuity for an unspecified period of time.” New Netherland historian Janny Venema similarly maintains that Indians

¹⁵ Hoppe, *Short History of Man*, 104n1.

were “hardly familiar with [the] European idea of land ownership. They thought of land in terms of *usufruct*, whereby some form of social unit—a clan . . . or lineage—held a right to use the land undisturbed, and as long as they did so, others recognized this right. People could lay claim not on the land itself, but on the things that were on the land during the various seasons of the year.”¹⁶

Even many scholars who delve more deeply into the details of private property and land tenure in the Americas refuse to concede that indigenous peoples owned land. Anthropologist Robert S. Grumet describes Indian land tenure as usufruct even though this puts him in the awkward position of having to make major qualifications to this claim. He explains that Indians did not think “land was free like air and water open to anyone wishing to share it” and then says that it was “available only to people with rights to land who were willing to properly respect local customs and concerns. Land was not free to strangers from foreign places who did not have these rights. Such people could only accept land as a granted gift or seize it outright.” Scholars such as Grumet fail to see that the exclusive nature of Indian land use rights is precisely what constitutes private property in land.¹⁷

¹⁶ Matthew Dennis, *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press / New York State Historical Association, 1993), 152; William A. Starna, “American Indian Villages to Dutch Farms: The Settling of Settled Lands in the Hudson Valley,” in *Dutch New York: The Roots of Hudson Valley Culture*, ed. Roger Panetta (New York: Hudson River Museum / Fordham University Press, 2009), 73–90, esp. 74–75; and Janny Venema, *Beverwijck: A Dutch Village on the American Frontier, 1652–1664* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), 40. See also Amy C. Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys: The Odyssey of the Delaware Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 32–34.

¹⁷ Robert S. Grumet, *The Munsee Indians: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 84. For more examples of private property in North American Indian societies, see Peter S. Leavenworth, “‘The Best Title That Indians Can Claim’: Native Agency and Consent in the Transfer of Penacock-Pawtucket Land in the Seventeenth Century,” *New England Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (June 1999): 282; Faren R. Siminoff, *Crossing the Sound: The Rise of Atlantic Communities in Seventeenth-Century Eastern Long Island* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 115; Tom Arne Midtrød, *The Memory of All Ancient Customs: Native American Diplomacy in the Colonial Hudson Valley* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 46–48; Midtrød, “Native American Landholding in the Colonial Hudson Valley,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (2013): 88–93; William A. Starna, *From Homeland to New Land: A History of the Mahican Indians, 1600–1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 106–7; Joshua L. Reid, *The Sea Is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs, an Indigenous Borderlands People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 19–20, 93, 103; Daniella Francesca Bassi, “Dutch-Indian

The idea that Indians had usufruct to the exclusion of freehold is a condescending misreading based on two widely held convictions. The first is that what something is depends only on what its participants consider it to be (e.g., Indians didn't have empires because they didn't know what empires were; powerful peoples just subjugated weaker peoples and repeatedly extracted resources from them).¹⁸ The second is that "European" ideas of property and markets led to indigenous Americans' geopolitical demise because Europeans were able to trick and later strong-arm native peoples out of their land.

I consider the realities of action and custom to outweigh abstractions about what Indians thought about what they were doing. Like historian Andrew Lipman, I think that "the idea that Natives were incapable of seeing land as a transferable property is a kind of Noble Savage hokum that insists Indians had a spiritual reverence for every square inch of soil, and thus barely made a mark on the earth."¹⁹ Accordingly, Inuit lived under natural law, because they most definitely had private property, whose boundaries influenced individuals' and groups' behavior.

Land Transactions, 1630–1664: A Legal Middle Ground of Land Tenures" (master's thesis, University of Vermont, 2017), 85–87, 89–91; and Bassi, "Native Americans Had a Lot More Private Property than You Think," *Mises Wire*, September 2, 2021, <https://mises.org/wire/native-americans-had-lot-more-private-property-you-think>.

¹⁸ My little parenthetical quip is based on the practices of the Inca Empire and on one scholar's brash dismissal of Pekka Hämäläinen's *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009) as anachronistic. For examples of indigenous states and empires, see Louis Baudin, *A Socialist Empire: The Incas of Peru*, trans. Katherine Woods, ed. Arthur Goddard (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1961); Helen C. Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); Thomas C. Patterson, *The Inca Empire: The Formation and Disintegration of a Pre-capitalist State* (New York: Berg, 1991); Allen Greer, *Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empires, and Land in Early Modern North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) (covering the Narragansetts, Massachusetts, Wampanoags, and Pequots of southern New England and the Aztec Empire); Daniella Bassi, "Pre-Columbian America Wasn't Exactly a Paradise of Freedom," *Mises Wire*, October 14, 2021, <https://mises.org/wire/pre-columbian-america-wasnt-exactly-paradise-freedom>; and Bassi, "The Inca Empire: An Indigenous Leviathan State," *Mises Wire*, November 24, 2021, <https://mises.org/wire/inca-empire-indigenous-leviathan-state>. These indigenous states are linked to their Eurasian counterparts by their shared trait of legalized coercion, the defining characteristic that cuts through the superficial differences of time and place.

¹⁹ Andrew Lipman, "Buying and Selling Staten Island," *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life* 15, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 17.

The Inuit conception of landed property was suited to the vast and isolated Arctic environment. In sharp contrast to common ownership or no private property, Inuit had what geographer Peter J. Usher calls *communal property*, which is simply private property owned by a specific group rather than an individual, a kind of ownership that exists around the world to this day (corporations and housing complexes managed by a homeowners' association are examples).²⁰ The ancestors of the Inuit established these rights through use and occupancy—living in and off the land—just as all other indigenous groups turned virgin land into private property, and property rights were vested in the group.

Inuit land ownership during the era of traditional camp life (from at least 1550 to about 1950) altered the landscape little: there were no fences; igloos melted away during the warmer months; and summer houses could be dismantled and moved almost without leaving a trace.²¹ In much of the Inuit homeland, the frozen subsoil precluded farming, and for much of the year there was little plant food available. These conditions necessitated seasonal migration (usually around the group's territory) in pursuit of food and discouraged the building of permanent structures. The treeless landscape probably didn't help matters either, although the tundra did offer plenty of rocks, which Inuit put to good use. The few lasting signs of Inuit occupation and possession were tent stones, depressions in the ground, refuse heaps, sod houses, stone foundations, and even stone houses, which all marked former habitation sites. Stone cairns also dotted the landscape,

²⁰ Peter J. Usher, "Property Rights as the Basis of Inuit Hunting Rights," in *Property Rights and Indian Economies*, ed. Terry L. Anderson (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), 51.

²¹ In 1966, G. N. Faulkner, the DNA administrator for Sugluk (present-day Salluit, Quebec), noted that there were signs of Inuit habitation going far back, including old stone houses, and Gordon Rogers, DNA administrator for Pond Inlet, noted the presence of eleven "very old" sod houses nearby. Faulkner and Rogers, interviews by Helen Burgess, summer 1966, T39-11 and T39-12, HBCA-HB. In 1909, HBC man Ralph Parsons (1881–1956), who established the Wolstenholme trading post (near present-day Ivujivik, Quebec, open 1909–47), spotted many old camps while attempting to contact the locals. He judged that the oldest ones were at least thirty-four years old. Wolstenholme post report, 1909–10, s.v. "General Remarks and Suggestions," B.368/e/1, microfilm no. 1M1260, HBCA-WPR. See also Laura Elena Kelvin, "The Inuit-Metis of Sandwich Bay: Oral Histories and Archaeology" (master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2011), 49; and John C. Kennedy, *Encounters: An Anthropological History of Southeastern Labrador* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 6.

acting as landmarks. Finally, there were the tombs of the dead, who were not interred but laid to rest on the hard ground and covered with stones.

Proof of title to land lay in people's knowledge and naming of it. Elder Mark Kalluak (1942–2011) explained: "Just as family units knew and protected each other, the land they occupied was as familiar as members of a family unit. The names of each lake, body of water, river, rapids and sea were held in relationship." There were also family stories attached to particular territories—further proof of ownership. Abutting groups knew each other and the limits of their respective lands. Strangers did not know the land—where to hunt or fish, where each family lived, or where the travel routes were—and therefore neither had nor could prove claim to it.²²

According to Usher, each of the original eight regional groups of Inuit in what is now Canada was "associated with a relatively stable geographic area," although the limits of these territories were subject to change due to geopolitical or ecological factors, which could cause retreat, abandonment, or expansion (such changes should not be considered unique to past societies, for even today they remain a distinct possibility for every group, no matter how fixed its borders may look on paper). The groups were made up of many smaller communities, and each of these was "identified not only with a particular territory but with a distinctive pattern of land use." These bands consisted of a few families, and their members considered themselves to have "unique rights in those territories and, to a lesser extent, rights in the territory of the tribe as a whole." The corollary to this, historian Renée Fossett observes, was that whereas members of the group "could hunt anywhere within the bounds of the territory a collective considered its own, strangers could not."²³

It was common, however, for individuals and groups to have fishing, hunting, and travel rights beyond their territory, and Usher remarks that there was "considerable overlapping use among groups."²⁴ In a terrain where hunters might have to go very far afield to find game in poor years, it made

²² Mark Kalluak, "About Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit," in Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik, *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, 56; and Usher, "Property Rights," 46–47.

²³ Usher, "Property Rights," 46; and Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled*, 211.

²⁴ Usher, "Property Rights," 48.

sense for people to organize themselves in broader confederations and to tolerate overlapping property rights. Group-centered and overlapping property rights gave Inuit a greater hunting range and a greater chance of survival in difficult seasons than individual- or household-centered and more strictly demarcated property rights would have. But that territorial boundaries were flexible did not mean that they did not exist or that Inuit did not consider themselves to have property in land.

Within the limits of the group, land ownership was communal, but this system too was based on the ubiquitous basic idea that acquisition and ownership originate in use. Because Inuit communities spent the long winter season split up into small camps of two or three families and came together only during the summer months, each kin subgroup lived, hunted, and trapped in a specific area and came to be associated with it. These areas included not only actual land, but also sections of sea ice, the vast sheets of which extended coastal peoples' usable land area for much of the year. Specific individuals also had "preeminent rights to a trapline or fishing spot." Accordingly, as Usher explains, although "no one could deny another the right to make a living," people had to seek permission to use land that wasn't theirs, and there was a clear "system of permitting or refusing others" entry and use rights.²⁵

The difference between individual- or household-based conceptions of private property and the group- and kinship-based Inuit land tenure is that Inuit individuals' and kin groups' particular landholdings were fluid and were coterminous with their land use. People could therefore move to a different part of their group's land, and when they did so, their former spot became available for others to claim. But property rights did not simply disappear as soon as one relocated. Anyone wishing to use the newly opened area had to ask the previous owner's permission before claiming it. A person could not simply start using someone else's spot by virtue of being a member of the community. First use of an unclaimed piece of community land conferred specific rights that superseded those of other members, if not the group's communal title to the land.²⁶

²⁵ Usher, "Property Rights," 48–49.

²⁶ Usher, "Property Rights," 48.

Although traditional Inuit land tenure was oriented around groups rather than individuals, the specificity of Inuit land use and the fact that one couldn't just set up shop anywhere make it clear that Inuit had a clear if simple system of private property in land. Group ownership, after all, is still private ownership; its exclusivity, even if not as narrow as that of individual ownership, makes group ownership an equal antipode to no ownership—that is, to land held in common by all mankind.

Private Property in Movable Items

In Inuit societies, private property of course extended to movable items, and food was a major form of property. Scholars often portray Inuit societies as being very openhanded with food and sharing it unconditionally. According to anthropologist Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, for example, "A person who requested food was never refused," and a good host always offered his visitors food. However, Fossett reports that although food was indeed shared in Inuit societies and stinginess was frowned upon, sharing tended to be restricted to kin groups and the local community. She notes that "within . . . the coresidential kin groups, refusal to share was seen as a threat to the [community's] internal security" but that generosity outside those bounds "was recognized as an equally serious danger." Because of the risk of sharing with a potentially unlimited number of people, "open-handedness beyond the local community was proscribed by assigning unrelated people to the category of 'strangers' and requiring that they be treated with aloofness." Looking at Inuit myths and folktales, Fossett also finds that sharing was suggested "only in reference to . . . regularly recurring . . . local scarcities of a season's duration." In contradiction to the narrative of Inuit as a people who were communal to the exclusion of private property, she finds that "the cultural ideal for conduct within the residential family group in times of mild deprivation over the short term did not apply in times of abundance or in times of serious deprivation over the long term; and it never applied to strangers."²⁷

²⁷ Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, *Traditional Social Organization among the Inuit of Kangiqsujaq, Nunavik*, trans. Robyn Bryant (Inukjuak, QC: Publications Nunavik / Avataq Cultural Institute, 2013), 124, 115; and Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled*, 204–6, quotes on 206, 205–6.

Discussing the traditional Inuit norms that were in place when he was a young man, elder Norman Attangalaaq (b. 1932) explained that it was considered theft to take someone else's cached meat. He recalled that his father confronted and scolded "a man who was not a member of our group, but had taken our [winter caribou] meat supply and potentially left our entire camp at risk" of starving.²⁸ This memory shows that there were clear limits to sharing in Inuit societies. Those limits were the substance of Inuit property rights. Food sharing did not consist of free gifts or a communal cache that anyone could take from freely. Meat was stored by specific people and households for the long winter ahead, and only members of their community could take from those caches. But even group members were expected to ask permission before taking food. Attangalaaq noted that his father was surprised and distressed when he found the cache empty, because no one had asked for permission to take from it.²⁹ That even group members were not entitled to take freely from caches shows that food was the property of individual households. The broader group had the special right to ask households for food in anticipation of aid, but it did not have property in household caches. The tacit obligation to share food with the group if able placed a latent limit on households' enjoyment of their edible property, but this did not negate their property rights in their food supply.

Inuit's somewhat broader property rights in relation to food may have developed as a buffer in a place where starvation was a relatively common fate. Survival depended on collaboration, not only on individual talent. Everyone in a community or kin group was ready to share their own precious food if necessary and possible, and having offered their resources up in the past, those who later found themselves in dire straits would be aided by their people. As Kalluak noted, "Inuit really had to look after each other in order to pass through hard times. They used to say that good fortune usually passes on from one to another and that we should always be helpful whenever we are able. In that way, when it's our turn and we need help,

²⁸ Norman Attangalaaq, "Conscientious Planning," in Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik, *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*, 107–9.

²⁹ Attangalaaq, "Conscientious Planning," 108.

others will remember us because of what we did for them.”³⁰ But sharing with anyone who came over the horizon—or, worse, tolerating theft—was a recipe for famine.

Although in Inuit societies private property did not take the more explicit forms that it did in Eurasian cultures, there was a clear sense of what belonged to a person and what belonged to the group—the sense that an individual’s resources were not for the enjoyment of all. Elder Émile Imaruittuq (b. 1934) explained that the word *nangminiq* means “something that is your own”: “If you had your own house, that house would be *nangminiq*. If you made clothing for yourself, that would be *nangminiq*.” The word’s meaning is also in keeping with Inuit notions about the bounds of sharing: “You also use *nangminiq* for your immediate relatives.” Of the same word, elder Lucassie Nutaraaluk (b. 1922) said, “*Nangminiq* means things are mine, nobody owns them but me. Guns, a canoe, an outboard are all things that are mine. Even a snowmobile, a *qamutiik* [komatik], or a harpoon are things that are mine.”³¹

Restorative Justice in the Arctic

Inuit’s culturally specific conception of private property in land and in movable goods was the pedestal on which the Inuit legal order stood. The corollary to exclusive access to something is the ability to defend it from unauthorized use. Property rights entail full control over what is owned, and that is impossible without the ability to defend it from trespass. If people can help themselves to something one claims as one’s own, one does not truly have property in it. Law therefore springs from private property.

Traditional Inuit societies had a definite conception of theft. As noted, one had to ask permission before taking something that was not one’s own. Attangalaaq explained that taking “personal belongings that had been stored by certain families other than yourself” was seen as theft. Imaruittuq

³⁰ Kalluak, “About Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit”; Attangalaaq, “Conscientious Planning”; Mariano Aupilaarjuk, “Planning and Preparing Well”; and Joe Karetak and Frank Tester, “Introduction: Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit, Truth and Reconciliation,” all in Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik, *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit*, 51 (quote), 42, 107–10, 177–78, 4.

³¹ Imaruittuq and Nutaraaluk, in Mariano Aupilaarjuk et al., *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, vol. 2 of *Interviewing Inuit Elders*, ed. Jarich Oosten, Frédéric Laugrand, and Wim Rasing (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 1994), 141.

elaborated: "If I were to take a cigarette and smoke it while people weren't looking that would be *ivajarniq* [eating or drinking something without asking first]. If I went to a house and ate food without permission that would be *ivajarniq*. If I actually took an object to keep for myself, that would be *tiglingniq* [stealing]. When I know there is a cache [of meat] and I take the cache for myself, that's *tiglingniq*." Imaruittuq's examples and use of specific terms to describe the act of taking and using someone else's things without permission show that such behavior was considered a clear violation. As such, those who engaged in it would face consequences if caught. Imaruittuq recalled that those caught stealing food were counseled by community elders but that there could be more serious repercussions: "The way Inuit dealt with this type of problem was through counselling. During counselling no one was tied up. Nutaraaluk said that when an individual became too dangerous to society, when he became threatening to others[,] they had to be tied up. That was the time when you had no choice but to tie them down and deal with them drastically, when they became *ilimanaq* [possible recidivists]."³²

Stealing food was an especially threatening act because the thief put his victims at risk of starvation: seeking their cached food during a period of unsuccessful hunting, those robbed could find themselves with no backup. And if multiple people's caches had been stolen, they would not be able to assist one another, further elevating the risk of death. So serious a crime was food theft that a chronic thief could face execution by the community.³³ Only under a system of specific, demarcated ownership could such behavior be considered an aggressive and therefore criminal act.

Inuit societies addressed crime through a form of restorative justice whose goal was to restore harmony and eliminate threats to the community. Rather than focusing on punishment, Inuit societies expected offenders to make reparation to their victims. Counseling by elders, shaming, shunning, and ridicule were also employed to bring transgressors in line.³⁴ Inuit

³² Attangalaq, "Conscientious Planning," 107; Imaruittuq and Nutaraaluk, in Aupilaarjuk et al., *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, 138, 139.

³³ Nelson H. H. Graburn, "Eskimo Law in Light of Self- and Group-Interest," *Law and Society Review* 4, no. 1 (August 1969): 48.

³⁴ Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled*, 207.

communities may have developed restorative justice because peace and unity afforded them the best chance of thriving in their homeland.

Britannica defines *restorative justice* as “a response to criminal behaviour that focuses on lawbreaker restitution and the resolution of the issues arising from a crime in which victims, offenders, and the community are brought together to restore the harmony between the parties. Restorative justice includes direct mediation and conflict resolution between the offender, the victims, their families, and the community. It holds the offender accountable to the other parties.” By contrast, *retributive justice* focuses on punishment. Most modern Western justice systems are retributive (although not to the exclusion of restitution), so they hold criminals accountable foremost to a government claiming to represent society, however broadly defined. Such systems inflict punishment on wrongdoers, but they fundamentally interpret offenses as crimes against society rather than against specific victims.³⁵ This very broad conception of victimhood leaves little recourse for the specific victims of a crime to be compensated, such that there is often no true resolution for them.

Murder cases are the best example of this. If someone kills a person in the modern West, in the best case he will be arrested, convicted, and imprisoned. But although the victim’s family might be pleased with this outcome, they receive no direct justice from it. Rather, a roughly one-size-fits-all punishment is applied for a crime against “society.” The victim’s family is not consulted. They do not exact retribution. It’s true that it’s possible for the victim’s family to receive some restitution for the damages incurred from the loss of their relative. But this requires bringing a separate civil case against the murderer. And even if this suit is successful, restitution is unlikely because a successful criminal case sends the murderer to prison, where he will generate almost no income with which to repay the family (unless he happens to have sufficient wealth in savings or assets that can be liquidated). The problem with retributive justice systems is that the criminal case takes significant precedence, even though the victim plays

³⁵ Debra Heath-Thornton, “Restorative Justice,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified August 26, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/restorative-justice>; Jon’a F. Meyer, “Retributive Justice,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified September 12, 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/retributive-justice>.

only a minor role in it and even though it leaves the criminal's debt to the victim unpaid. The primary concern of the criminal case is that the state's laws have been violated, not that the family or even the victim has been uniquely harmed. Justice is allegedly done in absolute terms, "for all." But in fact retributive justice absolves offenders of responsibility as far as their specific victims are concerned.

Restorative justice, on the other hand, is rooted in private property, although this is not usually mentioned in basic definitions of the concept. Restorative justice's idea that wrongs can be righted through redress for the specific victims—and its consequent focus on this rather than on general punishment (though restitution and punishment overlap in some cases)—implies that the offender appropriated something wrongly. This trespass against private property, rather than a vague idea of social justice, is the root of the wrong. When someone is robbed, his exogenous possessions are taken from him; when someone is assaulted, his body—the most primordial and intimate form of property—is trespassed upon and he is threatened with the potential theft of his life; when someone is killed, his life is taken. The idea of private property must precede the idea of reparation, of doing right by the specific individuals harmed rather than acting in the name of a collectivity.

Although restoration was the preferred way to resolve disputes, Inuit societies responded to the worst crimes—those that directly threatened the lives of others—with retribution in the form of execution, abandonment, and banishment. Describing how Inuit societies restored order in these situations, A. P. Low, commander of a 1903–4 Canadian expedition to the Arctic, wrote that when an individual became "dangerously obnoxious, or insane, a consultation of the men of the band [was] held, and one or more of them [were] deputed to remove the criminal or lunatic; in such a case the individuals acting [were] held blameless in the matter."³⁶

Aggression necessitating self-defense by an individual or the group was the trigger for retaliation against an offender. Belligerence was not

³⁶ A. P. Low, *Report on the Dominion Government Expedition to Hudson Bay and the Arctic Islands on Board the D.G.S. Neptune, 1903–1904* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1906), 164.

taken lightly in Inuit societies. Expressions of anger such as pushing, hitting, and yelling were considered legitimate threats to a person's life. As historian William Morrison explains, "Many Inuit believed that a man who spoke harshly had it in his mind to commit murder, and that it was thus reasonable and proper to kill him first." This is what happened to H. V. Radford and George Street, two white explorers who in 1912 were killed near Bathurst Inlet (present-day southwestern Nunavut, western Arctic, off the southeastern shore of Coronation Gulf) after Radford "threatened and struck" their guide.³⁷ According to Shelagh D. Grant, for Inuit, equanimity was equated with *isuma*, the "capacity for a sense of reason," and its opposite was insanity, which was marked by anger and aggression: "If an Inuk's actions became deviant and menaced others, and if that individual did not respond to other means of control, then he or she was considered to be . . . insane, providing just cause that his or her life be terminated."³⁸

Len Budgell (1917–2000), a longtime Hudson's Bay Company trader in Labrador and the Arctic, related the judgment of insanity passed on Claudia, an old Inuit woman who on several occasions during his tenure in Hebron (present-day northern Labrador),³⁹ from 1941 to 1942, had threatened to kill people's children. Initially Claudia and her husband were exiled to an island off the coast, where her husband looked after her and their son brought them food. Eventually, Claudia turned on the old man as well, expressing the wish to kill him and stalking him with a rock. Unable to sleep out of fear, he was moved to another island. That summer, the community held a meeting in which they decided to execute Claudia. Budgell and a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer visited her grave three years after her death and exhumed her skull, never having been certain of how she had met her fate. They found that her skull had been bashed in, possibly with

³⁷ William R. Morrison, *Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894–1925* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985), 148.

³⁸ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 19 (quote), 20.

³⁹ Hebron was a mission town founded by Moravians in 1830. The settlement was forcibly depopulated by the Canadian government in 1959. See France Rivet, "Hebron Mission National Historic Site of Canada," in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, November 18, 2019, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/hebron-mission-national-historic-site-of-canada>; and Carol Brice-Bennett, *Dispossessed: The Eviction of Inuit from Hebron, Labrador* (Montreal: Imaginaire | Nord, 2017).

an ivory-tipped harpoon. Claudia had become a menace to all around her, impossible to spare because of the danger she posed to the rest of the camp.⁴⁰

Those who were killed without provocation could be avenged by their families. This kind of judicial killing provided restitution to a murder victim's kin, usually in addition to eliminating an ongoing threat to the community. According to Imaruittuq, "If someone took revenge on another for committing a murder, there was nothing the community could do against the person who took revenge."⁴¹ One woman took revenge on her husband's murderer by feeding him boiling seal broth that scalded his throat and killed him (she had told him it was cold).⁴² However, Imaruittuq explained further that "if the victim didn't have anyone to avenge their murder then the murderer continued to live."⁴³ But a murderer who had not been killed in redress could still be killed by the camp if he was considered a threat. One murderer who was not killed was Idjuadjuk, who killed an entire family for opposing his marriage. As Renée Fossett explains, Idjuadjuk was allowed to live after he was married because the community considered him "satisfied and . . . unlikely ever to commit a similar offense."⁴⁴

Indeed, one of the most important factors in whether a murderer would continue to be a member of the community was whether he was likely to kill again. Nutaraaluk recalled, "Murderers used to be killed in the old days. If they were difficult to deal with and there was no longer any hope of integrating the murderer back into the community, they would be killed. But some of them were spared, if they showed they were willing to change."⁴⁵ This logic applied at the individual level as well, and those who found themselves at the mercy of someone who had "lost it," as Inuit culture conceived it, could defend their lives without repercussion.

⁴⁰ L. G. Budgell, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, December 6, 1982, tape 2 of 7, T11-54, HBCA-OHI.

⁴¹ Imaruittuq, in Aupilaarjuk et al., *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, 48.

⁴² Imaruittuq, in Aupilaarjuk et al., *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, 163.

⁴³ Imaruittuq, in Aupilaarjuk et al., *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, 167.

⁴⁴ Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled*, 208.

⁴⁵ Nutaraaluk, in Aupilaarjuk et al., *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, 164.

Those who had killed accidentally were not harmed, however.⁴⁶ The fate of accidental killers shows the restorative, property-based principles of Inuit law at work: such people could not rightfully be killed in redress, for this would be a crime against their persons. Neither were they a threat to others, so there were no grounds to execute them in self-defense. But somewhat unexpectedly, it doesn't seem that accidental killers were expected to provide restitution in any form, even though accidents, like crimes, cause property damages that must rightfully be compensated. In murky cases such as accidental killings, then, Inuit communities placed harmony above restitution.

Inuit Violations of Natural Law

In the absence of the state, Inuit law, based on natural law and rooted in private property, kept order and did so effectively. But this does not mean that Inuit law had no systemic flaws or that injustices never occurred. Inuit societies sanctioned two practices that violate natural law: female infanticide and arranged marriage.

Inuit sometimes practiced what is generally considered female infanticide, though natural rights theorists and other philosophers debate whether analogous scenarios constitute murder.⁴⁷ Sometimes when a girl was born in a very difficult winter (perhaps one in which people had been forced to eat their dogs or their own clothes and several people had even starved to death), the baby was put outside, where she was sure to die of exposure, or was smothered to death (though this seems to have been less common).⁴⁸ Scholars generally posit that this practice regulated population size, allowed the communities to use scarce food supplies more efficiently, and ensured groups' survival in tough times. However, the case of the Netsilik Inuit of

⁴⁶ Aupilaarjuk et al., *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, 170.

⁴⁷ Additionally, Fossett has made the point that "to speak of infanticide is to give the wrong name to an act that did not, in Inuit ideology, involve the killing of a human being" because Inuit believed in the eternal reincarnation of souls. See Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled*, 231, 227–31.

⁴⁸ Geert van den Steenhoven, *Legal Concepts among the Netsilik Eskimos of Pelly Bay* ([Ottawa]: Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, February 1959), 49–50, 74n41; and Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 80.

Pelly Bay (present-day central Nunavut, western Arctic, off the lower Gulf of Boothia), who are said to have practiced systematic female infanticide—or at least to have had the highest rate—has been a source of ongoing debate about the purpose of the practice.⁴⁹ With the possible exception⁵⁰ of the Netsilik Inuit, then, the logic behind the practice seems to have been that the more males there were, the more food there would be, because males were the hunters (though there were some women hunters and trappers). Although families also gave unwanted children up for adoption, female infants faced the danger of being left to die if they were born during the long winter months, when people were quite isolated and food did not always materialize.

There is much controversy about the legality (as distinct from the morality) under natural law of denying aid to someone when doing so will cause the person's death. The legal question is whether this denial constitutes murder. Murray Rothbard argues that the decision to stop sustaining someone is not a crime under natural law. This position stems from each person's private property in body and labor, as do all natural law precepts. Individuals cannot be said to own—to control—their bodies and labor unless they are free to decide what to do with them. According to natural law, the obligation to care for a dependent (or anyone else) is unenforceable

⁴⁹ See Knud Rasmussen, *The Netsilik Eskimos, Social Life, and Spiritual Culture*, vol. 8 of *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921–24* (Copenhagen: Nordisk, 1931), 139; Asen Balikci, "Female Infanticide on the Arctic Coast," *Man*, n.s., 2, no. 4 (December 1967); Balikci, *The Netsilik Eskimos* (New York: Doubleday, 1970); M. J. Dunbar, "Stability and Fragility in Arctic Ecosystems," *Arctic* 26, no. 3 (September 1973); Carmel Schrire and William Lee Steiger, "A Matter of Life and Death: An Investigation into the Practice of Female Infanticide in the Arctic," *Man*, n.s., 9, no. 24 (June 1974); and David Riches, "The Netsilik Eskimo: A Special Case of Selective Female Infanticide," *Ethnology* 13, no. 4 (October 1974).

⁵⁰ Fossett notes that it was "fairly common practice, as late as 1920, to withhold life and humanness from female bodies born in bad economic circumstances," but she adds that "among Netsilik many times were bad, or at least difficult. . . . Most other Inuit groups experienced fewer occasions when a new life would place the entire community in jeopardy." Fossett also notes that life was withheld from male infants as well, though this was "less common." Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled*, 230. Milton M. R. Freeman disagrees and ascribes the practice to "assertion of male dominance within the household," while Arthur E. Hippler thinks the cause was "(primarily) male initiated aggressiveness at the ambivalently perceived female, and jealousy of the infant." See Freeman, "A Social and Ecologic Analysis of Systematic Female Infanticide among the Netsilik Eskimo," *American Anthropologist*, n.s., 73, no. 5 (October 1971): 1016; and Hippler, "Additional Perspective on Eskimo Female Infanticide," *American Anthropologist*, n.s., 74, no. 5 (October 1972): 1319.

because it amounts to forced labor. This is so even if the person to whom aid (labor) is denied is a child that the parent chose to bring into the world, because the willing parent has no contract with the child but rather has made a nonbinding promise to raise it.⁵¹

In theory, therefore, if there were no other option, at least, a parent could legally abandon a child, even if it were sure to die by this act, without committing a crime against the child's person, although this act would be morally abhorrent. A well-known example is the case of Kikkik (examined in chapter 7), an Inuit woman who in 1958 left two of her children for dead under desperate circumstances, when to continue to travel with them would likely have led to her own death. In cases in which there was no other option, then, Inuit cannot justly be said to have committed infanticide. But Inuit often did have other options. They knew where babies came from and could have practiced abstinence and other natural birth control measures. Some babies could possibly have been given up for adoption, and many were. In fact, Corporal W. V. Bruce in his 1916 police report on the Copper Inuit noted that exposure of newborns happened "if no one [was] found who [was] willing to adopt them," and added that the practice was rare "as the birth

⁵¹ As Rothbard explains, "A parent does not have the right to aggress against his children, *but . . .* the parent should not have a *legal obligation* to feed, clothe, or educate his children, since such obligations would entail positive acts coerced upon the parent and depriving the parent of his rights." See Rothbard, *Ethics of Liberty*, 100. For Rothbard's entire argument about natural rights in regard to children, see *Ethics of Liberty*, chap. 14, on which this analysis is based.

Rothbard contends that promises differ from contracts in that the latter are exchanges of property titles, the outright breach of which would constitute theft, and that where breaking an agreement does not constitute theft, there has been no breach of contract but rather a broken promise and therefore no liability for damages. See Rothbard, *Ethics of Liberty*, chap. 19 and p. 98 (on the alleged contracts between parent and child).

There is of course much debate on this topic and on the closely related topics of abortion and lifeboat scenarios. For proabortion theories based on property rights, see Rothbard, *Ethics of Liberty*, chap. 14; Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1971); Walter Block, "Toward a Libertarian Theory of Abortion," *Libertarian Forum*, September 1977; and Walter E. Block, *Evictionism: The Compromise Solution to the Pro-life Pro-choice Debate Controversy* (Singapore: Springer, 2021). Block's theory of evictionism builds on Rothbard's and Thomson's work. On lifeboat scenarios, see Rothbard, *Ethics of Liberty*, chap. 20; and Michael Huemer, *The Problem of Political Authority: An Examination of the Right to Coerce and the Duty to Obey* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), chap. 5. For natural law in relation to assisted suicide, see Gregory James Corcoran, "End-of-Life Decision and the Natural Law" (research paper, Seton Hall Law School, May 1, 2013).

rate is low and the natural affection of the mothers prevents this.”⁵² More Inuit girls could also have been raised as hunters; after all, female hunters were not unheard of. In cases in which they abandoned babies when there were other options, Inuit can be said to have committed infanticide, or at the very least a morally unconscionable act.

That said, it’s unknown how often female abandonment and infanticide actually occurred. Anthropologists have posited rates as high as 66 percent based on the ratio of males to females in different populations, but this is faulty reasoning that does not seem to take into account other causes of female death or the fact that the ratios observed may have reflected unique and temporary circumstances. Schrire and Steiger and Michael Chapman both simulated female infanticide and its effects, concluding, respectively, that the groups could not have survived with female infanticide rates over 8 percent and 30 percent.⁵³

Legal scholar Sidney L. Harring also reminds us that some anthropologists observed “approximately equal male/female ratios,” including Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who worked among the Copper Inuit and concluded that exposure of infants was rare or nonexistent, and E. M. Weyer, who found that most Inuit communities had a higher ratio of women to men but a slightly lower ratio of girls to boys. He adds that “the emphasis on infanticide took a real aspect of Arctic life out of its social context: a high death rate from all sources existed for everybody: men died in hunting accidents; women died in childbirth; men, women, and children died of starvation and exposure to the elements.” Harring maintains that the police and missionaries misrepresented infanticide (in addition to blood feuds) as widespread in Inuit societies, when it was in reality a last resort “used only when food supplies were very short, and nursing mothers could not travel with two suckling children.” Finally, it should be noted that not a single

⁵² W. V. Bruce, “Report on the Copper Eskimo,” in *Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1916* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1917), 341, quoted in Sidney L. Harring, “The Rich Men of the Country: Canadian Law in the Land of the Copper Inuit, 1914–1930,” *Ottawa Law Review / Revue de droit d’Ottawa* 21, no. 1 (1989): 37.

⁵³ Balikci, “Female Infanticide,” 615–16; Schrire and Steiger, “A Matter of Life and Death”; Chapman, “Infanticide and Fertility among Eskimos: A Computer Simulation,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 53, no. 2 (August 1980).

person was arrested for infanticide, according to Harring. There was never enough evidence, and that is telling.⁵⁴

Female infant abandonment and infanticide had the potential to exacerbate imbalances in the population and heighten the competition for wives, which was sometimes so desperate that there are stories of men who killed a woman's husband or family to take her as a wife. Perhaps due to the relative lack of women at times, and the small numbers of people in general, Inuit arranged marriages. Sometimes the agreements were between the families of young people, but more often they were between a man and the family of a girl or woman. The traditional marriage ritual was led by the man, who forcibly took the woman he wished to marry from her home (typically with her family's support) to make her his wife. This undeniable violation of the property rights of young women in their persons (and sometimes those of young men, whose marriages were also arranged sometimes) was accompanied by further trespasses in the form of marital rape, although women did have full recourse to self-defense against rapists.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, the marital rite of passage was seemingly sanctioned by everyone except some of the young girls who were undergoing it at any given time, and marital rape was not considered a crime meriting the community's most drastic measures. It was up to the spouses to work it out, whatever that might mean, and discussing it was taboo.⁵⁶ Women fortunately seemed to regain control of their bodies as they and their marriages matured.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See Harring, "Rich Men," 27–28, 29 (quotes), 29n89, citing Weyer, *The Eskimos* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1932), 217–32; and memorandum from Stefansson to police inspector W. J. Beyts, May 2, 1912, in RG 85, Vol. 869, File 8455, Public Archives of Canada (today Library and Archives Canada), Ottawa.

⁵⁵ Imaruittuq confirmed women's right to retaliate against a rapist in Aupilaarjuk et al., *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, 57. Elder Apphia Agalakti Awa (1931–96) talked about her and another young woman's resistance against their husbands' unwanted sexual advances in Nancy Wachowich, *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women*, collab. Apphia Agalakti Awa, Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak, and Sandra Pikujak Katsak (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 40.

⁵⁶ On arranged marriages and rape, see Aupilaarjuk et al., *Perspectives on Traditional Law*, 55–58; and Wachowich, *Saqiyuq*, 40–42. For Awa's heartbreaking story of being taken in marriage, see Wachowich, *Saqiyuq*, 36–41.

⁵⁷ For example, wife-sharing arrangements notably involved the women themselves, not only the men who would sleep with them. The woman to be shared was actively involved in all of the many wife-sharing arrangements of HBC trader and later Northwest Territories

Self-Rule as a Precondition for Free Trade

In a difficult world peopled by imperfect beings, some number of whom are deviant and aggressive, culturally specific natural law works better than state-imposed legislation precisely because there is no rigid legal edifice that prohibits people from defending themselves and that forcibly intervenes in all disputes. Injustices could and did occur among Inuit, but the individual could always fight back. Whether fighting back would succeed is another story—this uncertainty is one of the harsh realities of living among other human beings, all of whose physical power and social judgments can act on our individual lives.

In spite of the grave injustices of Inuit law, the institution of property from which the Inuit jurisdictional order sprang signals Inuit societies' place in the universal tradition of natural law adapted to local custom and circumstances: like all peoples around the world, Inuit were ultimately motivated by the desire to protect themselves and the fruits of their labor, an instinct springing from the sense of *this is mine*. Recognizing this very broad but distinct legal foundation that connects Inuit and white peoples (and, indeed, all other humans) is key to explaining the eastern Arctic's peaceful, mutually beneficial trade in the absence of third-party intervention during the early twentieth century.

politician Duncan Pryde (1937–97). However, Pryde also mentioned that men who shared a wife became kin and could rely on each other's relatives in times of need. The social protection that wife sharing provided to a family, especially one among strangers, suggests that in at least some cases there may have been pressure on the woman to assent to these agreements in order to protect her family. See Pryde, *Nunaga: Ten Years of Eskimo Life* (New York: Walker, 1971), chap. 10.

CHAPTER 2

No-Man's-Land? Northern Statelessness, Corporate Privilege, and Market Freedom

In combination with the stateless Inuit sociolegal order, the minimal assertion of British and Canadian state authority in the Arctic before World War II allowed something approaching an open market to flourish for several decades. Natives and whites were able to transact on a relatively level playing field because the absence of state force limited the white traders' ability to shield themselves from the consequences of unjust acts. The inability of the state's police power and legal monopoly to obstruct justice in the Arctic, at least in a timely manner, led to respectful cross-cultural interaction and collaboration.

The reality is that no government ever had (or, for that matter, has) a rightful claim to any of the so-called Canadian Arctic: only Inuit people and individual newcomers—those who settled in previously unowned spots or who were permitted by Inuit to live among them—have any legitimate property rights in that land. The governments of England and later Canada simply laid claim to the area against other states, superseding the rights of the land's true owners. Other states recognized Britain's and Canada's claims, and this recognition established the British and Canadian governments' "sovereignty"—their right to subjugate the rightful owners of the land with impunity. But although these governments claimed to own the Arctic, the region was virtually stateless until the 1940s, with land either

falling under private Inuit control or practically unowned, the division that predated European contact.

The Crown, the Company, and Canada

Virtually as soon as explorers visited the Arctic in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the English crown claimed possession of and jurisdiction over the region, but the crown's focus was far to the south, where it would remain for a long time. In 1670, Charles II granted the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), in which his cousin, the English-German Prince Rupert, was a leading investor, its originating charter. With no authority whatsoever to do so, this charter, born of nepotism and cronyism, granted the HBC the exclusive right to trade and operate in the vast Hudson Bay drainage basin (a 1.5-million-square-mile [3.9-million-square-kilometer] area encompassing parts of present-day Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and even the United States), which was fittingly named Rupert's Land. As early as the 1690s, the HBC was trading with Inuit sporadically as its ships passed through Hudson Strait and Hudson Bay on their way to Rupert's Land, but there were not yet any eastern Arctic trading posts. In 1821, when the HBC merged with its archrival, the North West Company, the HBC's trade monopoly expanded to cover what in 1859 became the North-Western Territory. This massive monopoly was reaffirmed in 1838 with the renewal of the HBC's charter.¹

Thus, the HBC basically owned Rupert's Land for two hundred years. The HBC's ownership of Rupert's Land was every bit as illegitimate as the British state's claim to the right to give it to the company. The HBC was granted land and legal power that wrongfully superseded preexisting indigenous property titles and sovereignty. The 1670 royal charter gave the HBC "the sole Trade and Commerce of all those Seas, Streights, Bays, Rivers, Lakes, Creeks, and Sounds, in whatsoever Latitude they shall be, that lie within the entrance of the Streights commonly called Hudson's Streights,

¹ The North West Company, founded in 1779, was a multiple partnership comprising several independent traders who sought to break the HBC's monopoly by forming a coalition. See Jennifer S. H. Brown, "North West Company," *Canadian Encyclopedia*, June 6, 2007, last modified March 4, 2015, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/north-west-company>.

together with all the Lands, Countries and Territories, upon the Coasts and Confines of the Seas, Streights, Bays, Lakes, Rivers, Creeks and Sounds, aforesaid, which are not now actually possessed by any of our Subjects, or by the Subjects of any other Christian Prince or State.” As “true and absolute Lords and Proprietors” (“SAVING ALWAYS, the Faith, Allegiance and Sovereign Dominion due to Us, our Heirs and Successors, for the same”) of these lands (including the fisheries around them), the company could dispose of them freely.

To enforce the vast trade monopoly it was granting the company, the English crown used threats and coercion to keep others out of Rupert's Land and out of the so-called Indian trade. The charter explicitly prohibited English subjects from entering Rupert's Land and from interfering with the trade. Offenders were forced to pay the company £1,000 in money or contract labor and had to surrender half the value of their ships and merchandise to the HBC and the other half to the crown, a win-win for the cronies:

WE STREIGHTLY charge, command and prohibit, for Us, Our Heirs and Successors, all the Subjects of Us, Our Heirs and Successors . . . that none of them directly or indirectly, do visit, haunt, frequent or trade, traffic or adventure, by way of Merchandize, into, or from any the said Territories, Limits or Places, hereby granted . . . other than the said Governor and Company, and such particular Persons as now be, or hereafter shall be, of that Company . . . unless it be by the Licence and Agreement of the said Governor and Company in Writing first had and obtained, . . . upon Pain that every such Person or Persons . . . shall incur . . . the Forfeiture, and the Loss of the Goods, Merchandizes, and other Things whatsoever, which so shall be brought into this Realm of England, or any the Dominions of the same, . . . for which the said Governor and Company shall find, take and seize, in other Places out of our Dominions, where the said Company, their Agents, Factors or Ministers, shall trade, traffick or inhabit, by Virtue of these Our Letters Patent, as also the Ship and Ships, with the Furniture thereof, wherein such Goods, Merchandizes, and other Things, shall be brought and found, the one Half of all the said Forfeitures to be to Us, Our Heirs and Successors, and the other Half thereof

WE DO by these Presents clearly and wholly for Us, Our Heirs and Successors, give and grant unto the said Governor and Company, and their Successors.

AND FURTHER, . . . the said Offenders . . . [are] to suffer such other Punishment as to Us, Our Heirs and Successors . . . shall seem meet and convenient, and not to be in anywise delivered until they, and every of them, shall become bound unto the said Governor for the time being in the Sum of One Thousand Pounds at the least.

The company could make and unmake law as “necessary and convenient for the good Government of the said Company, and of all Governors of Colonies, Forts and Plantations, Factors, Masters, Mariners, and other Officers employed or to be employed, in any of the Territories and Lands aforesaid, and in any of their Voyages; and for the better Advancement and Continuance of the said Trade, or Traffic and Plantations, and the same Laws, Constitutions, Orders and Ordinances so made.” It could assess penalties and mete out punishment. It had jurisdiction over its members “in all Causes, whether Civil or Criminal,” and the power to “execute Justice accordingly.” The one huge caveat was that it had to remain within English law, or at least close enough to be “agreeable to the Laws, Statutes or Customs of this our Realm.” Had the crown permitted the company to contradict English law, it would have ceded its juridical monopoly over the HBC and Rupert’s Land, in effect rendering the latter an independent state, which of course would not have benefited the crown.

In keeping with the status of Rupert’s Land as a kind of vassal state, the company also had the unique right to provide for its own protection, which as we have seen is a right commonly limited by states, who instruct their subjects to turn to the government for protection instead. The charter states:

WE DO GIVE and grant unto the said Governor and Company, and their Successors, free Liberty and Licence . . . to send either Ships of War, Men or Ammunition, unto any their Plantations, Forts, Factories, or Places of Trade aforesaid, for the Security and Defence of the same, and to choose Commanders and Officers over them, and to give them Power and Authority . . . to continue or make Peace or War with any Prince or People whatsoever, that are not Christians, in any Places where the said Company shall have any Plantations, Forts or Factories, or adjacent thereunto, as shall be most for the Advantage and Benefit of the said Governor and Company, and of their Trade; and also to right and recompense themselves upon the Goods, Estates or People

of those Parts, by whom the said Governor and Company shall sustain any Injury, Loss, or Damage, or upon any other People whatsoever that shall any Way, contrary to the Intent of these Presents, interrupt, wrong or injure them in their said Trade. . . . And that it shall and may be lawful to and for the said Governor and Company, and their Successors . . . to erect and build such Castles, Fortifications, Forts, Garrisons, Colonies or Plantations, Towns or Villages, in any Parts or Places within the Limits and Bounds granted before in these Presents, unto the said Governor and Company, as they in their Discretion shall think fit and requisite, and for the Supply of such . . . as also to transport and carry over such Number of Men being willing thereunto, or not prohibited, as they shall think fit, and also to govern them in such legal and reasonable Manner as the said Governor and Company shall think best, and to inflict Punishment for Misdemeanors, or impose . . . Fines upon them for Breach of their Orders.²

Although the HBC was subject to English authority, the company's rights to essentially protect a border by barring entry; to seize illegal trespassers (and half of their assets) and other alleged criminals; to bring judgment and punishment on violators of company and royal law; to erect fortifications; and to engage in defensive warfare rendered Rupert's Land a quasi vassal state.³ In theory, the HBC ruled over all nonnative people in Rupert's Land because nobody unaffiliated with the company was permitted to be in the area.

The HBC decidedly did not rule over native peoples in Rupert's Land; however, its discretionary war-making power, legalized by the English state, certainly had the potential to influence the behavior of native individuals and communities. But although potent legal instruments like the HBC's charter have a great power to do harm, geopolitical realities cannot be

² All charter quotes from Charles II, "Royal Charter of the Hudson's Bay Company," trans. Sean Barrett, Charles Franks, and the Project Gutenberg Online Distributed Proofreading Team, HBC Heritage, Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation, Hudson's Bay Company, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://www.hbcheritage.ca/things/artifacts/the-charter-and-text>. For a very readable analysis highlighting the charter's key points, see Hudson's Bay Company, *Lords and Proprietors: A Reader's Guide to the Hudson's Bay Company Charter* (Toronto: Hudson's Bay Company, 2004).

³ In fact, the charter declares Rupert's Land one of England's "Plantations or Colonies in America."

legislated away. The vastness and early remoteness of Rupert's Land was a great blessing, shielding free native peoples from the coercion of state subjecthood: the company didn't know the land well enough to be a geopolitical bully, nor did it have the resources to be an offensive superpower in such a large area. In fact, it couldn't even keep independent traders out of the area. Frenchmen had traded at the peripheries of Rupert's Land before the company's existence and continued to do so until 1763 (the end of the Seven Years' War and of New France), when Scotsmen succeeded them, establishing the North West Company in 1779.⁴ These early competitors would be succeeded by many more, who would follow the HBC almost to the ends of the earth in pursuit of fur and profits, bringing ever more consumer choice to native peoples, such that in many places, natives could take their business elsewhere, not just take it away. Native peoples therefore retained their equalizing natural freedom to defend themselves in the event of HBC aggression and to withhold their goods and labor (freedoms that state subjects ultimately lack vis-à-vis the state) until Canadian jurisdiction gradually began to displace company jurisdiction after 1870, with the arrival of the mounted police and white settlement in native lands.

Therefore, although it was nurtured by state protection and favor, the HBC largely resembled an actual private company operating in the absence of state coercion; that is, in a free market. It was fully liable for its actions, it could not take business for granted, and it was a fairly decent neighbor to the indigenous peoples with whom it did business—Abenakis, Innu (a.k.a. Montagnais), Ojibwes, Crees, and Inuit, among others. The company's policy, which would continue into the Arctic fur trade era of the twentieth century, was not to interfere in the lives of the different groups.

But neither the HBC's crony, fundamentally illegitimate title to the land nor its authority over the land were safe from state encroachment. In 1803, the crown expanded the jurisdiction of the Upper and Lower Canada (present-day southern Quebec and Ontario) courts to include all

⁴ See "The North West Company," HBC Heritage, Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation, Hudson's Bay Company, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://www.hbcheritage.ca/history/acquisitions/the-north-west-company>; and "Radisson and des Groseilliers," HBC Heritage, Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation, Hudson's Bay Company, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://www.hbcheritage.ca/people/explorers/radisson-and-des-groseilliers>.

crimes and offenses committed in Indian territories and in any other part of North America that was not under American jurisdiction. Rupert's Land fell under the latter category, though it was not mentioned. This broad measure shifted executive power on company lands away from the HBC, even though the royal charter had given the company the legal power to enforce English and company law. In 1821, the crown explicitly affirmed that the 1803 expansion of jurisdiction applied to company lands and commanded the HBC and other entities holding monopoly grants to "enter into such Security as shall be required by His Majesty for the due Execution of all Processes Criminal and Civil, as well within the Territories included in any such Grant, as within those granted by Charter" and to turn in any accused "in their Employ or acting under their Authority" for trial.⁵

With the 1821 legislation, the British crown also gave itself the right to regulate the fur trade. The law declared the crown's right to grant new Indian trade monopolies "in all such Parts of *North America* . . . not being Part of the Lands or Territories heretofore granted to the said Governor and Company of Adventurers of *England* trading to *Hudson's Bay*, and not being Part of any of His Majesty's Provinces in *North America*, or of any Lands or Territories belonging to the *United States of America*." The legislation also required the HBC and other grant holders to submit records of all their North American employees annually. Most important, it severely reduced the life of royal charters and other grants to twenty-one years; this practically constituted taking back Rupert's Land and the HBC trade monopoly, which in 1670 had been granted to the company "for ever hereafter." In a classic instance of legal gaslighting, the legislation closes by asserting that "nothing in this Act contained shall be taken or construed to affect any Right, Privilege, Authority, or Jurisdiction which the Governor and Company of Adventurers trading to Hudson's Bay are by Law entitled to claim and exercise under their Charter; but that all such Rights, Privileges, Authorities,

⁵ George III, *An Act for Extending the Jurisdiction of the Courts of Justice in the Provinces of Lower and Upper Canada, to the Trial and Punishment of Persons Guilty of Crimes and Offences within Certain Parts of North America adjoining to the Said Provinces* (London, 1803); and George IV, *An Act for Regulating the Fur Trade, and Establishing a Criminal and Civil Jurisdiction within Certain Parts of North America* (London, 1821).

and Jurisdictions shall remain in as full force, virtue, and effect, . . . any thing in this Act to the contrary notwithstanding.”⁶

Despite the severe curtailment of the HBC’s ill-gotten property rights in 1821, its charter was renewed that same year. Since the HBC had just swallowed up the North West Company, the trade of the two former competitors all came under the protection of the renewed charter. Better yet, the 1821 legislation also gave the HBC administrative control of what in 1859 became the North-Western Territory (which included the present-day Yukon and Northwest Territories as well as the northern reaches of present-day Alberta and Saskatchewan). The company’s trade monopoly now spanned the continent, a huge gain.⁷

But though the company’s charter was renewed again in 1838,⁸ its property rights and operations were more vulnerable to the whims of the state than ever before. According to historian Shelagh D. Grant, the company had for years been able to convince the British Parliament that the HBC’s lands were “unfertile and of value only to the fur trade,” but when its charter again came up for renewal in 1859, Parliament decided to investigate whether the land had any value, and a select committee of the House of Commons hired John Palliser to undertake a three-year study of the region. The question had become a political one: many Canadians were eager for the opening of the northwestern frontier because it offered the prospect of economic growth and imperialistic expansion similar to what the United States was experiencing. The possibility that the American government would claim the region was another fear. But the frontier couldn’t be opened with the HBC’s crony charter and property rights to most of British North America standing in the way. Unsurprisingly, Palliser’s 1860 report found potential value in Rupert’s Land, specifically a large northern fertile belt that was allegedly suitable for settlement, and recommended that a colony

⁶ George IV, *Act for Regulating the Fur Trade*.

⁷ “North West Company.”

⁸ “The Royal Charter,” HBC Heritage, Hudson’s Bay Company History Foundation, Hudson’s Bay Company, accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.hbcheritage.ca/things/artifacts/the-royal-charter>; and Arthur J. Ray, “Hudson’s Bay Company,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, April 2, 2009, last modified January 19, 2023, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/hudsons-bay-company>.

Figure 1. Canada and Rupert's Land, 1870–98



Source: Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, in David J. Hall, "North-West Territories (1870–1905)," *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 6, 2006, last modified August 18, 2022, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/north-west-territories-1870-1905>.

be established as soon as possible. So although business was allowed to continue, the charter was not renewed, and the crown began pushing the HBC to sell its land.⁹

The British and Canadian governments attempted to purchase the land from the HBC in 1860 and 1862, but the company's asking price was too high (first £1.00 million, or about \$4.50 million, and later £1.50 million, or \$6.75 million¹⁰). The American Civil War put the issue on the back

⁹ Shelagh D. Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936–1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 3–4; and Grant, *Polar Imperative: A History of Arctic Sovereignty in North America* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2010), 139–40. See also William R. Morrison, *Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894–1925* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985), 73.

¹⁰ From its establishment in 1858 until 1938, and again from 1962 to 1967, the Canadian dollar was pegged to the US dollar. Unless otherwise noted, all dollar amounts in this book

burner until 1867, the year of Canadian Confederation, when the British North America Act (Canada's constitution) was passed. The act created the Dominion of Canada by joining the provinces of Canada (present-day southern Ontario and Quebec),¹¹ New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia; declared the Canadian dollar (which had replaced the Canadian pound in 1858) the official currency; and allowed for other provinces and colonies as well as Rupert's Land to join Confederation in the future.¹² After some squabbling between the British and Canadian governments over the price and who would pay it, all pretenses of free negotiation with the HBC were dropped. As Grant describes, "Impatient with the impasse, the colonial secretary . . . ordered representatives of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian government to meet in London in March 1869, where he delivered a twelve-page ultimatum. The fur-trading company was to surrender authority over the lands in return for £300,000 . . . to be paid by Canada with Britain guaranteeing the loan. The deal was reluctantly approved by both parties."¹³ Britain officially transferred the land to Canada in 1870.¹⁴ Though the company's shareholders were understandably upset, they made out all right: the company was granted "the right to continue trading operations without special taxes or tariffs, . . . approximately 45,000 acres of land adjacent to the existing trading posts and the right to claim . . . roughly 7 million acres of the best agricultural land in the west."¹⁵

But one region was left out of Confederation: the Arctic Archipelago (or Arctic Islands). The British claim to the islands was based on nothing more than John Davis's explorations in 1585 and 1587 and the distant declarations of possession made to the south by Martin Frobisher in 1576

refer to Canadian dollars, but most amounts are also equivalent to US dollars. All pounds refer to British pounds, since the Canadian pound was phased out in 1858.

¹¹ The Province of Canada was created in 1840 from Upper Canada and Lower Canada, which were renamed Canada West and Canada East. At Confederation, these subdivisions were renamed Ontario and Quebec.

¹² Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 141–43. The Confederation initially consisted of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada East, and Canada West.

¹³ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 143.

¹⁴ Stephen A. Royle, *Company, Crown and Colony: The Hudson's Bay Company and Territorial Endeavour in Western Canada* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 5–6; Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 143; and Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 4.

¹⁵ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 144.

and John Ross in 1818—so a very dubious so-called right of discovery.¹⁶ The fuzziness of jurisdiction over this very distant and (to the British state) little-known place was part of why Canada's northern boundary had not been clearly defined at Confederation. Some British officials assumed the islands were part of Rupert's Land, while others guessed that they were directly held by the British government.¹⁷ But Americans' prominence in the booming Arctic whaling industry and their requests for mining rights on Baffin Island portended American claims to the area as well. To prevent this—and for virtually no other reason, since the islands were not considered valuable and there were no plans to develop them—the British government transferred them to Canada in 1880 via the Arctic Islands Act.¹⁸

Sovereignty Claims in the North American Arctic

The American state's potential competing sovereignty claims were an important motivator for Britain to assert its shaky sovereignty over the Arctic Archipelago by essentially expropriating the lands it had granted the HBC—supposedly permanently—in 1670 and transferring them to Canada. In fact, the very decision to carve the semiautonomous Dominion of Canada out of British North America while retaining it within the imperial realm was made to prevent American annexation of the Canadian provinces in light of their increasing squirming under British rule. Some members of the American political class had overtly expressed interest in absorbing the territories to create a vast northern power; for example, after a report submitted to the US Treasury recommended buying Rupert's Land for \$10 million, legislation was introduced in Congress in 1866 that would have allowed the Canadian provinces to become part of the United States. Such a feat would have significantly altered the geopolitical arena and diminished Britain's global influence. As Grant explains, "Political leaders were now convinced that the only means to ward off annexation to the U.S. was to unify the provinces under a single government."¹⁹

¹⁶ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 152–53.

¹⁷ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 154–55.

¹⁸ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 5; and Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 143–44.

¹⁹ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 137–39, 141, 142–43 (quote).

Although Confederation had averted the threat of annexation, Canada's northern claims remained vulnerable to American expansionism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The reality was that there were no signs of Canadian possession—control—of the Arctic. There were no permanent Canadian settlements and, accordingly, no institutions to enforce the laws of the pretender to sovereignty. There were no police to enforce legislation and no customs officials to restrict entry to the market—although, importantly, from the beginning there was at least some intervention in the market via the trader side, since traders' dealings were “regulated” (read: overseen and hampered) at headquarters by restrictions that affected the form and costs of the operations of the companies and their associates. The enforcement arm of the state—the ultimate source of its authority—was absent from the Arctic. Of course, Dominion officials were acutely aware of this Achilles' heel and felt compelled to assert Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic. But how to do this in a land that had little value and no prospects for development, and was vast, remote, and inaccessible for most of the year?

Private individuals and groups establish ownership of land by using and inhabiting previously unowned land or by purchasing or inheriting owned land from others. By contrast, European imperial states—in addition to employing conquest, the universal method by which states acquire their territorial monopolies—had a tradition of establishing ownership (sovereignty) by right of discovery that went back at least to the mid-fifteenth century, when the Catholic Church began to issue papal bulls allowing Catholic states to enslave non-Christians and conquer their lands.²⁰ European empires laid

²⁰ The 1452 *Dum diversas* gave the Portuguese crown the right to enslave Muslims, pagans, and other so-called infidels and to conquer their lands anywhere, though the bull was addressing the territorial disputes that were occurring along the lower West African coast, which Portugal-backed explorers had recently discovered. The 1455 *Romanus pontifex* specifically expanded the legal privileges granted in 1452 to the entire West African coast. Later the 1456 *Inter caetera* expanded these rights to the New World, and the 1493 *Inter caetera* clarified that Spain too had these rights of enslavement and conquest in all places not claimed by a Christian ruler. The 1456 *Inter caetera* also set a boundary between the Portuguese and Spanish spheres, essentially giving Spain the New World and Portugal Africa and Asia. In 1494, the two kingdoms modified the division of the lands through the Treaty of Tordesillas. This was done at the insistence of the king of Portugal, who felt that Portugal had received the short end of the stick. Pope Julius II finally ratified this treaty in 1506. See “Dum diversas,” Doctrine of Discovery, Indigenous Values Initiative, last modified July 23, 2018, <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/dum-diversas/>; Joseph Gill, “Nicholas V,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*,

claim to huge land masses merely by virtue of having seen their littorals and peripheries “first.” In spite of the right of discovery’s long history of legitimacy, cemented by states’ mutual acknowledgment of such claims, sovereignty by right of discovery is fundamentally invalid, overlapping and superseding as it does the earlier land claims of innumerable individuals, families, and groups.²¹ Nevertheless, governments consider stateless regions unowned, and in the Americas, European empires vied for ownership of enormous, already largely owned stretches of land through exploration and “discovery,” which was often accompanied by ceremonial acts of possession such as placing royal insignia, planting flags, and uttering declarations to the winds.²² The right of discovery and even the old ceremonies of possession were still a valid foundation for sovereignty claims when Canada found itself holding a title to much of the North American Arctic in the late nineteenth century.

But Canadian claims notwithstanding, most people considered the northern Arctic an unowned no-man’s-land. Foreign explorers and scientists came and went freely, not to mention whalers, prospectors, miners, independent traders, and other commerce-oriented people. Many explorers representing different states laid claim to various portions of the area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Otto Sverdrup claimed

last modified March 29, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicholas-V-pope>; Francis Xavier Murphy, “Alexander VI,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified February 12, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alexander-VI>; Sebastian Modrow and Melissa Smith, “Inter caetera,” Doctrine of Discovery, Indigenous Values Initiative, last modified June 13, 2022, <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/inter-caetera/>; “The Doctrine of Discovery, 1493: A Spotlight on a Primary Source by Pope Alexander VI,” Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/doctrine-discovery-1493>; and *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Treaty of Tordesillas,” last modified May 31, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Tordesillas>. For what it’s worth, the Roman Catholic Church finally repudiated the doctrine of discovery in 2023. See Bill Chappell, “The Vatican Repudiates ‘Doctrine of Discovery,’ Which Was Used to Justify Colonialism,” NPR, March 30, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/30/1167056438/vatican-doctrine-of-discovery-colonialism-indigenous>.

²¹ It goes almost without saying that conquest too is an invalid form of property acquisition that wrongfully overlaps and supersedes the earlier land claims of innumerable individuals, families, and groups. People living in conquered lands—that is, under governments—are essentially tenants: they no longer have full control of their property because what they can do with their land is limited to what the state declares allowable.

²² For a good overview of this set of practices, see Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

parts of Ellesmere Island and the Sverdrup Islands for Norway between 1899 and 1902. A. P. Low took possession of Beechey Island, Somerset Island, and Ellesmere Island and its surrounds in the name of Canada in 1904 via formal ceremonies. Robert E. Peary claimed the entire North for the United States in 1909.²³

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, occupation began to have more weight in sovereignty disputes, though as historian Gordon W. Smith emphasizes, discovery “retained its traditional value in conferring an inchoate title.” But in inaccessible places like the polar regions, the bar for establishing “effective occupation” was lower: in these places, states could claim huge areas from tiny outposts, and other governments would recognize their claims. Though these places “could not be occupied in a normal way, if at all,” Smith explains, they could be “identified as the property of particular states.” Otherwise, the Arctic sovereignty of Canada and Denmark, both of which would have had “great difficulty in demonstrating . . . effective occupation,” as well as other states’ claims to remote, uninhabited areas, would have been left open to contestation and invalidation.²⁴

Canadian Police Presence in the Arctic

It was in this context of geopolitical uncertainty that Canada took steps to assert sovereignty over the Arctic in the late nineteenth century. For Canada’s claims to hold, its authority—the force of its laws—needed to be felt. To that end, the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP; after 1904 the Royal North-West Mounted Police and after 1920 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police [RCMP]), which had been created in 1873 to police nascent western settlements for similar reasons, was sent north to the Yukon beginning in the 1890s.²⁵ The first Northern police detachment, Fort Constantine (present-day Forty Mile, western Yukon), was established in 1895 near the Alaskan border. Another detachment, Fort Herchmer (present-day Dawson

²³ Gordon W. Smith, *A Historical and Legal Study of Sovereignty in the Canadian North: Terrestrial Sovereignty, 1870–1939*, ed. P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2014), 132, 295, 148–49.

²⁴ Smith, *Study of Sovereignty*, 319, 320.

²⁵ Shelagh D. Grant, *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 26; and Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 5, 9, 14.

City, Yukon), was established in 1897. According to the RCMP, the NWMP had thirty-one detachments and 235 men in the Yukon Territory by 1898 but was not very active in the Arctic until 1903, when the Alaskan border dispute between the United States and Canada was settled in the US's favor, prompting increased exploration of the Arctic.²⁶ That same year, the first Arctic detachments were established in the western Arctic at Herschel Island (just off the northern shore of present-day Yukon), Fort McPherson (present-day northwestern Northwest Territories), and Fullerton Harbour (present-day central Nunavut, on the northwestern shore of Hudson Bay). According to the RCMP, there were twenty-five detachments and over seventy men in the Arctic by 1919.²⁷

In the first several decades of the twentieth century, if not longer, then, the Mounties were concentrated in the Yukon and the western Arctic, where the large numbers of American whalers, gold miners, and provisioners presented the biggest threat to Canadian state authority.²⁸ As historian William R. Morrison explains, "What alarmed Ottawa was . . . the demonstration of the impotence of dominion government as far as its authority over the new territories was concerned." In these remote areas, the Mounties' earliest function was generally to perform "acts of symbolic sovereignty," such as patrolling the land and planting flags. Later they established what Morrison calls "developmental sovereignty": they explained and enforced "laws, mining codes drawn up in Ottawa, customs regulations, [and] gambling and liquor laws."²⁹

In the eastern Arctic, the police's coverage was relatively light. Despite the RCMP's claim that "the entire Arctic was under Canadian jurisdiction" by 1919, there was no police presence in the eastern Arctic until 1922, when the first RCMP detachments were established at Craig Harbour on very remote southeastern Ellesmere Island and at Pond Inlet on northern Baffin

²⁶ "RCMP in the North," Royal Canadian Mounted Police, last modified July 8, 2016, <https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/rcmp-the-north>.

²⁷ See Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 10; Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 26; W. R. Morrison, "Alikomiak and Tatimagana," in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 6, 2006, last modified April 4, 2017, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/alikomiak-and-tatimagana>; and "RCMP in the North."

²⁸ Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 73, 87–88; Smith, *Study of Sovereignty*, 41–42, 56–59, 66–68.

²⁹ Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 5, 2.

Island (both in present-day northern Nunavut).³⁰ Craig Harbour and Pond Inlet served not only as police stations but also as post offices and customs houses.³¹ These police stations may have materialized as a delayed response to the presence of whalers (the whaling industry was largely defunct by the 1920s), but more likely their establishment was set in motion after word got out that Greenland Inuit had been crossing to Ellesmere Island regularly to hunt musk ox, a long-standing custom. As the Danish government was soon made aware, Canadian regulations allowed only Canadian natives to use the land.³² After some back-and-forth, the issue was resolved amicably, but Ottawa realized that it needed to demonstrate control and occupation of the eastern Arctic. So in 1922 the police detachments were established and the annual Eastern Arctic Patrol begun, their purpose being to surveil the region and “maintain law and order,” with the ultimate goal of shoring up Canada’s supposed sovereignty over Inuit land and unowned Arctic land.³³

Once the police had a foothold in the eastern Arctic, they began to expand their footprint relatively quickly: they opened detachments at Pangnirtung (eastern Baffin Island) in 1923, at Dundas Harbour (Devon Island, just south of Ellesmere Island) in 1924, at Bache Peninsula (midway up the eastern coast of Ellesmere Island) in 1926, and at Lake Harbour (southern Baffin Island) in 1927.³⁴ From their stations, the police conducted long, semiregular patrols of the land to convince the world that the eastern Arctic was Canadian, a practice that continued until at least the 1930s but possibly as late as 1969, according to the RCMP.³⁵ In a show of possession of the area and its people, the agents of the Canadian federal government

³⁰ “RCMP in the North”; Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 14, 214–15; Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 221; and Ryan Shackleton, “‘Not Just Givers of Welfare’: The Changing Role of the RCMP in the Baffin Region, 1920–1970,” *Northern Review*, no. 36 (Fall 2012): 6.

³¹ Smith, *Study of Sovereignty*, 344.

³² Smith, *Study of Sovereignty*, 344, 357; Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 105; and William R. Morrison, “Canadian Sovereignty and the Inuit of the Central and Eastern Arctic,” in “À la frontière des sexes / On the Border of Genders,” special issue, *Études/Inuit/Studies* 10, no. 1/2, (1986): 253.

³³ Smith, *Study of Sovereignty*, 357.

³⁴ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 139, 215, 224; Shackleton, “‘Givers of Welfare,’” 6; Morrison, “Alikomiak and Tatimagana”; and Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, app. G, 307.

³⁵ Smith, *Study of Sovereignty*, 361.

also took censuses and reported on residents' health.³⁶ Most important, they harassed foreigners and natives, confronting them, telling them they were on Canadian soil, and informing them of Canadian laws. They also extorted customs duties and licensing fees from commercial vessels: one of the growing number of laws the police tried to enforce in the North was the 1906 Fisheries Act, which asserted that Hudson Bay was "wholly territorial water of Canada" and imposed a \$50 license requirement for all fishing vessels.³⁷ The Eastern Arctic Patrol was a similar extension of the Canadian state into the area. Beginning in 1922, agents of the Canadian state made an appearance in the eastern Arctic every summer, first traveling on the government's ship and later (from 1932 until 1947) aboard the annual HBC supply ships, on which they rented space to cut costs.³⁸ The patrols consisted of a retinue of "civil servants," high-ranking Mounties, and government-paid scientists and doctors sailing around the area. As Peter Kulchyski and Frank James Tester explain, "They supplied northern communities with provisions, carried mail, . . . and performed medical surveys of the Inuit population." The patrol also transported Inuit to different communities and often to the South for tuberculosis treatment; both transports were sometimes against their will, but especially the latter, according to historian C. S. Mackinnon.³⁹

In practice, however, state authority in the Arctic as a whole was virtually nonexistent until after World War II. The police detachments were few and very scattered. Having been situated based on sovereignty concerns, some of them, such as Craig Harbour, were nowhere near a place of importance to local people (such as an HBC trading post); this allowed locals to ignore or circumvent police. Discussing the western Arctic, Grant writes that police authority was "more symbolic than real. Little revenue was collected from licences or customs duties, and other than forbidding the sale of liquor, there was certainly no attempt to isolate the Inuit . . . from the . . .

³⁶ Morrison, "Canadian Sovereignty and the Inuit," 255.

³⁷ Legislation quoted in Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 98.

³⁸ Smith, *Study of Sovereignty*, 351–52; Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 19.

³⁹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 104–5; C. S. Mackinnon, "Canada's Eastern Arctic Patrol, 1922–68," *Polar Record* 27, no. 161 (1991).

whalers.⁴⁰ Things were not much different in the eastern Arctic in the early decades of police deployment.

Moreover, because the police often relied on locals to help them carry out their functions, the personal distance necessary to fully enforce legislation was sometimes lacking in Northern communities. Inuit translated for the police, helped them find their way in a place they knew little about (though they had no qualms about claiming it for the state), and hunted for them, in addition to doing other chores for hire around the detachments, services they also provided to traders. In fact, planning for the NWMP's expansion into the eastern Arctic in 1904, NWMP superintendent J. D. Moodie recommended employing two Inuit at each post to do these very tasks.⁴¹ The HBC often helped the police establish themselves as well, and the police also depended on the company's cooperation to police the area effectively.⁴² After all, the company antedated the police in the region and was influential among the natives. Company men spoke Inuktitut; were well acquainted with the local culture and with most of the individuals in their area; and had the experience and equipment to navigate the region. Moreover, trading posts were nexuses for news about native camps, including crimes and cases of people in distress, without knowledge of which the police could do nothing.

Police Policy toward Inuit Crime

In addition to its other functions, the RCMP of course investigated crimes. However, its initial policy was leniency toward the crimes of Inuit, whom state officials considered essentially primitive people. The goal was to gradually introduce Inuit to the restraints of Canadian jurisdiction—of “civilization,” as the agents of the state saw their coercive legal order.

⁴⁰ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 10–11. See also Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 80–83, 86. For example, since Inuit gravitated to the HBC's trading post at Churchill to the south, the NWMP at Cape Fullerton, on western Hudson Bay, were “virtually ignored.” For this reason, a detachment was opened in Churchill in 1905. Similarly, whalers avoided the police at Herschel Island with ease, wintering at Baillie Island, which was inaccessible to the police. Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 100, 83; and Morrison, “Canadian Sovereignty and the Inuit,” 253–54.

⁴¹ Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 92.

⁴² Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 81; and Grant, 15.

Cases involving killing were only sometimes exceptions; they were often not investigated because it could take years to crack a case, especially before the advent of the wireless radio in the late twenties. When killings were investigated, charges were not usually pressed, due both to lack of evidence and to how logistically difficult and expensive it was to mount legal proceedings against the accused. For example, Irsivalitaq, who sometime in 1923 killed his hunting partner after the latter “rubbed muck” on him, which was considered both a major insult and a threat, spent two years in hiding and was only found when Danish anthropologist and explorer Knud Rasmussen reported his hiding place to the police. According to legal scholar Sidney L. Harring, “The great distance involved in taking the youth back to Chesterfield Inlet [present-day Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut, western Arctic, on the western shore of Hudson Bay, RCMP detachment established 1914, HBC post open 1911–61, 1964–87] for trial, plus the weakness of the case against him, induced the RCMP to drop the case. He was ‘released with a warning not to take the law into his own hands.’”⁴³ Tallying up the killings reported by the RCMP, Rasmussen, and Canadian anthropologist and explorer Diamond Jenness, Harring states that the Copper Inuit of Coronation Gulf killed almost fifty people (six of them white men) between 1900 and 1930, an abnormally high number, but that only eight Inuit were tried and convicted.⁴⁴

⁴³ Knud Rasmussen, *Across Arctic America: Narrative of the Fifth Thule Expedition* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1927), quoted in Sidney L. Harring, “The Rich Men of the Country: Canadian Law in the Land of the Copper Inuit, 1914–1930,” *Ottawa Law Review / Revue de droit d’Ottawa* 21, no. 1 (1989): 32 (first quote); “Hudson’s Bay Company. Chesterfield Inlet,” record creator, AM-RC; and Harring, “Rich Men,” 32n97 (second quote), partially quoting *Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1925* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1926), 73–74n74. For other examples of cases that were dropped due to a lack of evidence, see Harring, “Rich Men,” 6n9, 8–9.

⁴⁴ Harring, “Rich Men,” 3–4, 50, 50n162, citing Diamond Jenness, *Life of the Copper Eskimo*, vol. 13, pt. A of *Report of the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913–18* (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1970); Knud Rasmussen, *Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimo* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1932); and *Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1916* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1917). The number of whites killed may be seven because Grant mentions another possible killing not accounted for in Harring’s work. See Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 40, citing RG 18, vol. 2160, file 25–28, Crime Reports and Correspondence, 1914 through to 1917, National Archives of Canada (today Library and Archives Canada), Ottawa.

Harring maintains that it is “doubtful” that the high homicide level seen in 1914–30 was typical for Copper Inuit communities. Furthermore, the Copper Inuit homicide rate

On the rare occasions when Inuit were arrested and tried for killing, their sentences tended to be lenient, if they were not acquitted altogether. Sinnisiak and Uluksuk were the first Inuit to be tried under Canadian law. In 1917, the two went to trial for killing two Oblate missionaries, Guillaume Le Roux and Jean-Baptiste Rouvière, in Coppermine (present-day Kugluktuk, Nunavut, western Arctic, on the southwestern shore of Coronation Gulf) in 1913, allegedly after Le Roux hit one of them. It took the police over two years to track Sinnisiak and Uluksuk down and four years to bring them to trial. Both were sentenced to death, but their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Even this sentence was whittled down, though. In the end, the two were released after two years' hard labor at Fort Resolution; after that, they were hired to stay on for two more years. When they finally returned home, Shelagh D. Grant notes, "they reportedly boasted about being given free food, clothing, and a warm place to sleep."⁴⁵

seems to have been an outlier if the numbers for the 1920s are any indication: in that decade, the Copper Inuit, the smallest Inuit group (approximately seven hundred people), were responsible for nineteen killings (two of white men), whereas the other five Inuit groups combined (approximately five to eight thousand people) killed fourteen people (only one of them a white man). Harring, "Rich Men," 25, 52 (quote).

⁴⁵ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 40–43, 49, 269–70, quote on 41; Harring, "Rich Men," 7; and W. R. Morrison, "Sinnisiak," in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 7, 2006, last modified December 15, 2013, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sinnisiak>. Sinnisiak was actually tried twice; the first jury acquitted him of the murder of Rouvière by the first jury, a result the government didn't like. The second time, he was tried alongside Uluksuk for the murder of Le Roux. See Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 40–41; and Harring "Rich Men," 6, 52.

For other examples of leniency toward and lack of investigation of killings, see the cases in Harring, "Rich Men," 25–27, 32n97, citing H. Steele, *Policing the Arctic: The Story of the Conquest of the Arctic by the Royal Canadian (Formerly North-West) Mounted Police* (London: Jarrolds, 1936); *Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1920* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1921); *Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1925*; and Rasmussen, *Across Arctic America*.

For a different reading of the priests' killing, see Harring "Rich Men," 51–56. Harring, in short, thinks that the local Inuit community concocted a false story for the RCMP, putting the blame on Sinnisiak and Uluksuk to protect themselves from possibly being killed by the white men. He thinks that two leading locals—Kormik, who was seen as a leader and who quarreled with one of the priests after the latter caught him stealing his rifle and became very angry, and Uluksak, a powerful shaman—were behind the killing, and that Sinnisiak, a lesser shaman, and Uluksuk, a younger man, volunteered to carry out the execution to enhance their social standing. The fact that Kormik and Uluksak had most of the priests' possessions at the time of the investigation may support this interpretation.

The case of Alikomiak and Tatamigana, two Copper Inuit, is the major exception to the RCMP's policy of leniency toward Inuit in the early twentieth century. In 1922, Alikomiak, along with his uncle Tatamigana, was being detained by the RCMP at the Tree River detachment (present-day western Nunavut, just south of Coronation Gulf, established 1919⁴⁶) for the killing of an Inuk named Pugnana. According to the RCMP, on the Kent Peninsula (today called Kiillinnguyaq; in western Nunavut, western Arctic) an Inuk named Hanak threatened to kill Tatamigana and Pugnana after an argument. Fearing for their lives, the two decided to kill him first. Tatamigana shot Hanak, and Pugnana shot Ikialgina, who had come to Hanak's defense. Ikialgina's father, Ikpakuak, then started shooting at Tatamigana and Pugnana, who shot him dead. Pugnana then stabbed Hanak's wife and daughter to death. Tatamigana and his nephew Alikomiak then plotted to murder Pugnana, reportedly because Tatamigana was jealous that Pugnana had taken one of Hanak's wives for himself. Tatamigana allegedly paid his nephew a rifle to shoot Pugnana and to kill his infant daughter. While detained, Alikomiak shot and killed RCMP corporal (and part-time fur trader) William Doak, who had mistreated him, while Doak was sleeping and then shot and killed trader Otto Binder as he approached the building.

Under the state's monopoly of justice, crimes against the state and its agents are the most threatening offenses, flying as they do in the face of the state's self-appointed right to coerce everyone in its territory with impunity. Convinced that its leniency with Sinnisiak and Uluksuk was to blame for the brazen killing of a police officer, the government decided to make an example of the men. Tatamigana was tried and acquitted for killing Ikpakuak. But both men hung in 1924 for killing Pugnana, despite the cases' negative press. Alikomiak's and Tatamigana's cases are widely considered to have been show trials, and at this writing the two men remain the only Inuit to have been executed by the Canadian state. A guilty verdict was presumed,

⁴⁶ The HBC ran a post at Tree River from 1920–37. "Hudson's Bay Company. Tree River," record creator, AM-RC.

for the judge came north with gallows and a hangman, and the men's graves were dug before the sentence had even been passed.⁴⁷

The killing of Newfoundland free trader Robert Janes shows how the RCMP continued to be lenient toward Inuit, if not as much as before. In 1923, not long after the RCMP detachment in Pond Inlet was established, a nearby Inuit community decided to execute Janes after he came around their camp aggressively trying to collect payment for goods he'd given them on credit, threatened a man with a knife, and even threatened to kill the people's dogs (which would have stranded them) if they didn't pay. A man named Nuqallaq agreed to carry out the sentence. Nuqallaq was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to ten years' hard labor at Stony Mountain Penitentiary (present-day southern Manitoba). Ululijarnaat, who had helped lure Janes out of his igloo, was sentenced to two years' hard labor at the Pond Inlet RCMP detachment. Aatitaaq, who had helped plan the

⁴⁷ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 128–30, 136, 188, 195; Harring, "Rich Men," 9–10; W. R. Morrison, "Alikomiak and Tatamigana," in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 6, 2006, last modified April 4, 2017, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/alikomiak-and-tatamigana>; Kenn Harper, "The Hanging of Alikomiak and Tatamigana—Part 1," *Nunatsiak News*, November 26, 2022, <https://nunatsiak.com/stories/article/the-hanging-of-alikomiak-and-tatamigana-part-1/>; and Kenn Harper, "The Hanging of Alikomiak and Tatamigana—Part 2," *Nunatsiak News*, December 10, 2022, <https://nunatsiak.com/stories/article/the-hanging-of-alikomiak-and-tatamigana-part-2/>. See also Lisa Beiler, "Alikomiak and Tatamigana: Justice and Injustice in the Canadian Arctic" (MA thesis, University of Waterloo, 2016).

Harring notes that the bloodshed the Copper Inuit saw with the Kent Peninsula killings was totally unprecedented and thinks there is more to this case than the police and legal system ultimately gleaned from the story they pieced together. On the one hand, he writes that Hanak, who wanted to take another wife (from someone else), may have created a rift in the community when he secured the support of Ikpakuak and Ikialgina. Hanak threatened and challenged Pugnana and Tatamigana, and he also shot and wounded Anagvik the day before the rest of the camp was supposed to relocate (sensing trouble, the community had decided to isolate the troublemakers, "a well known Inuit defence mechanism"). These three men may have been Hanak's rivals for wives. On the other hand, Harring points to the conflicting statements in the police report, noting that Hanak apparently "both wanted another woman and was also upset that Tatamigana and Pugnana were 'too friendly' with his wife." He adds that wives were "never killed in disputes between men" because "there was no reason to do so[,] and murder cut down the number of women available." He concludes that "some major community disruption occurred, the cause of which is beyond our grasp," but he also speculates that the trader Binder, who had either taken or was sharing Ikialgina's wife and had allegedly been looking to take Ikpakuak's wife as well, may have been at the bottom of it. Harring, "Rich Men," 56–57, 12, 19 (quotes on 56–57). Harring's analysis quotes and is based on the RCMP's report and Northwest Territories Anglican bishop Lucas's account: *Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1922* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1923); and "Blood Feud Was Direct Cause of Eskimo Murders," *Edmonton Journal*, September 14, 1924.

execution, was acquitted. But Nuqallaq served only eighteen months of his sentence; he caught tuberculosis and was sent home, where he died a few months later.⁴⁸ Harring concludes that before 1930 the RCMP's efforts to deter killing were "ineffective." He notes that Copper Inuit killings "dropped from eleven between 1920 and 1925 to nine between 1925 and 1930. But an increase occurred in killings among other Inuit, from four in the period before 1925 to ten in the period after," although he adds that "probably more arrests were made because more arrests were possible" with the RCMP's heavier presence.⁴⁹

As Grant explains, the Canadian Department of Justice's objective at this early point was simply "to deter further violence among the Inuit. To accomplish this goal, it was thought that one or two high profile court trials . . . would be sufficient. Thus no provision was made for a court to travel north on an annual basis."⁵⁰ Though a handful of Inuit were arrested and punished for killings with the advent of Canada's police presence in the Arctic, more often either there was no investigation or no charges were pressed, even though occasional killings (both murders and executions according to Inuit traditional law) did continue to occur over the next several decades, especially in the western Arctic. With the exception of a 1938 Pond Inlet murder trial in which Katcho, the accused, was ruled insane, sent south for commitment, and never heard from again, there were no other murder trials besides those mentioned above until the 1950s.⁵¹

The Canadian state's policy of leniency toward Inuit offenses was its only available option, for its tiny nodes of power in the Arctic initially had very limited influence. What wasn't seen or reported couldn't be prosecuted, so Inuit had the very real choice of circumventing Canadian jurisdiction for several decades during the early twentieth century. In fact, even when the police did become aware of a crime, they could not necessarily detain

⁴⁸ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 3–6, chaps. 5–7, 265–70. Janes was the only white man to be killed in the eastern Arctic in the period covered by this study.

⁴⁹ Harring, "Rich Men," 51.

⁵⁰ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 43.

⁵¹ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 245–46. For some of the most prominent Inuit trials of the 1950s, see Dorothy Harley Eber, *Images of Justice: A Legal History of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut as Traced through the Yellowknife Courthouse Collection of Inuit Sculpture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

Inuit who chose to resist. In 1914 the RCMP were instructed to be friendly while investigating the presumed killing of American explorer H. V. Radford and Canadian George Street near Bathurst Inlet (present-day southwestern Nunavut, western Arctic) in 1912. Because of Inuit's ignorance of Canadian law, a conviction was not expected in the event of a trial. Even so, the two alleged killers, who had reportedly killed another white man (a Mr. Caldwell) and his two native guides in addition to Radford and Street, fled after the arrest of Sinnisiak and Uluksuk. In 1917, the police finally found Inuit who could tell what had happened (though it's not clear whether these were the killers); however, the police deemed the killing a "marginal self-defense" and so did not make any arrests.⁵² In 1921, Ouangwak, who a year earlier had been arrested for killing two Inuit near Baker Lake in the western Arctic, escaped from the Chesterfield Inlet police detachment (established in 1914 to replace the recently closed Fullerton Harbour detachment). Though Ouangwak ended up perishing in a blizzard, his act of resistance demonstrates how tenuous the Canadian state's claims to the Arctic were before the mid-1940s.⁵³

It should also be remembered that, like the traders, the RCMP had no immediate backup in these remote posts. As Doak's murder illustrates, lone officers were liable to Inuit for any offenses against those who were supposed to be unconditionally subject to state authority.⁵⁴ Although the RCMP had "*carte blanche* to do whatever they thought best," as Morrison puts it, their weak position meant that "as a rule the police tried to deal with the Inuit in terms that they could understand."⁵⁵ The lack of a police presence in the eastern Arctic before 1922, and its lack of power for many years thereafter, meant that Inuit-white interaction was largely unaffected by government coercion and that the two parties had the freedom to come to mutually agreeable arrangements, circumstances that overwhelmingly fostered peace and prosperity on both sides.

⁵² Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 40–41; and Harring, "Rich Men," 7.

⁵³ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 43, 268. For other cases of Inuit resistance to the police, see Harring, "Rich Men," 8–9, 32, 34.

⁵⁴ Smith, *Study of Sovereignty*, 357; and Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 160–61.

⁵⁵ Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 161 (quote), 157 (quote), 153–54, 160.

CHAPTER 3

A History of Voluntary Market Interaction: Arctic Whaling and the Early Subarctic Fur Trade

Although the absence of the state was essential to the peaceful white-Inuit interaction that characterized the eastern Arctic in the first half of the twentieth century, another important factor was the mutual impetus to trade and prosper. Each side had something valuable that the other wanted. With neither side having the unnatural military leverage that allows a group to repeatedly rob and coerce another, purchase was the only way to access those valued goods and to ensure that they were brought to market year after year. Inuit would have to bring their goods to the trading posts voluntarily—and they did.

The voluntary nature of exchanges during the Arctic fur trade shows that the transactions were mutually beneficial. Voluntary trade only occurs when both parties feel that they are exchanging something less valuable for something more valuable. In the fur trade, Inuit exchanged furs for tea, sugar, tobacco, flour, firearms, metal tools, and other locally unavailable goods. To the white traders, the fur was far more valuable than the goods Inuit demanded in return for them, and to the Inuit communities, the goods were more valuable. Nobody chooses to do something for nothing, so all

voluntary exchanges are by definition profitable, worthwhile, and beneficial to the participants in the moment when trade occurs.

Voluntary Trade and the Subjectivity of Value

But what is considered a profitable exchange is completely subjective. As the thinkers of the Austrian school of economics posited in the late nineteenth century, the ultimate source of a good's worth is the opinion of the people involved in each exchange of that good—not the cost of the good's labor or other production inputs, whose own prices are also based on individuals' aggregated subjective valuations.¹ Contrary to what the labor theory of value posits, the subjectivity of value means that goods don't have an absolute value that can be calculated from the materials and labor that go into creating them. A fine fur coat may have a high market price based on what individual buyers are generally willing to pay for it and what individual sellers are generally willing to accept. But the same coat might be totally worthless to an animal rights activist or a vegan, meaning that no exchange would occur with such a person. The subjective theory of value fits economic exchange so well because it accounts for constantly fluctuating prices in a dynamic world filled with unique individuals and circumstances. It asserts that there is truth and validity in all those different valuations and in the changes they experience. If the animal rights activist or vegan finds herself in the tundra, far from any store selling cruelty-free outerwear, her own coat almost completely worn out, she might discover some value in a fur coat offered by a passing Inuit family—perhaps even high value, depending on the family's eagerness to part with the coat.

The subjectivity of value shows that the numerous scholarly diatribes about the alleged worthlessness of knives, mirrors, beads, and other trade goods in comparison to the valuable furs, the precious metals, and especially the vast land tracts that many indigenous peoples traded to European explorers, traders, and officials after contact are completely inappropriate for understanding white-native exchanges. Such analyses are built on the

¹ Carl Menger, William Stanley Jevons, and Léon Walras propounded the subjective theory of value almost simultaneously in the late nineteenth century, but those who want to learn about it often consult Menger's work first. See Carl Menger, *Principles of Economics*, trans. James Dingwall and Bert F. Hoselitz (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007).

fundamentally mistaken notion that the worth of things is absolute and determinable. Such critiques completely disregard what the native parties to these historical transactions considered valuable. They substitute the critics' own valuations, dismissing native valuations as incorrect—the product of their innocence and of deception. But it takes two to tango in the marketplace. People's valuations are based on what they know, what they have, what others think of those things, and countless other factors—and they are all unique and cannot be premeasured or judged in any objective way. Exchanges are the only way to reveal people's valuations, which are based on acts rather than thoughts, and these valuations are ever changing along with the transactors themselves. The bottom line is that it's arbitrary and wrong to declare, looking back from the comfort of a different time and place, that there was one clear winner in a voluntary trade. In spite of its crony arrangement with the crown, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) created value for natives, as did the other commercial actors across the Canadian North.

In the Arctic, the company was in pursuit of raw white fox hides to manufacture into hats, stoles, and other feminine luxury accoutrements that became fashionable in the early twentieth century.² Inuit had a great interest in metalwork, clothing, dry foodstuffs (flour, sugar, hardtack, tea), firearms, and other locally unavailable imports. These items, readily available in the Western world and relatively affordable (depending on their quality), were extremely valuable to the natives. They were impossible for Inuit to make, and they revolutionized their way of life. Metal awls, knives, and other tools were more effective and more durable than their bone, ivory, and stone counterparts, saving precious labor and energy. Dry goods added variety to what had essentially been a diet of animal meat and fat, and they served as an extra buffer against starvation, supplementing traditional caches of seal and walrus meat in a place where dying of hunger

² Cecil E. Bradbury, *Ten Years in the High Canadian Arctic, Being a Personal Account of His Early Life, More Particularly His Voyages as an Employee of the Hudson's Bay Company between the Years 1920 and 1930* (St. Johns, NL: Robinson-Blackmore Books, 1994), 11. Also Susan Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluliliq Project: Historical Overview of Post-Contact Occupation in the Parc National Iluliliq Project Study Area" (unpublished report submitted to the Kativik Regional Government, Nunavik Parks Division, Nunavik, QC, 2017), 27. Toby Morantz refers to the period from 1900 to 1930 as the "Great Fox Era." See *Relations on Ungava Bay: An Illustrated History of Inuit, Naskapi, and Eurocanadian Interaction, 1800–1970* (Westmount, QC: Avataq Cultural Institute, 2016), 71.

had never been rare. Cotton, tartan, duffel, and other fabrics, thin though they were in comparison to traditional clothing, made great summer wear and added color to a world where clothing, bedding, and boots had all been made of caribou, seal, polar bear, and other animal skins. Firearms, of course, dramatically eased the burden of procuring every meal (though not to the extent assumed by those ignorant of the skill required even of a modern hunter). Some animals could now be procured more easily and at a safer range. The natives' estimation of these kinds of goods was a signal to producers to make them and to traders to import them to the area.

The fur trade expanded into the present-day Canadian Arctic in the early twentieth century, when whaling, the region's traditional industry, was petering out. At the same time, the more southerly peoples of the subarctic continued to participate in a fur trade that had been established for far longer, but they began shifting away from their traditional focus on beaver and musk ox to trap more lynx, wolverines, red foxes, wolves, and bears (brown and black), as well as a variety of smaller furbearers such as ermine, marten, mink, muskrat, fishers, skunks, and red squirrels. Thanks to these preexisting economies, there was already a long-standing trade etiquette, as well as clear expectations and obligations for traders and trappers, when the Arctic fur trade began.

In the pursuit of wealth, the Arctic whaling industry and the subarctic fur trade had arrived at a *modus operandi* of mutual nonaggression and noninterference in native affairs. Both whalers and traders quickly learned the economic benefits of this mutual respect. The fur traders in the subarctic established a custom of grubstaking native trappers and adapting European commercial practices to the local cultures. The whalers adopted similar practices. These traditional industries therefore laid the foundation for a new trade that would be harmonious and beneficial for all.

Nonaggression in the Eastern Arctic Whaling Era

By the early twentieth century, eastern Inuit had been trading with European, American, and Canadian outsiders for two hundred years, and they had been involved in the whaling industry for the better part of a century. According to historian Renée Fossett, whalers were in the eastern Arctic as early as the 1590s. They were active in the Davis Strait (between

southeastern Baffin Island and western Greenland) and in Hudson Strait (between southern Baffin Island and northern Quebec), but according to journalist and oral historian Dorothy Harley Eber, they only began trading with Inuit in the 1820s, after the first British ships made it north past the Davis Strait and into Baffin Bay in 1817.³ Eber observes that armadas of seventy to one hundred vessels entered the waters of northern Baffin Island every year in the 1820s and 1830s and reports that “there are records of about 150 voyages . . . between 1860 and 1915.”⁴ The whalers were in the area to harvest whale blubber (which they rendered into whale oil) and baleen (also known as whalebone, which was used in corsets and other women’s clothing). At first, they traded for furs and ivory on the side, but their economic relations with Inuit expanded and became more regular by midcentury.⁵

Many whaling ships, previously a strictly seasonal presence in the eastern Arctic, began to build winter quarters and coastal processing stations. Whale stocks were beginning to decline, and a longer stay offered whalers the opportunity to improve their catch.⁶ Without government threats or protectionism, the industry had also grown crowded. Journalist Peter C. Newman explains that “as the business grew more competitive, the whalers began to set up shore stations to process the oil and to afford themselves the chance of profiting from a second summer in the whaling grounds. Tiny communities sprang up at Cape Fullerton in Hudson Bay and in sheltered coves such as the eventual sites of Pond Inlet and Pangnirtung on Baffin Island.”⁷

³ Renée Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled: Inuit of the Central Arctic, 1550 to 1940* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 42; and Dorothy Harley Eber, *When the Whalers Were up North: Inuit Memories from the Eastern Arctic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 3, 11. In other regions, notably western Greenland, Inuit were trading with whalers regularly by the eighteenth century. Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled*, 86.

⁴ Eber, *Inuit Memories*, 11, 22–23, 23 (quote). See also Lofthouse, “Parc National Ilulilik Project,” 23.

⁵ Shelagh D. Grant, *Polar Imperative: A History of Arctic Sovereignty in North America* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2010), 138; William R. Morrison, *Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894–1925* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985), 94; and Shelagh D. Grant, *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 12.

⁶ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 12.

⁷ Peter C. Newman, *Merchant Princes*, vol. 3 of *Company of Adventurers* (Toronto: Viking, 1991), 179.

Inuit began providing goods and services to the whalers in return for firearms, ammunition, and other desired goods. Inuit men helped hunt and process the whales, and they also provisioned the whalers with fresh meat through hunting. Inuit women made suitable winter attire for the men—caribou outerwear and kamiks (sealskin boots)—and traded other domestic skills.⁸ The whalers transported all manner of metal tools, dry goods, liquor, and miscellaneous wares to the Arctic, and the byproducts of their activities—many huge whale carcasses stripped of blubber but with plenty of meat on them—were a welcome source of easy food for both locals and sailors. The interdependence between whalers and Inuit, who often worked side by side and who furnished each other with highly desirable goods and services, yielded what historian Shelagh D. Grant has described as a variety of “frontier justice”—in other words, peaceful, nonintrusive coexistence.⁹

Whalers were welcome in the Arctic because of the items they brought with them—but only as long as they were not aggressive. Grant is quick to note that “it was understood that trouble would follow if [Inuit] killed a white man,” but she does not mention that the same hazard was also present in the reverse scenario.¹⁰ Whites were decidedly not immune from punishment: Grant herself explains that all whalers knew “the story of how shipwrecked sailors on Akpatok Island had been killed by their Inuit hosts—because of food shortages and their unreasonable demands.”¹¹ Neither side tolerated threatening behavior; the risk was too great.

Although many whalers likely considered the Arctic a no-man’s-land, which implies nonrecognition of the locals’ property rights, they did not claim any area, let alone the whole region, for themselves. They set up shop where they were permitted to—where there was no resistance to their presence. This is significant because there were a number of very early incidents where such permission was not granted and visitors were murdered or driven from the area. For example, in 1611, mutineers from Henry Hudson’s expedition stopped at the Digges Islands near the mouth

⁸ Eber, *Inuit Memories*, 8, 25, 29; and Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 12, 14.

⁹ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 16.

¹⁰ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 17.

¹¹ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 17.

of Hudson Strait, where they tried to hunt birds. The groups shared hunting techniques, traded, and had a peaceful first encounter, but the following day some Digges Islanders assaulted the mariners under the pretense of trading again (the sailors wanted venison for their goods), killing four; the rest of the crew departed but proceeded to kill four hundred birds nearby. The next year, the Digges Islanders killed five sailors who had gone ashore to hunt birds and search for fresh water; the survivors spent the winter in another spot, where they reportedly lived on all sorts of big game and an “abundance of Fish.”¹² Although it’s not known exactly what happened, and language and cultural barriers probably didn’t help matters, both of these encounters began with a clear violation of Inuit private property: a large number of strangers with no right to the land suddenly showed up and tried to help themselves to scarce local resources without permission, a trespass that could leave locals facing malnourishment or starvation. The lack of attempts to expel the whalers 250 years later shows that they were not encroaching on Inuit territory. Inuit had weighed the pros and cons of the whalers’ presence and had permitted them to remain. Whalers stayed out of internal Inuit affairs and focused on trade and their own personal needs. This trade continued into the early twentieth century, but by then the industry was in decline. Whale oil was quickly being supplanted by petroleum-based lubricants for machinery and by other fuel sources, especially kerosene, and substitutes for whalebone had been found. Prices for whale products accordingly began to fall,¹³ and whalers would disappear from the region by 1915.¹⁴

As the market for the products of the whaling industry diminished in the late nineteenth century, more than a few whalers began to buy ivory,

¹² “A Large Discourse of the Said Voyage, and the Success Thereof, Written by Abacuk Pricket, Who Lived to Come Home,” and “The Report of Captaine Hawkrigde,” both in Luke Foxe, *North-West Fox; or, Fox from the North-West Passage* (1635), in *The Voyages of Captain Luke Foxe of Hull, and Captain Thomas James of Bristol, in Search of a North-West Passage, in 1631–32; with Narratives of the Earlier North-West Voyages of Frobisher, Davis, Weymouth, Hall, Knight, Hudson, Button, Gibbons, Bylot, Baffin, Hawkrigde, and Others*, ed. Miller Christy (London, 1894), 1:150–156, 1:168–69.

¹³ Morrison, *Showing the Flag*, 83; and Newman, *Merchant Princes*, 180–81.

¹⁴ Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled*, 191–92; and David Damas, “Shifting Relations in the Administration of Inuit: The Hudson’s Bay Company and the Canadian Government,” *Études/Inuit/Studies* 17, no. 2 (1993): 6.

sealskins, fish, and especially furs from Inuit.¹⁵ There had already been some exchange of this kind, but it had been a supplement to the whaling economy. In the eastern Arctic, whalers started a private trade on the side in the 1830s. In 1830, the HBC established a trading post at Fort Chimo (called Fort Good Hope until 1831; present-day Kuujuaq, Quebec, just south of Ungava Bay and just barely in the subarctic, open 1830–43, 1866–1987), but as Newman explains, “Not much business developed because the aboriginals had few items worth trading,” so the company shifted gears. Fort Chimo became a whaling and fishing post, staying open until 1843. In the 1850s, the HBC reopened whaling stations at Little Whale River (1749–59, 1787–ca. 1819, ca. 1851–80, 1882–90) and Great Whale River (1813–22, ca. 1854–1987), and it established new whaling and fishing posts elsewhere on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay.¹⁶ In 1866, anthropologist David Damas notes, the company sent a ship to winter at Fullerton Harbour (northwestern shore of Hudson Bay, on the eastern Nunavut mainland) to compete with the whalers for Inuit trade there; it seems the venture was not lucrative. HBC posts would not be established north of Churchill (present-day northeastern Manitoba, on the western shore of Hudson Bay, open 1717–82, 1783–1987) for almost fifty years.¹⁷ But as the side trade took center stage in the early twentieth century, the company finally broke in, opening its first posts in the Arctic. Fur became the heart of the regional economy, and it would remain so until the late 1940s, when the HBC began to focus on retailing due to the influx of welfare dollars into the Arctic. The HBC had been trading furs long before it reached the Arctic, however.

Cultural Accommodation in the Subarctic Fur Trade

The HBC began sending people to North America for the fur trade in the latter seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century it started to exploit

¹⁵ Grant, *Arctic Justice*, 15; Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled*, chap. 7; and Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 11.

¹⁶ “Hudson’s Bay Company. Fort Chimo,” record creator, AM-RC; “Hudson’s Bay Company. Little Whale River,” record creator, AM-RC; “Hudson’s Bay Company. Great Whale River,” record creator, AM-RC; Damas, “Shifting Relations,” 6; and Newman, *Merchant Princes*, 178. Little and Great Whale River had closed due to the failure of the fisheries in 1819.

¹⁷ Damas, “Shifting Relations,” 6; “Hudson’s Bay Company. Churchill,” record creator, AM-RC.

the fisheries as well. This earlier fur trade of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries was with the Cree, Ojibwe, and Innu (also called Montagnais) peoples of the subarctic, as well as with more southerly peoples, at posts far to the south of most Inuit. The company did business on the lower Hudson Bay and on the James Bay (the smaller bay off the bottom of Hudson Bay), proceeding inland only slowly. The HBC's first post was Rupert House (initially called Charles Fort; present-day Waskaganish, Quebec, on the western shore of James Bay, open 1668–86, 1776–1811, 1813–1987), where the company traded with Crees. Its first inland post was Flamborough House (initially known as Cumberland Fort; present-day central Manitoba, on the Nelson River, open 1750–59). Flamborough House was not very far inland at all and was established as an outpost to the York Factory post (present-day northeastern Manitoba, on the southwestern shore of Hudson Bay, open 1684–97, 1714–82, 1783–1957).¹⁸ Scholars such as Arthur J. Ray, Daniel Francis, and Toby E. Morantz rightly describe the pre-1870 fur trade as a partnership between the HBC and native trappers.¹⁹ Like the whalers in the Arctic, the fur traders at the HBC's early subarctic posts relied on natives for fresh food, clothing, seasonal labor, and of course furs.²⁰ Post servants, as employees were called in this era, had to hunt for much of their food, but they often joined native hunting parties when they did so, benefiting from the knowledge locals had acquired over their lifetimes and inherited over generations. And although the post workers could double as trappers, those who did so in this earlier period preferred to hide their furs from the company and sell them independently in England to get higher rates than

¹⁸ Michelle Filice, "HBC Trading Posts in Canada," *Canadian Encyclopedia*, July 7, 2023, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/hbc-trading-posts-in-canada>; Scott Stephen, "'Assistant to York': The Ambiguous Role of Flamborough House, 1749–1759," Manitoba Historical Society, last modified May 19, 2016, https://mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/62/flamboroughhouse.shtml; "Hudson's Bay Company. Rupert House," record creator, AM-RC; "Hudson's Bay Company. Flamborough House," record creator, AM-RC; and "Hudson's Bay Company. York Factory," record creator, AM-RC.

¹⁹ Ray calls it an "equal partnership with natives." Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 22. Francis and Morantz think of it the same way, as the title of their book shows. See Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay, 1600–1870* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983).

²⁰ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 22.

the Indians.²¹ The high demand in European markets meant that there would be no fur industry if the company could not convince Indians to trap. More important, each post's profit margin depended on getting natives to sell their furs there and to return every season.

The importance of steady Indian patronage produced a commerce that was distinct for its adaptation to native cultures and the changing circumstances of wild fur harvesting. Its most distinguishing practices were a tailored trade ritual based on native custom, the use of local languages, and fur as the unit of account; a tradition of gift giving; and a grubstaking system of credit and relief. All these practices were based on postures of mutual respect and deference toward local custom. The traders' goal of profit required this nonaggressive, respectful approach to the local populations. Forged in the race for wealth, the fur traders' culturally accommodative practices yielded largely amicable white-native relations.

A Tailored Trade Ritual

The trading process in the subarctic fur trade was significantly adapted to broad native custom. Trading was a ritualistic, multiday event, and it was also a kind of celebration, since there were many groups who only visited the post once a year. All the trappers received welcome gifts when they arrived at the post. They would also take what was left of the arrival day (and sometimes a little longer) to rest from the trip and to enjoy their gifts, with trading beginning the next day at the earliest. But the resting period was not merely a quiet time. It was an occasion to renew relationships and exchange information such as the location of certain animals and who had marriageable daughters. As Francis and Morantz explain, "When a large gang arrived, headed by a [trading] captain, it was greeted by the postmaster before brandy and tobacco were presented, and the gang was sometimes housed in a tent provided by the company. After a period of socializing and ritual ceremony which might last a day or more, the inlanders returned to the post for trading. . . . The main elements of the ceremony were speeches

²¹ Toby Morantz, personal communication, August 8, 2022.

by the postmaster and the leading Indians, the smoking of a pipe,²² and the exchange of gifts, the captains presenting the master with furs which had been collected from their hunters.”²³

Although by no means an example of an ordinary trade occasion, HBC trader Philip H. Godsell’s (1889–1961)²⁴ description of the company’s 250th anniversary commemoration, celebrated in 1920 at the historic Lower Fort Garry post (present-day Winnipeg, Manitoba, open 1832–1911)²⁵ and for which the company gathered Indians from many different regions, was meant to evoke the by then romanticized early period and is helpful in imagining how trade was conducted:

Then a tall magnificent Sioux, Kinnewakan . . . stepped forward with all the dignity and poise of a Roman emperor. Lifting a large stone-headed calumet, bearing the totem of each tribal leader painted on the stem . . . he filled the bowl with kinni-kinnick [a mixture of bark and leaves]. There was a deep hush . . . as he reverently raised the stem, pointed it to the heavens and called in guttural tones upon the Wahcondah to give blessing to the day. Turning the stem to each point of the compass he then presented it towards Sir Robert.

Deafening shouts of applause arose from the whites and Indians as the Governor emitted three puffs of blue smoke. . . . Like a priest giving sacrament Kinnewakan passed around the semi-circle, holding the stone head firmly in his hand while each brave took a whiff. Then . . . Kinnewakan placed the pipe in the hands of the Governor, a lasting pledge of friendship and good-will. . . .

²² In many North American native cultures, smoking was an integral part of peacemaking and often done at the beginning of gatherings, somewhat like a convocation ritual.

²³ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 46.

²⁴ Godsell, Philip Henry, biographical sheet, AM-BS.

²⁵ Here the company primarily traded with Crees, Ojibwes, and Dakotas (also called Sioux). Lower Fort Garry superseded Upper Fort Garry (present-day Winnipeg, open 1820–82), which was built at a former North West Company post site. See “Hudson’s Bay Company. Lower Fort Garry,” record creator, AM-RC; and “Hudson’s Bay Company. Upper Fort Garry,” record creator, AM-RC.

One by one I introduced the Indians, each Chief being permitted to make a little speech. . . .²⁶

After the furs were presented, they were most likely inspected and the trappers given store credit at the going rate. But this was only half of the transaction. After their accounts were credited, the trappers were ready to shop, and the purchasing process was also unique to the local cultural context.

Trade was always conducted in the local language, never in the language of the traders. Godsell, for example, was proficient in Cree and Inuktitut, and in his memoir of his company days he described trader “Big Bill” Campbell as a typical company man: married to a Cree woman, Campbell had “traveled widely amongst the Indians; [and] knew both Crees and Ojibways intimately, their superstitions and languages.”²⁷ The made beaver (technically a clean prime beaver pelt that had been worn for at least one season to wear off the coarse outer hair²⁸) was the unit of account, essentially the local currency. In many areas, the company created a variety of tokens to represent various quantities of made beaver during transactions.²⁹ The trader laid either a trapper’s pelts or these tokens out on the counter and withdrew them as the trapper-customer selected items.³⁰ These adaptations made it easier for peoples who were unfamiliar with English, with the concept of money, and with mathematics to visualize and come to an understanding of trade, of the value of their work, and of the prices of the goods they wanted. It allowed traders and trappers to transact with confidence and with no forcible “educating” or “reforming” of local peoples. The use of local languages and of fur as the unit of account continued in the Arctic, where the traders learned local Inuktitut dialects and used wooden pegs or aluminum tokens

²⁶ Philip H. Godsell, *Arctic Trader: The Account of Twenty Years with the Hudson’s Bay Company* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1934), 170–71; see chap. 14 for the complete account.

²⁷ Godsell, *Arctic Trader*, 71, 44 (quote).

²⁸ “Standard of Trade,” HBC Heritage, Hudson’s Bay Company History Foundation, Hudson’s Bay Company, accessed June 26, 2024, <https://www.hbcheritage.ca/history/fur-trade/standard-of-trade>.

²⁹ “Currency,” HBC Heritage, Hudson’s Bay Company History Foundation, Hudson’s Bay Company, accessed June 26, 2024, <https://www.hbcheritage.ca/history/fur-trade/currency>.

³⁰ Bruce D. Campbell, *Where the High Winds Blow: Adventures in the Arctic with the Hudson’s Bay Company*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 22.

to represent arctic fox pelts, the unit of account in that region (see chapter 5 for a full description of the Arctic fur trade).³¹

Although the HBC had an established price schedule in made beaver, prices were negotiated by both parties. This flexibility with prices in a time when European markets were slowly but steadily moving toward various forms of standardization was perhaps another adaptation to the circumstances of trading in Indian country.³² Traders were free to raise prices on any item as they saw fit, but that didn't mean Indians would pay those prices. As a general rule, natives were resistant to price changes, whether up or down, and they were hyperaware of them. This state of affairs meant that although traders charged the highest prices their customers were willing to pay, which could vary somewhat by the year, prices were remarkably consistent over time.

It should be noted, however, that all noncoercive market transactions occur within this range of overlap between buyers' and sellers' asking prices, whether prices are measured in money (as under indirect exchange) or in goods (as under barter). All voluntary exchanges are subject to the equilibrating pressures of sellers demanding the highest prices possible for their goods and buyers offering the lowest prices possible for them; the resulting prices always exceed the value that both parties place on what they contribute to the exchange, whether it's money or a directly useable good. These market pressures can be seen in the fact that despite Indians' dislike of price changes, they would not accept without debate a price they thought too high. From the 1730s to the 1760s the HBC traders at Eastmain (initially called East Main House; present-day Eastmain, Quebec, on the eastern shore of James Bay, open ca. 1718–1837, 1870–1987) were able to command from the eastern Crees they were trading with roughly 30 percent more than the aggregated standard price of the goods they sold. But as North West Company competition began to move into the inland markets in the

³¹ Descriptions of how trade was conducted with Inuit can be found in A. Dudley Copland, *Copland: Chief Trader, Hudson's Bay Company, 1923–39* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1985), 17–18; and Gordon Rennie, in George Pitseolak et al., *Niurutiqarniq: Trading with the Hudson's Bay Company*, ed. Shannon Partridge, interviews supervised by François Trudel (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2009), 232–33. These accounts are also peppered with Inuktitut words, and their authors achieved fluency in Inuktitut.

³² Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 48–51.

1760s, the surplus over the aggregated standard company price, which had remained “fairly uniform” up to this period, steadily declined; by 1780, it had disappeared.³³ The expansion of local markets pushed prices down as new competitors tried to undersell each other just enough to gain customers, which adjusted natives’ idea of a fair price.

And, like most customers, Indians would not settle for whatever goods traders brought with them just because they were foreign or made of metal. If goods seemed low quality, Indians would not buy them and would make their views very clear to the traders. If they wanted something that was not sold at the post, Indians communicated this desire as well. Traders “invariably” heeded their customers’ feedback, as most successful entrepreneurs do, contracting for the manufacture of specialized items such as curved knives in England.³⁴

Gift Giving and Gratuities

In general, gift giving was a way of sealing agreements, renewing relationships, and expressing goodwill in North American native cultures (as it is in many cultures around the world). As mentioned above, trappers were presented with gifts, usually small amounts of brandy and tobacco, when they arrived at a post.³⁵ These presents rewarded patronage and loyalty and renewed the bond between trappers and traders.

A more formal and long-lived form of gift giving in the subarctic fur trade was the trading captain system, which began in the first half of the eighteenth century on the coasts of Hudson Bay.³⁶ In this arrangement, the HBC (and its French competitors)³⁷ rewarded socially influential men with gifts based on how many hunters they recruited to bring their furs to that particular post and on the size of their group’s combined catch. According to Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, “As a reward for bringing in hunters and as encouragement to continue doing so, leading Indians received gifts

³³ “Hudson’s Bay Company. Eastmain,” record creator, AM-RC; and Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 47–51.

³⁴ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 61.

³⁵ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 46.

³⁶ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 44.

³⁷ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 43.

of brandy, tobacco, and, to distinguish them as leaders, an outfit of quasi-military clothing.”³⁸

This special status was a lifelong honor, and it was a mutually profitable one: by the turn of the nineteenth century, captains’ bonuses were worth “as much as half the value of their gang’s winter hunt,”³⁹ and it was worthwhile for the traders to be generous with the captains. Before the company and other traders established themselves inland, bringing the trade to the people, captains did the important legwork of convincing people to make the long journeys to the posts. It’s worth noting too that the captains’ groups usually included people from different hunting camps and did not simply consist of kinsmen.⁴⁰ Although this system might not sound so unique today—it was essentially independent recruiters working on commission—it resulted from applying cultural literacy to meet the trade’s needs. As Francis and Morantz explain, “Traditionally Indian trade involved the giving of presents and the cementing of friendships, and so the fur trade incorporated this noneconomic dimension” to earn natives’ business.⁴¹ The captain system ended in the early 1820s, when the demise of the HBC’s archrival, the North West Company, made the HBC the only game in town for several decades. Although former captains were designated “leading Indians” for some time afterward, the HBC’s incentive to reward people for bringing their trade to its posts had been eliminated.⁴²

The custom of gift giving persisted in a different way, however. After all, most Indians had traded independently until the 1780s, when competition from the North West Company materialized as a serious threat to the HBC’s hegemony. Moreover, independent trappers were also presented with gifts, usually small amounts of brandy and tobacco, when they arrived at a post during the captain era.⁴³ The HBC’s reestablished dominance of the fur trade didn’t mean that cultural awareness and customer appreciation could fall by the wayside: unlike geopolitical conquest, market success is not

³⁸ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 42.

³⁹ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 44–45, 125.

⁴⁰ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 45.

⁴¹ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 53.

⁴² Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 41–46 (quote on 42), 125, 169.

⁴³ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 46.

a one-and-done affair. In a relatively open market, new contenders arise, and customers must be won over again. Already by the mid-eighteenth century, Canadian competitors were following the company inland and competing with it for customers. So by the mid-nineteenth century, even though the captaincies were a thing of the past, the HBC's custom of giving presents to arrivals had actually expanded into a policy of feeding customers and their families during their sojourn at the post, likely as a way to entice people to do business with the company. Each arrival now received "a quantity of grain, according to the size of his family, some tobacco, and a pipe and on departure these gifts were repeated." These "gratuities," as they were called in the twentieth century, could become much more costly depending on how determined competing traders were to get native business. Food had formerly been given out only when people were starving.⁴⁴

Individual trappers also began to be rewarded based on the amount of quality furs they brought to the post. By the 1830s, in addition to his net earnings after accounting for debt taken out the previous fall, "each trapper was given a variety of presents. . . . includ[ing] awls, cloth, ammunition, knives, needles and thread, clothing, tobacco, sugar, and tea." The size of this bonus of sorts varied with the size of the catch, but the threshold was ten made beavers' worth of furs. Anyone who brought in fewer than ten did not receive anything beyond his earnings.⁴⁵ These bonuses were meant to encourage people to devote more time to trapping and, of course, to bring their harvests to the company. They may also have been a safeguard against loss of business in periods when the company couldn't match or beat a competitor's fur prices.

Like "pure" gifts, the bonuses were an expression of cultural fluency and accommodation. Although wealth is a universal motivation, it is a subjective one: the form and amount of wealth that will motivate a person

⁴⁴ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 146. Godsell notes that natives would "hold back their furs to see which trader would give them the biggest 'gratuity' in order to obtain their skins. . . . in this manner, they extracted from the harassed traders thousands of dollars' worth of so-called 'gratuities.' Sometimes the 'gratuity' would be a canoe, an outboard engine, but more frequently would consist of a case of tea, a side of bacon and some sacks of flour. The Chiefs and headmen would also exact their toll and receive more 'gratuities' from the traders for keeping their tribesmen 'loyal.'" Godsell, *Arctic Trader*, 300–301.

⁴⁵ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 146.

varies widely with his values and goals. Natives valued wealth as every other person does, but the higher fur prices that the company might have been able to offer had it phased out gift giving may not have been worth as much to them as the company's increased "generosity" under the prices that prevailed.

By the same token, although the trade goods were the *raison d'être* for the relations that sprang up between natives and strangers, they were not all that mattered. Francis and Morantz observe that "the temperament of the trader was crucial to maintaining a high level of returns."⁴⁶ Traders who were arrogant, unsympathetic, and distant repelled trapper-customers, who then sought out other posts. If they did enough damage to the business, such traders' contracts were not renewed. On the other hand, traders who were in tune with local circumstances and culturally literate—or, better yet, had established kinship ties in the community—could increase returns.⁴⁷ The key to retaining native patronage lay in having the cultural and situational knowledge to correctly forecast the outcome of each trapping season. Accusations of laziness often made no sense in the world of wild fur production and meat harvesting. Yield varied from year to year, and hunting often took precedence over trapping—it simply had to, being people's main source of nourishment. A more appropriate response to the vicissitudes of nature was to skew policies toward understanding and helpfulness, and this approach went much further with natives.

The Credit System in the Fur Trade

The fur business's credit system was perhaps the traders' most significant adaptation to local circumstances. Like agriculture and fishing, industries whose producers need their tools in advance to produce anything and whose yields are not predictable, the fur industry propelled itself through credit (which traders also referred to as debt). Fur was the only good that natives could sell to the traders almost without limit in order to access the items they wanted. But without some sort of credit arrangement, Indians would

⁴⁶ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 60.

⁴⁷ For examples of successful and unsuccessful traders, see Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 60–61.

have had to wait until the end of the season, when they had furs to sell, to get the things they wanted so much, including shot, which for many had become crucial to hunting and trapping. Also, the land's fur yield varied considerably from year to year, and without credit, people could have such a hard time that they might not even harvest fur at all. Without credit, the risk of a poor harvest, of wasted time, and of financial loss would have had to be borne entirely by natives, who would likely have spurned trapping under such circumstances.

So the HBC and other traders shouldered the risk, using their financial resources to support Indian communities during the trapping season. Traders outfitted trappers with a variety of staples (ammunition, tea, flour, tobacco, et cetera) at the beginning of the season, an arrangement which arose in the first half of the eighteenth century and helped stabilize trappers' economic outcomes despite the land's variable yield.⁴⁸ As Francis and Morantz explain,

Upon leaving the post in the fall, each hunter was given by the company a quantity of goods which was paid for in furs the following spring. Company traders recognized that it was [also] in their interests to advance ammunition and other necessities to certain individuals who had had unsuccessful hunts the previous winter, otherwise these men and their families might perish or, more probably, spend most of the next season hunting game animals for food and clothing rather than fur-bearing animals. . . . The extension of credit was [also] an inducement for Indians to trade at the bay rather than with the inland competition.⁴⁹

The wide variability of fur stocks meant that this credit system was very flexible, not unlike those of similar industries. As expected, the more successful and trustworthy the person, the more likely he was to be extended credit in the future. But people who still had outstanding balances from a previous poor year often received credit as well, and debts that were not

⁴⁸ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 51.

⁴⁹ Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 51–52.

paid were eventually wiped from the books, although economic historian Arthur Ray has found that Indians generally paid their debts.⁵⁰

The credit system was complemented by relief for the sick and destitute (such as widows, elders, and maimed trappers). When credit and gratuities failed as remedies for the contingencies of the fur trade, the HBC aided native families by issuing relief in kind from its own coffers. Like the system of credit, this leniency in a business relationship—goods that did not have to be repaid (though issued with the expectation that trappers would bring their harvests to the company in better times)—resulted from traders' thinking in terms of their own long-term gain. Discussing the pre-Confederation trade, Ray explains, "It served the company's interest to make sure that the natives always had these basic necessities [hunting, trapping, and fishing equipment; clothing; and food]. Therefore, in lean years, or when individual hunters suffered misfortunes because of illness or injury, the company provided essential goods as relief, gifts, or uncollectable debts. . . . Besides guaranteeing the physical survival of the native labour force, such company largess also bought loyalty to the company."⁵¹

In the 1870s, the system of credit and private relief began to weaken. Competition squeezed the HBC's profit margins in western subarctic Canada.⁵² Natives responded to the expanding market as any people would, selling "all (or at least their highest-quality) furs" to the highest bidder, which was increasingly not the HBC.⁵³ With the advent of significant competition from independent traders, the company's support lost some of the significance it once had, and trappers' loyalty became less certain. Accordingly, company directors sought to curtail credit and relief issuance to remain competitive. Discussing the post-Confederation trade, Ray notes that the credit system tied up a lot of money for many years: "Every year considerable capital was invested in both Indian debts and post inventories. This capital turned over very slowly, given the long delays that took place

⁵⁰ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 85–88.

⁵¹ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 226.

⁵² White trappers were also beginning to enter the western subarctic fur trade in large numbers, and without any special requirements to do business (they used cash and the normal credit rules of the Western world applied to them), giving trappers competition as well.

⁵³ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 226.

(up to five years) between the time the company first bought the goods and when it sold the furs it received in exchange for them.”⁵⁴ These high costs no longer made sense, nor were they sustainable. Even in the twentieth century, however, the men on the ground at the posts typically resisted these efforts to eliminate credit, knowing the particularities of trappers’ circumstances.

But the changes occurring in older fur-trading areas to the south and in the booming West did not change the origins of the trade and the strategies that by the twentieth century had brought success for hundreds of years. When the fur trade moved into the eastern Arctic, it was once again crucial for traders to cultivate native patronage and loyalty. In this place, it was as though the HBC were starting all over again. In some areas, the locals literally had to be found and persuaded to enter the trade. In the eastern Arctic—a place that states had nominally claimed but where by 1900 no state had yet established a significant foothold—an arrangement strikingly similar to that of the earlier subarctic trade took hold in the early twentieth century. The institutions and rituals on which the earlier fur trade had been built became the bedrock of the modern white fox trade.

⁵⁴ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 5.

PART 2

The Pursuit of Mutual Gain: Semifree Trade and Collaboration in the Eastern Arctic

From 1895 to 1911, prices for all varieties of fur rose sharply as the North American and European economies grew.¹ More spending power meant that people in these places could afford more luxuries such as fur coats, stoles, and fur-trimmed accessories, so the demand for furs increased long term. As businesses moved to make the things people wanted, demand continued to grow, pushing fur prices up. This all stimulated the North American fur industry: enterprising Canadians as well as Americans and other foreigners went north and west to buy furs, as well as to trap themselves. Others went into business making, selling, cleaning, and repairing fur garments or became fur dealers. Indigenous peoples, of course, responded to the demand too, bringing in more fur. Especially in the western subarctic, which was more accessible than the eastern due to expanding railroads, independent fur buyers competed hard with the mammoth Hudson's Bay Company

¹ Arthur J. Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 50.

(HBC) and nonindigenous trappers competed with indigenous trappers.² The general trend was more wealth in the fur trade, in indigenous and nonindigenous homes alike, and a more open market at the HBC's expense.

In weighing the twentieth-century fox trade's costs and benefits for Inuit, it's important to bear in mind that the HBC did not spring from a free market but from state sponsorship and privilege. As noted in chapter 2, the state legally shielded the HBC from competition for much of the eighteenth century, and even though this protection failed from the start to keep the fur trade an HBC monopoly, the combination of state privilege and the remoteness of Rupert's Land may have enabled the HBC to dominate the market until numerous competing traders coalesced into the challenge of the North West Company (officially established 1779). But despite the reality that the "honourable company" was a special interest propped up by the state, the twentieth-century fur market was a relatively free market. The HBC triumphed over the North West Company in 1821, but other competitors followed. In the latter nineteenth and twentieth centuries, numerous small-time independent traders competed with the company across Canada, but especially in the western frontier regions. At the turn of the twentieth century, larger competitors also mounted a hard challenge to the company. Revillon Frères expanded into Canada in 1903, the Sabellum Trading Company started operating in 1911, Lamson and Hubbard entered the Canadian market in 1918, and the Baffin Trading Company formed in 1939.

In the eastern Arctic in the first half of the twentieth century, these four companies, along with a very small number of independent traders, were the HBC's primary competitors. Although the British and North American governments increasingly regulated the production and sale of goods as the twentieth century progressed, there was little government intervention in trappers' production. And the circumstances of the Northern trade—the small size of Inuit communities and the limited range of goods traded—meant that there was a lot of room for commercial practices that had become nonstandard in larger, increasingly regulated economies. Wherever government decision-making was absent, individual choice reigned. The result in the eastern Arctic was mutually beneficial trade.

² Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 91–95.

CHAPTER 4

Establishing the Arctic Trade: Opening Posts and Forming Relationships

When the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) moved into the eastern Arctic in pursuit of raw white fox hides, Inuit did not value fox very much. In fact, HBC man Frank Melton (1887–1969) explained that early in the trade, many men wouldn't deign to trap foxes because it was considered “women and children's work.” Others caught only as many as they needed to buy tea and tobacco. Since Inuit were clearly interested in the HBC's items and the company only accepted fur in payment, however, Inuit started trapping.¹

In August 1909, the HBC established Wolstenholme (near present-day Ivujivik, Quebec, at the entrance to Hudson Bay, open 1909–47), its first post dedicated to the arctic fox trade, at the tip of Arctic Quebec. This was in aid of protecting the company's dominance in the North from Revillon Frères (RF; established in Paris in 1723 and incorporated in Ottawa in 1906), its main competitor in the eastern Arctic.² In 1903, as fox was becoming a hot item, RF had opened a post on Ungava Bay at Fort Chimo to compete with the HBC's older post there (open 1830–43,

¹ Melton, Frank, biographical sheet, AM-BS; and Frank Melton, interview by J. W. Anderson, September 5, 1958, tape 1 of 2, T6-15, HBCA-OHI.

² Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 367–68.

1866–1987);³ by 1909, RF had forty-eight stores in the eastern Arctic.⁴ In 1910, RF erected a post at Wakeham Bay (near present-day Kangiqsujaq, Quebec, off the southwestern shore of Hudson Strait), 203 miles (327 kilometers) northwest of Fort Chimo. RF sought to cut out middlemen by buying furs directly at the source, so it set up posts in very remote areas, in direct competition with the HBC.⁵

Though the HBC had long been acquainted with Hudson Strait Inuit by this time, Wolstenholme was new ground. This fact and the presence of an encroaching rival in RF set the tone for trade at the new post and in the eastern Arctic as a whole: the company would have to make a good effort to attract and retain Inuit patronage. The HBC was not the only game in town, as it had often been in earlier periods. Although it did not have to spar with many small independent traders, as it did in the frontier regions of western Canada, the company's fewer rivals in the eastern Arctic over the first half of the twentieth century were more persistent. With more resources at their disposal than the small operators in the West, these few competitors could more easily influence local prices and industry practices, drawing trappers away from the HBC.⁶

³ Sarah Bonesteel, *Canada's Relationship with Inuit: A History of Policy and Program Development*, ed. Erik Anderson (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2008), 4; Susan Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluiliq Project: Historical Overview of Post-Contact Occupation in the Parc National Iluiliq Project Study Area" (unpublished report submitted to the Kativik Regional Government, Nunavik Parks Division, Nunavik, QC, 2017), 27–28; Toby Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay: An Illustrated History of Inuit, Naskapi, and Eurocanadian Interaction, 1800–1970* (Westmount, QC: Avataq Cultural Institute, 2016), 73; and Arthur J. Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 92.

⁴ "Revillon Frères," McCord Museum, accessed April 18, 2021, <http://collections.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/L103.30> (this page has since been removed from the museum's website).

⁵ Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluiliq Project," 28, 30, 34; Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 92.

⁶ In the West, the company was "struggling with countless small operators all along the expanding southern frontier." Its strategy was to give these independent traders a run for their money on the frontier so that they would run out of funds before they could gain a foothold in the more profitable inland areas—a method that was largely unsuccessful. Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 91–92. See also Innis, *Fur Trade in Canada*, chap. 11 (fittingly called "The Decline of Monopoly").

Selling a New Rhythm of Life

As the fox trade developed, eastern Arctic Inuit were still oriented around seasonal subsistence hunting. The whale fishery's seasonal nature as a summer activity meant that it had fit well into the Inuit hunting calendar and had not required much of a lifestyle change. Eastern Inuit already headed to the coast during the summer for fishing, sealing, walrus hunting, and whaling on the open water. As the sea ice began to form, making navigation by boat impossible (especially before icebreakers), and the whales departed for open water, Inuit were free to head inland for their fall caribou hunts. After "freeze-up" was over and the sea ice fully formed, Inuit hunters could travel onto the ocean (the floe ice) for winter sealing and ice fishing. Trapping could commence once foxes were "prime"—their fur thick and light (foxes were graded white, silver, and blue)—and this season lasted through the long Arctic winter, ending when the foxes' coats thinned and darkened in the late spring and early summer.

However, in contrast to winter sealing, trapping was an inland activity, as foxes live in the tundra. The more traps a hunter set, the more of a commitment trapping was. Although people continued to hunt wherever they were, trapping competed with winter hunting because regular rounds had to be made to check the traps, which could be fairly spread out and away from winter game. The average Arctic trapline contained twenty traps and could be as much as 100 miles (160 kilometers) from a trading post.⁷ If a fox was caught, that trap could render no more service until it had been reset. The foxes also had to be collected sooner rather than later because other animals could feed on the carcasses, which would ruin the hides. For example, in 1914, a good fox year at Wolstenholme, the post manager mentioned that foxes trapped around the post were soon eaten by other foxes.⁸ The hides had to be cleaned and prepared in order for the traders to accept them (although there was sometimes leniency with this policy),⁹ so women, to whom this work fell, were left with less time for other work.

⁷ Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 200.

⁸ Wolstenholme post journal, 1914–18, entry for October 26, 1914, microfilm no. 1MA73, H2-30-2 (B.368/a/4), HBCA-WPJ.

⁹ HBC trader Len Budgell noted that at the Hebron post in northern Labrador furs were brought in cleaned and stretched, while at Wolstenholme they came in rolled up and frozen,

At the beginning of the fur trade, then, Inuit were faced with a choice: to change their lives but become wealthier—getting more of the foreign goods they wanted—or to continue to hunt as before but live with very few to none of these luxuries they had formerly acquired from the whalers, who were now taking their leave. Because trapping entailed logistical adjustments to the annual rhythms of subsistence, Inuit families had to weigh whether its benefits justified those costs. Most Inuit chose to trap, but they participated in the trade to widely varying degrees. Anthropologist David Damas notes that Baffin Island Inuit were generally “indifferent” in their adoption of the fox trade, largely maintaining their earlier settlement patterns. Nevertheless, he reports that northern Baffin Islanders became more sedentary after taking up trapping, remaining near meat caches and within a day of all their traps, while southern Baffin Landers elected to trap more, laying longer traplines that ran along the coast and into the interior.¹⁰

To make trapping a more alluring economic pursuit for Inuit, the HBC (and other traders) conducted the trade in a way that evened out Inuit outcomes, continuing or adapting the practices developed in the older subarctic fur trade (discussed in chapter 3). First, guided by the locals, the HBC placed its posts near Inuit communities, in meeting places and in areas where both fur and food sources were plentiful. Posts were also opened in places that people were interested in relocating to. Second and more important, the company grubstaked Inuit at the start of each trapping season (or “outfit”), providing them, before they produced any wealth, with the goods that had become essential to a decent life and quite necessary to pursue the trade. Credit was also issued in poor years to tide people over. Finally, the company complemented this credit system with relief, instructing its employees to issue the company’s own private aid as well as government-funded relief (discussed in chapter 8) at their discretion during the worst circumstances. In the Arctic fur trade, where outcomes varied with four-year fox cycles, during the nadirs of which there were hardly any animals, these forms of

which made their quality difficult to assess. Cleaning the furs was worthwhile because one could get more money for a prepared fur, especially since it could be graded on the spot. L. G. Budgell, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, December 14, 1982, tape 3 of 7, T11-55, HBCA-OHI.

¹⁰ David Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 21.

support made trapping less risky and more rewarding for Inuit. They also helped ensure trappers' success, which was important to the traders' own success.

Not a single Inuk traded fur at Wolstenholme in the first two years of the post's existence. The founding post manager, Ralph Parsons (1881–1956), made a long outreach trip in search of Inuit. Although he saw signs of former campsites in “thirty different harbours,” such as “decayed seals bones in great quantities” at Moody's Inlet, Parsons reported them “not less than 6 or 7 years old.”¹¹ Finally, in late July 1910, the staff made contact with Inuit when the SS *Active* from Dundee, Scotland, carrying “about 40 Esquimaux . . . for the whale fishing,” stopped to take water at the post. In addition to whale and walrus hunting, these forty men trapped for this ship in the wintertime, evidence of how the economy of the region was swiftly moving away from whaling. Though these Inuit had camped near the post in the fall of 1907, the ship had “removed them to Lake Harbour on the North side of the Hudsons Straits . . . as they could not live by hunting here without ammunition.”¹² They were now picked up “near Lake Harbour” (present-day Kimmirut, Nunavut, on the southern coast of Baffin Island) for whaling, and every fall they were dropped off at Big Island (just off the southern coast of Baffin Island), which had become their winter quarters.¹³ As this encounter shows, at the dawn of the Arctic fur trade, eastern Inuit remained strongly oriented around subsistence hunting, seeking the most prolific winter hunting sites and building their homes near these places even though they were selling their labor and animal products on the market. But although the natives reported “plenty of foxes” at Big Island, a good hunting ground was not always trapline material.

After the SS *Active* departed Wolstenholme in the summer of 1910, the post staff did not see Inuit again for another year, when on another mission in search of Inuit they encountered two families near Sugluk Bay (present-day northern Quebec, off the southwestern shore of Hudson Strait,

¹¹ Wolstenholme post journal, 1909–10, entry for July 8–31, 1910, microfilm no. 1MA73, H2-30-2 (B.368/a/1), HBCA-WPJ; and Wolstenholme post report, 1909–10, s.v. “General Remarks and Suggestions,” microfilm no. 1M1260, B.368/e/1, HBCA-WPR.

¹² Wolstenholme post report, 1909–10, s.v. “General Remarks and Suggestions.”

¹³ Wolstenholme post report, 1909–10, s.v. “General Remarks and Suggestions.”

about 200 miles [322 kilometers] southeast of Wolstenholme) and three families at Skeleton Island.¹⁴ Ten families were reportedly following them northwest. These families were presumably more committed to the fox trade than those aboard the whaler the year before. They were not local but had left Ungava Bay due to the scarcity of foxes and reports of their plentitude to the northwest. They had wintered in Stupart's Bay [present-day northern Quebec, off the southwestern shore of Hudson Strait] but had not had a great season there either and were heading further north. Parsons reported that "they have never spent a winter so far north as this . . . but they mean to give it a trial." Six of the families were going to trap from Sugluk Bay, and the rest would be "scattered north and south of [Wolstenholme post]."¹⁵ The seventeen people whom Parsons and his two men encountered told them that "they would hunt for [the HBC] and trade with [them] as long as [the company] remained" at Wolstenholme.¹⁶

Opening Posts with Inuit Input

The desire for foreign goods encouraged many Inuit families to relocate to lesser-known parts of their territories and take up trapping, both of which entailed risk. Moving further north meant more extreme cold, less daylight, and perhaps less game, especially for those who were unfamiliar with the area. And to trap was to take on the risks of the marketplace: they would hunt less for their subsistence in order to trap for the commercial market, but setting traps didn't mean the foxes would take the bait. Neither did a successful catch guarantee sufficient wealth to meet these communities' changing needs. Prices fluctuated—due to shortages, related supply shocks, consumer tastes, labor costs, monetary inflation, and many other local and

¹⁴ I couldn't find anything on Skeleton Island, but it was likely east of Sugluk Bay, since the post men were attempting to make it to Stupart's Bay, around halfway up Hudson Strait.

¹⁵ Wolstenholme post journal, 1910–12, entry for June 27–July 18, 1911 (both quotes), microfilm no. 1MA73, H2-30-2 (B.368/a/2), HBCA-WPJ; and Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, s.v. "Competition and General," microfilm no. 1M1260, B.368/e/2, HBCA-WPR. In the journal entry the number of families recorded is higher: two at Sugluk, four at Skeleton Island, and twenty more on the way. Parsons may have pieced some things together by the time he wrote the report, which would explain the lower numbers. He mentioned that twenty more families would be coming the following winter in addition to the twenty-five that would be in the area during the winter of 1911–12.

¹⁶ Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, s.v. "Competition and General."

global variables—as they do in any market that isn’t completely rigged but rather mirrors the vicissitudes of human existence. If they weren’t necessarily aware of all the factors that were at play, eastern Inuit weighed these risks as they understood them, knowing that they had to eat. To help mitigate these risks, the HBC supported trapping communities during the transition into the fur trade and for the duration of the traditional hunting and trapping life on the land, into the 1960s.

One basic form of support was responsiveness to Inuit preferences when erecting posts. The threat of Inuit’s trading with RF and other traders (or possibly abstaining from the market altogether¹⁷) compelled the company to weigh these preferences. Although most of the company’s eastern Arctic posts were on the coast, in spots that had a decent open-water window and were navigable by barge to facilitate restocking and employee transport, the locations were also chosen with Inuit travel and hunting logistics in mind.

Inuit across the North were certainly motivated to make long journeys to trade. As an extreme example, Len Budgell, an HBC trader who spent much of his long career in Labrador, recalled that Hudson Bay natives would sometimes travel to Labrador from Sugluk Bay, from Ungava Bay, from George River, and from inland to trade—vast distances to cover by dog team—because goods were cheaper at Labrador posts than at nearer posts.¹⁸ Notwithstanding this willingness, it was important for trading posts to be relatively close to Inuit camps so that people would not have to make long journeys in harsh weather, which often lengthened travel time

¹⁷ Because of their remoteness, some communities remained virtually outside the global marketplace well into the fur trade, doing only as much trapping as they needed to get a few important items. For example, elder Salomonie Alayco (b. 1906) remembered that people living at Pujjunaq (present-day Mansel Island, Nunavut, just west of the tip of Quebec) “visited the trading post by dogteam” and dressed entirely in polar bear skins. He noted that the people “didn’t even have any stoves. They only used soapstone lamps. They . . . managed to cross parts of ice where sea currents are. . . . Sometimes they had to use their ice chisels to move their sleds. . . . They were still living in a traditional way of Inuit.” Alayco, oral account, quoted in Lofthouse, “Parc National Iluliliq Project,” 68. To keep igloos warm and lit through long winter nights, Inuit traditionally burned seal oil in soapstone lamps. Whale oil reportedly did not burn well, leading nineteenth-century Inuit to wonder why whalers wanted it so keenly! See Dorothy Harley Eber, *When the Whalers Were up North: Inuit Memories from the Eastern Arctic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 29.

¹⁸ L. G. Budgell, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, December 6, 1982, tape 2 of 7, T11-54, HBCA-OHI.

by several days. This wasn't only out of consideration for them; it was a business exigency. If a post was too far away from a group's camp, it was possible that no one would undertake the journey. Indeed, the reason why the families journeying north in 1910 had not wintered at Cape Wolstenholme was "not that seals &c were too scarce, but that the place was too far away from any trading station for them to get ammunition &c."¹⁹ There was also the very real possibility that Inuit could withdraw from the trade entirely if the trading post was inaccessible. In fact, some communities, such as those of Baffin Island, were only marginally involved in the white fox trade. Long-serving HBC employee Peter Nichols (1914–2003) recalled that the two hundred Inuit who traded at the "tiny" Frobisher Bay post (present-day Iqaluit, Nunavut, southeastern Baffin Island, open 1914–40, 1944–87) were some of the most scattered trappers in the Arctic. He described the people as "very primitive" compared to the Inuit he'd traded with at other posts and noted that they lived almost entirely off the land and had very little contact with whites. The post consequently had fewer trade goods than other posts, and Nichols added that Frobisher Bay Inuit bought the least flour of any he'd seen and often used flint rather than matches to make fire.²⁰ In any discussion of the Canadian fur trades, then, it must be remembered that many inland peoples chose to stay out of the trade and to virtually forgo European goods, judging the long journey to the nearest post not worth their while.²¹

After the first lonely and unprofitable year at Wolstenholme, Parsons—who would go on to become the HBC's fur trade commissioner (1931–40)

¹⁹ Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, s.v. "Competition and General."

²⁰ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, October 1981, tape 3 of 8, T11-43, HBCA-OHI; and "Hudson's Bay Company. Frobisher Bay," record creator, AM-RC. Frobisher Bay Inuit actually traded more sealskins than fox pelts.

²¹ Toby Morantz finds that this was the case from the 1730s to the 1850s with some Cree inlanders in the subarctic. During this period, the inlanders' socioeconomic organization showed continuity: they either did not participate in the trade or came to HBC posts every few years. Of course, the trading post wasn't the only place to get European goods. Some people were too far away to make the journey and didn't mind used items, so a trade in secondhand goods sprang up in some places. Such people's limited needs could be met by trading with Inuit, Cree, and Naskapi trappers. See Toby Morantz, "Economic and Social Accommodations of the James Bay Inlanders to the Fur Trade," in *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations*, ed. Shepard Krech III (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), 72.

and greatly influence the company's strategy²²—was relentless in trying to convince the company that business would be better if they relocated the post. In his 1909–10 report he noted that RF had “established a Post at Cape Dufferin [northwest of present-day Inukjuak, Quebec, about midway up the eastern shore of Hudson Bay] . . . [so] no natives can be expected here from that direction.” He also noted apprehensively that if RF were to open a post at Stupart's Bay, trade would be diverted from that direction as well and would also affect Fort Chimo's business from there, which was “quite a considerable amount.”²³ Based on his reconnaissance missions, Parsons concluded that there were no Inuit within 200 miles (322 kilometers) of Wolstenholme and opined that it was “out of the question to expect natives to visit us here from the South or East even supposing they knew that we had a trading Post here as they are cut off by Revillon Freres of Cape Dufferin to the South and it would be as near for them to go to [the HBC post in] Fort Chimo from Stuparts Bay to the East as to here.”²⁴

His recommendation was to set up shop at Stupart's Bay, where he thought a post would attract a lot of local trade. Although Fort Chimo was drawing in some trade from Stupart's Bay, the long journey (seven to ten weeks roundtrip) meant that only some of the Stupart's Bay Inuit were trading at Fort Chimo, and only once a year at that. Parsons was convinced that a Stupart's Bay post could increase the trade from this area by 80 percent. However, the captain of the HBC supply ship *SS Pelican* refused to move the post, since there hadn't been any orders from higher-ups to do so, and Wolstenholme remained open as a hunting post for another season (1910–11).²⁵

In the 1909–10 report, Parsons also suggested establishing a new post across Hudson Strait at Ashe Inlet, on Big Island. This recommendation undoubtedly came out of the encounter with the Inuit aboard the whaler *SS*

²² “Ralph Parsons: King of Baffin Land,” HBC Heritage, Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation, Hudson's Bay Company, accessed September 21, 2019, <http://www.hbcheritage.ca/people/other-people/ralph-parsons>. Parsons's policy respected the experience of the men in the field, who ran the posts and knew how to work with natives, something that committees in London and Winnipeg didn't always understand.

²³ Wolstenholme post report, 1909–10, s.v. “Competition.”

²⁴ Wolstenholme post report, 1909–10, s.v. “General Remarks and Suggestions”; and Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, s.v. “Competition and General.”

²⁵ Wolstenholme post report, 1909–10, s.v. “General Remarks and Suggestions.”

Active, who had begun wintering at Big Island a few years earlier. Parsons noted that these people had told one of his employees that Big Island had plenty of foxes and residents. They had also sold the employee some dogs and clearly “hadn’t the least idea of trade, in fact had never seen a trade shop before.” More important, they “were highly delighted with the goods they saw displayed in store.”²⁶ In 1911, before he set off to establish this post, which would be named Lake Harbour (and would actually be on Baffin Island, about fourteen miles [twenty-three kilometers] north of Big Island, open 1911–87), Parsons noted that the site possessed all the characteristics of a good location: there were “plenty of Esquimaux there,” “the furs were there,” and there was “no competition.” This was all information that the Big Islanders had given him the year before.²⁷ As a business, the company wanted to be conveniently located, to bring the goods to the people rather than waiting for the people to come to the goods. The HBC’s dual nature as a retailer of consumer goods and as a producer of raw materials (furs) also meant that it was beneficial for the company to be as close to the best traplines as its shipping needs allowed; this too meant listening to Inuit. More than consumers of the company’s retail goods, Inuit were to be the purveyors of its chief product, and they knew where the foxes were.

After the overland encounter with the families heading north to trap in 1911, Parsons planned to keep Wolstenholme open an additional year because there was plenty of game, which would facilitate trapping. These families seemingly tried to convince Parsons that Wolstenholme was a great place for a post. In his 1910 report, Parsons wrote that the people had praised the post as a good idea, and the availability of food was a big reason. They observed that the location was very convenient for people coming in to trade due to the good hunting grounds on both sides of Cape Wolstenholme and that “seals [were] as plentiful, [and] walrus, porpoise, bears and foxes more plentiful here than further south.”²⁸ Seal was a staple food for coastal Inuit, and walrus was an important source of dog food. Contrary to popular belief, the Inuit diet was not simply replaced by biscuits and tea with the

²⁶ Wolstenholme post report, 1909–10, s.v. “General Remarks and Suggestions.”

²⁷ Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, August 22, 1911, entry.

²⁸ Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, s.v. “Competition and General.”

beginning of regular trade with whites. Families continued to subsist on game during the fur trade; there was no other way to survive.

Like the earlier group, these Inuit assured Parsons that in this location the company would get more foxes than anywhere else along the southern shore of Hudson Strait. They also insisted that more people would move to the area if the post remained, including “a great number of the Esquimaux at Stupart’s Bay” and the people “on the Hudson’s Bay side” of Cape Wolstenholme.²⁹ Although he thought their opinions of the fox and game stocks a bit optimistic, Parsons came around to keeping the post open, although not to the exclusion of opening another post at Stupart’s Bay: “The question [now] is would we do better to remove entirely from here this fall [1911], where we stand to get at least 2000 foxes and go to Stupart’s, where the Esquimaux say foxes are not so plentiful and also to compete with Revillon Freres? I do not think so, but there is no doubt in my mind that if we had another post at Stupart’s Bay it would pay well.”³⁰

But in keeping with Parsons’s earlier directions in the 1909 report, the company sent instructions to dismantle Wolstenholme post and move it to Stupart’s Bay in the summer of 1911. By this time, Parsons’s opinion of Wolstenholme as a bad location for business had changed decisively, and the natives’ views were an important factor behind the reassessment: “When I recommended Stupart’s Bay as the best place for our own Post on my last report, I had no idea that Revillon Freres would establish there so soon, neither did I think that we would have Esquimaux here and that they would report so favourably on the place.”³¹

In the end, the HBC supply ship arrived late, leaving insufficient time³² to establish the posts at Stupart’s Bay and Ashe Inlet as planned, so

²⁹ Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, s.v. “Competition and General.”

³⁰ Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, s.v. “Competition and General.”

³¹ Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, August 8, 1911, entry.

³² The ship couldn’t stay later than early September because ice would make the strait unnavigable. Establishing or moving a post involved surveying the harbor to make sure it was deep enough for the supply ships to enter safely, transporting and unloading all manner of construction materials and trade goods, and building the structures (a store, a winter-ready dwelling house for employees, and sometimes a native house for trappers stopping in). Ideally, the ship’s crewmen would be able to remain long enough to allow the unloading to occur at a reasonable pace and perhaps to assist in constructing the buildings. See Parsons’s complaints

Parsons, after having dismantled the Wolstenholme buildings, made an executive decision to allow the post to remain for an additional year and to wait until the next year to establish the Stupart's Bay post.³³ But by this point his preference had become to leave the post in place: "Now that there are Esquimaux at Wolstenholme who are willing to live here and hunt in this locality for us, which was all that was required the past two years to make the Post a success, I consider that it would be very unwise to remove from here."³⁴ In fact, given the presence of RF at Wakeham Bay and the trappers' desire to establish at Wolstenholme, the most beneficial position for the HBC was to have posts both at Wolstenholme and at Stupart's Bay. Wolstenholme would be so convenient to the local population that they would be less inclined to journey to Wakeham Bay to trade with RF, and the Stupart's Bay post, which would be a stone's throw from RF's Wakeham Bay post, would hopefully turn local families in that area into HBC customers. The HBC's Stupart's Bay post (near present-day Kangiqsujuaq, Quebec) finally opened in 1914. The two posts benefited not only local Inuit but also the company, which was in a better position to fight off encroaching competition in these areas. As Parsons concluded, "If there were no traders in Hudson's Straits but ourselves Stupart's Bay would certainly be the best place for a Post [being centrally located on the strait]. However as such is not the case, I consider that [two posts] will bring in as much (*if not more*) Returns as being at Stupart's Bay *alone*."³⁵

Ultimately, Wolstenholme remained operational in its original spot until 1947, although from 1925 to 1930 it was an outpost (which was not always open and where trade occurred only sporadically) to Sugluk East post (near present-day Salluit, Quebec, open 1925–32). However, Parsons's comments and the moves he made when Wolstenholme's fate hung in the balance demonstrate the importance of local input as the HBC expanded into the Inuit homeland, as well as the company's genuine concern with winning and retaining Inuit patronage in the pursuit of furs. In a business

about the impossibility of establishing two posts in the time remaining: Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, August 21 and 22, 1911, entries.

³³ Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, August 21, 1911, entry.

³⁴ Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, s.v. "Remarks and Suggestions."

³⁵ Wolstenholme post report, 1910–11, August 21, 1911, entry.

context, and especially in a competitive one, the concerns of a customer or a partner must be weighed and efforts must be made to accommodate them. Eastern Inuit were both customers and partners in fur production. The company's presence would not be a favor to them.

Grubstaking Inuit Trappers

From the beginning, two realities characterized the fur trade in the eastern Arctic: First, sometimes harvests were poor or fur prices low; trappers needed to be supported during those times, or the people and the trade would die. Second, trappers could simply go to competitors for credit, taking their furs and business there; a hard stance from traders could affect business in the short and long terms. For these reasons, the white fox trade, like the older subarctic fur trade, functioned on a credit system. Without it Inuit might not have become more than sporadic customers and fur producers.

As in the subarctic, the HBC grubstaked native trappers and their families at the beginning of the trapping season, providing them in advance with the food and equipment they needed. For example, on southern Baffin Island in 1922, Inuit were advanced traps, four or five boxes of ammunition, and a bit of sugar and flour.³⁶ Foxes weren't usually shot, but ammunition (and, later, gasoline for motorboats) helped families hunt more efficiently, allowing them to cache food and dog food for the winter. This ensured not only that they would survive but also that they would spend the winter trapping rather than subsistence hunting.

Contrary to what many scholars imply, Inuit did not simply choose between trapping and an adequate diet; with HBC support, they hunted in the fall to build up a food supply, as well as through the winter. More important, when food was scarce, Inuit would neglect trapping; there was simply no other option. For example, in 1914, it was reported that in the Sugluk Bay area "the trading results [were] very poor. . . . If a native gets a fox he is a miracle worker & the natives are all starving & are only hunting enough to keep themselves alive."³⁷ Even if dry goods could have met

³⁶ L. A. Learmonth, interview by J. W. Anderson, June 15, 1958, tape 2 of 5, T6-4, HBCA-JWA.

³⁷ Wolstenholme post journal, 1912-14, entry for April 11, 1914, microfilm no. 1MA73, H2-30-2 (B.368/a/3), HBCA-WPJ.

all of Inuit's dietary needs, operating on the assumption that Inuit would eat mostly these provisions would have made traders' up-front costs much higher, possibly unsustainably so. (This is to say nothing of the fact that Inuit had no interest in giving up their favorite foods in order to trap.)

Moreover, the HBC's own men were expected to sustain themselves on the food of the country in the early years of the Arctic trade.³⁸ The company-supplied food was limited to a few canned and dehydrated provisions, only expanded with the arrival of white women in the North in the mid- to late 1930s.³⁹ To eat well, the post men hunted and also relied on Inuit hunters, who would trade some of their game, such as birds and whale meat, at the posts.⁴⁰ The expectation that post staff would hunt for a significant portion of their subsistence was likely due to the difficulty of transporting fresh food and the desire to cut already-high overhead costs, which included purchasing post equipment and trade goods, shipping these across great distances, and maintaining ships and eventually aircraft.

It made no economic sense for traders to stand in the way of Inuit subsistence hunting, and for this reason the credit system supported local food acquisition and in fact revolved around the traditional hunting calendar, with Inuit outfitted right after ship time, before the fall hunting season. HBC veteran Peter Nichols recalled that the natives who traded at the Port Harrison post (present-day Inukjuak, Quebec, on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay, open 1920–87) ate seals and seabirds, which they hunted all year, in addition to fish such as arctic char. At Port Harrison the annual walrus hunt, which began in October, was one of the most important activities because “the entire economy depended on feeding the dogs.” In fact, Nichols noted that the HBC provided dog food from its own store if Inuit

³⁸ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 5, 1983, tape 4 of 8, T11-57, HBCA-OHI; and Melton interview, September 5, 1958, tape 1.

³⁹ Nichols interview, October 1981 and September 5, 1983, tapes 3 and 4. Nichols noted that as late as 1940, when he was married and his wife came to live with him, there were very few white women in the North.

⁴⁰ These entries provide just a few examples of the trade in local foodstuffs: Wolstenholme post journals, 1923–24, 1933–34, 1938–39, and January 1945–November 1946, entries for January 19, 1924, June 27, 1933, March 21, 1939, June 4, 1939, June 6, 1939, and June 27, 1945, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/9, B.368/a/15, B.368/a/17, and B.368/a/20, HBCA-WPJ.

ran short.⁴¹ It's also worth mentioning that if the people couldn't get meat, they would eat their dogs as a last resort, a terrible sacrifice of the essential help they provided (the only option after that was to eat their clothes and shoes). HBC trader Wally Buhr (1915–2001), who worked at Lake Harbour, Sugluk West (known as Sugluk after 1940, since Sugluk East had closed; open 1929–87), and Cape Dorset (present-day Kinngait, Nunavut, on Dorset Island, just off the coast of southwestern Baffin Island, open 1913–87), echoed Nichols's testimony: "Our great interest was in the fur, in the white foxes," and natives without dog food couldn't trap but would have to go hunting. He explained that the company did everything possible to have enough meat to keep people trapping.⁴² The HBC kept reserves of walrus or whale meat (for dog food), seal fat (for food), and seal or whale oil (for heat) at their posts, producing these items locally or purchasing them from Inuit in other areas and transporting them to have on hand where they might be needed. Natives could get these goods on credit and sometimes as rations.⁴³

In the fall of 1934, the post manager of Wolstenholme specifically mentioned credit in relation to hunting. He reported that he had had to provision local Inuit for walrus hunting three times "instead of the usual twice" because bad weather had interfered with the previous hunting trips. This had resulted in high debt among the trappers, but the post manager anticipated a good fox season and was not as concerned as he might have been. Still, he thought that "lack of dogfood [would] undoubtedly minimise [the] fur hunt this coming winter," however, since the men had not secured enough walrus to last through the winter and would have to turn

⁴¹ Nichols interview, September 5, 1983, tapes 4 and 5.

⁴² W. A. Buhr, interview by Wendy Owen, July 13, 1981, tape 1 of 4, T11-8, HBCA-OHI.

⁴³ Melton interview, September 5, 1958, tape 1. Buhr, in his July 13, 1981, interview, mentioned "collecting" and sun drying of arctic char; Frobisher Bay post journal, 1938–39, entry for June 17, 1939, microfilm no. 1MA24, B.411/a/6, HBCA-FBPJ, mentions seal fat being packed; and Lake Harbour post journal, 1914–15, microfilm nos. 1MA34 and 1MA35, H2-30-4 (B.430/a/1), HBCA-LHPJ, is filled with mentions of sealskin, seal oil, and seal fat trading as well as rendering of seal fat. As with the purchase and exportation of sealskins, deerskins, and whale hide, at least some of which were sent to be sold at posts lacking them, it seems that the company kept for the use of Inuit and HBC staff at least some of the animal oil and fat, all the dog meat, and perhaps some of the fish that it amassed rather than exporting these products.

their attention to it later.⁴⁴ Decades later, in contrast, a post manager happily wrote that “all natives have done well with Whales, and are better off for Meat and Oil than they have been for the last 10 or 15 years; it should make a difference to the Fur hunt!”⁴⁵

In 1914, a Lake Harbour employee wrote: “Owing to the tardiness of the ship we are obliged to let some of the natives go deer-hunting [i.e., caribou hunting] instead of waiting, so that they will be able to get their skins for winter clothing.”⁴⁶ The natives were usually contracted to help load and unload the cargo ship in August, but since the ship was late, the post staff had no choice but to do this work with fewer hands, timing being critical to both the hunt and the ship’s schedule. There was no anger or frustration in the trader’s words. He understood well that the fall caribou hunt could not be skipped and replaced with credit or gratuities, because caribou was not only a primary food but also a source of proper winter attire. As with meat and fat, traders’ products could not readily supplant traditional caribou and sealskin clothing and boots. Fur clothing was superior to the company’s offerings in keeping the body warm,⁴⁷ and Nichols explained that for their winter wear and for trapping, the natives preferred skin clothing whenever they could get it.⁴⁸

As caribou became more scarce in the eastern Arctic, people had to go further afield to procure them, so during Nichols’s time at Port Harrison, in the 1940s, the company imported hides from the caribou areas inland, such as Baker Lake, which had plenty, and sold them to the locals, who would make their own winter clothes out of them. However, Nichols also witnessed the beginning of the transition to store-bought clothes, which he attributed to the HBC’s growing apparel offerings, as well as to the increasing use of

⁴⁴ Wolstenholme post journal, 1934–35, entries for September 29, 1934, and October 12, 1934 (quotes from the latter), microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/16, HBCA-WPJ.

⁴⁵ Wolstenholme post journal, January 1945–November 1946, entry for July 14, 1945.

⁴⁶ Lake Harbour post journal, 1914–15, entry for August 12, 1914.

⁴⁷ The HBC men knew this: they themselves had skin outfits made. Bert Swaffield explained that if you wanted clothes made in the Arctic you had to buy the seal- or deerskins and have a woman make the outfit for you. A. T. Swaffield, interview by Wendy Owen, July 30, 1981, tape 2 of 3, T11-14, HBCA-OHI.

⁴⁸ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 6, 1983, tape 6 of 8, T11-59, HBCA-OHI.

nonfur clothing. (Inuit women had begun to make clothing, particularly parkas, out of duffel, a heavy woolen cloth with nap on both sides.) During the shift to readymade clothes, Inuit continued to prefer sealskin boots (kamiks), however. In fact, HBC trader Budgell recalled that at Hebron (present-day northern Labrador, open 1926–42), where he worked from 1941 to 1942, the company amassed great quantities of prepared sealskins as well as sealskin boots for shipment elsewhere.⁴⁹ Sealskin boots became popular in mining and lumber camps after 1935, so most of the boots were probably sent south, but it's likely that some quantity of skins was reserved for trading posts in areas where seals were scarce, so that women could still make kamiks for their families.⁵⁰

So Inuit couldn't simply be forced to trap themselves into the ground while tolerating a decreasing living standard—and they weren't. Inuit families participated in the fur trade—men trapping and hunting, women processing hides and making clothes—as long as it was worthwhile for them to do so. Inuit benefited from the labor-saving tools, additional food sources, and other nice new things that their furs brought in reach, and perhaps also from the extended social network they could now count on. The same basic motive of personal gain on the other side of the trading counter meant that traders understood and accommodated the demands of Inuit life. As a matter of fact, they often tried to encourage Inuit to amass as much meat and fat as they could for the coming winter: “We have been trying to impress on the natives the necessity for looking ahead, putting up fish and meat during the summer and fall, and putting a little something aside in good years for the rainy day ahead,” reported one trader at Cape Smith (present-day Cape Smith, Nunavut, on Smith Island, just off the northeastern coast of Hudson Bay, open 1922–52) in 1939.⁵¹ Fur traders benefited, pure and simple, from well-clothed Inuit with ample larders.

The credit system was a good arrangement. Inuit got the goods they were after in advance, and the fur traders did the waiting—although Inuit

⁴⁹ Hebron was known for its fine sealskins. Nichols interview, September 6, 1983, tape 6; and Budgell interview, December 14, 1982.

⁵⁰ Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 96n1.

⁵¹ Cape Smith post journal, 1938–39, entry for February 21, 1939, microfilm no. 1MA11, B.398/a/10, HBCA-CSPJ.

did take on costs as well, including storing and transporting the furs until spring, when they would finally deliver them to the posts. According to Bruce Campbell (1913–2008), who was an HBC employee for five years, all of the company's trading posts kept files on each trapper, which included notes on their "ability as an engineer, as a dog-driver, as a hunter, as a trapper, and as a boatman; general character; and . . . the amount of fur caught in the past year."⁵² These files served as a kind of credit report—a trapper's skill and past catches helped HBC traders estimate his future income and determine how much credit (and leeway with credit) to extend to him. Each trapper also had his own ledger at the trading post. Whatever he was advanced would be listed as debt on this account. As he brought in foxes and other country products (sealskins, polar bear skins, animal fat, whale meat, fish, and other game), his balance would decrease. Debts were written off as uncollectable after a year, though it was not uncommon for them to be paid off after they were officially off the books.⁵³

Grubstaking was not a practice unique to the fur trade, of course; what was unique about the institution in this context was the leniency accorded the debtor. For example, throughout northern Quebec in the 1930s and 1940s, a person who came in with furs was permitted to choose how much of this income would be credited against his balance and how much would be spent in the store that day.⁵⁴ There were limits to this, of course, as a July 6 entry in the Wolstenholme post journal for 1940 demonstrates. On that day, two Inuit arrived with whale meat to trade, and the post staff got into "quite a disagreement with Ugnaitok concerning who should provide the natives with cartridges during the summer months [when Inuit had no fur income]. . . . He is of the decided opinion that the Company should provide the Cartridges when the natives are 'hard up' and the natives permitted to spend their small earnings . . . on tea, tobacco and such like. I do not know

⁵² Bruce Campbell, *Where the High Winds Blow: Adventures in the Arctic with the Hudson's Bay Company*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 17 (quote), 18.

⁵³ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 87.

⁵⁴ Nichols interview, September 6, 1983, tape 6.

who is responsible for entertaining this line of thought; but they both got cartridges for the meat traded to day.”⁵⁵

As this episode shows, the natives could not simply ignore their debts, expecting the traders to both provide all the capital goods for Inuit to trap and pay full price for their furs. Inuit trappers, after all, were independent fur producers. They were not selling labor. As such, they and their families were responsible for their own capital investments in rifles, ammunition, and other necessary goods. In fact, they were lucky to at least get some free traps from the HBC. The benefit of being independent producers, of course, was that the income from each skin they sold was fully theirs, even if they had operating expenses to offset. For the HBC traders, the wealth to be made in procuring furs from the far-flung Arctic hinterlands and bringing them to London and other trade centers was a motivation to be flexible purveyors of credit in addition to fur traders. This was also a logical move given the overlap between the consumer goods Inuit desired and the capital goods of their fur-trapping business.

A related and more crucial difference between traditional credit systems and that of the eastern Arctic fur trade, however, was that there was not a hard limit on credit. An indebted trapper requesting more credit would, in most cases, be issued more goods. This practice has often been described as some kind of profiteering wherein helpless natives were ensnared in debt and tricked out of their land, moveable possessions, and livelihoods. Although credit was used to this effect in other contexts, this was not true of the eastern Arctic trade. Instead, contractual agreements were mutually respected, and there was ample leniency and flexibility with credit, not for the purpose of tricking natives out of land, but as an adaptation to the unique variability of the wild fur industry.

Although Inuit in the eastern Arctic trade operated on credit, they were largely successful at repaying debt, holding up their end of credit agreements. This means that their story was one of using credit to propel themselves forward year by year rather than one of spiraling into poverty under unpayable debt, as happened to some North American peoples. Peter

⁵⁵ Wolstenholme post journal, 1940–41, entry for July 6, 1940, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/18, HBCA-WPJ.

Nichols, who spent several years trading at Frobisher Bay, Port Harrison, and Pond Inlet (open 1921–87), reports that in two to three years out of every five the company would not collect the debt that it had issued but that Inuit paid their debts overall.⁵⁶ HBC employee Lorenz Learmonth (1892–1985), discussing his time at Lake Harbour, noted that if there were foxes, Inuit paid their debts.⁵⁷ The truth of this statement can be seen from on-the-ground reports. At Wolstenholme post in 1934, long after the boom years of the twenties, post manager J. G. Allen reported, “There is every reason to suppose that all the debts will be cleared off as usual.”⁵⁸ Over ten years later, at the same post, J. G. Cormack (1911–72) wrote that the trappers were “all able to pay debts in full and most of them have a bit left over for tobacco money.”⁵⁹ Moreover, although the company would write debts off as losses after a year, many people would clear their accounts after that period, which shows that even more people were responsible with their credit lines.⁶⁰ Bert Swaffield (1903–91), who traded all around the eastern Arctic and at Southampton Island (renamed Coral Harbour in 1968; present-day Coral Harbour, Nunavut, on Southampton Island, at the mouth of Hudson Bay, open 1924–87), explained that Inuit didn’t like to carry debt and considered it a burden.⁶¹

If the leniency with credit raises suspicions about the HBC’s motives, the practice of striking debt off the books after a year (and the lack of interest on this debt) shows that the credit system was not calculated simply to dispossess trappers. The alternative, often carried out when people are unable to meet their obligations to creditors, was to seize and liquidate debtors’ possessions. This was not pursued, chiefly due to the profit motive of the fur industry. If the HBC and other fur traders had taken an inflexible stance, either bankrupting Inuit communities or placing a hard credit limit on them, the people might have abandoned trapping as a regular occupation

⁵⁶ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 6, 1983, tapes 6 and 7 of 8, T11-59 and T11-60, HBCA-OHI.

⁵⁷ Learmonth interview, June 15, 1958.

⁵⁸ Wolstenholme post journal, 1934–35, entry for October 12, 1934.

⁵⁹ Wolstenholme post journal, January 1945–November 1946, entry for July 25, 1946.

⁶⁰ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 87.

⁶¹ A. T. Swaffield, interview by Wendy Owen, August 26, 1981, tape 3 of 3, T11-22, HBCA-OHI.

and reduced their consumption of traders' goods. As Swaffield explained, "There was no way to collect on Inuit who had been outfitted. You just had to wait until they had a good year."⁶²

The wealth that traders could make in the many good years, both from fur sales and from Inuit purchases, was clearly worth the cost of carrying the communities in poor years, even more so when Inuit's general creditworthiness is taken into account. When HBC higher-ups attempted to curtail credit issuance as a way to cut costs and remain competitive, the post men tended to resist the mandates, and it was common for additional credit to be issued off the books, via under-the-table "purgatory" or "vest pocket" ledgers.⁶³ Undoubtedly some HBC men took this personal risk out of sympathy with natives, who in bad years could face not only poverty but also starvation, and many of whom the traders knew well. But it is more likely that lending in this way was not as risky as it seems. Traders understood that high-debt years were a normal part of the industry due to low fur prices, few foxes, and bad hunting years, all of which reduced the trappers' purchasing power but were somewhat cyclical. Traders knew that their partners would clear their balances as prices and fur stocks rebounded. In the meantime, post managers would find ways to balance the books by the end of the outfit, either writing the amounts off as sick/destitute credits or crediting their trappers more than their furs were worth.⁶⁴

The natural law framework in place in the North (discussed in chapter 1), moreover, encouraged communication and respect for the specific contractual conventions developed in the fur trade. To attempt to collect debt or to seize people's personal effects on a strict loan maturation timeline, without regard to the realities on the ground, amounted to swindling in this context. It was common knowledge in the fur trade that "you couldn't use force with the natives but had to be straight with them," as Swaffield put it. Robert Janes, the free trader at Pond Inlet who tried to rule with an iron fist, giving all his supplies out on debt and then trying to force the locals to pay (see chapter 2), ignored the flexible nature of loan contracts in the

⁶² Swaffield interview, August 26, 1981.

⁶³ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 87–88, 211.

⁶⁴ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 88.

trade. In doing this, he used force illegitimately, attempting to collect in the wrong circumstances, and thus threatened the community. He paid with his life when the community judged him a threat and decided to execute him.⁶⁵ The virtually unrestricted ability of people in the eastern Arctic to defend themselves and their property from aggression helped prevent abuse through the credit system.

⁶⁵ Swaffield interview, August 26, 1981. For more on this case and the extension of Canadian jurisdiction over Inuit, see Shelagh D. Grant, *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); and Dorothy Harley Eber, *Images of Justice: A Legal History of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut as Traced through the Yellowknife Courthouse Collection of Inuit Sculpture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

CHAPTER 5

An Interlude of Peace and Prosperity: Cultural Accommodation and Nonintervention

Cultural exchange is one of the most basic forms of exchange between people, and it's an important lubricant for long-term economic growth. Two enemy groups can trade in a beneficial way, but learning to work together and to respect one another establishes a peaceful social milieu with tailored, mutually intelligible ground rules. Like traders in the subarctic, fur traders in the eastern Arctic adopted many local practices in order to be successful, beginning with embracing Inuit material culture. Many wore fur clothing, which they paid local women to make for them. They traveled by dog sled (komatik) during the winter and slept in small igloos when they were traveling. This adoption of Inuit material culture was often born of necessity rather than any desire to assimilate to the local culture; however, other forms of integration were not merely practical: they made business sense. Learning Inuktitut, sharing food and extending credit, and abiding by Inuit legal norms (in the sense of interfering with them minimally) were crucial to establishing local goodwill and commerce.

Peace, generosity, and the ability to communicate promote commerce, and since traders were in the area to trade rather than to conquer, there was no contest for cultural or legal hegemony (although this does not mean that

traders' activities didn't have an impact on the local cultures). The beauty of white-Inuit interactions' focus on trade and the lack of a local top-down state apparatus in the eastern Arctic was that neither group had to give up their culture or subordinate themselves to another people's rules. Each group could live by their norms internally and come together for trade, avoiding conflict through a mutual awareness of the way the other conducted affairs. Traders, therefore, were free to, and in fact sought to, accommodate Inuit culture rather than dismantle it and replace it with their own—this in spite of the traders' strong sense of belonging to a superior culture (in the Hudson's Bay Company [HBC] post journals and in its employee publication *The Beaver*, the distant North was commonly juxtaposed with “civilization”).

Learning to Communicate

In the Arctic, knowledge of Inuktitut was essential to communication and trade. Especially outnumbering whites as they did, Inuit were not expected to speak English or culturally accommodate HBC men. From the first year of Wolstenholme post's existence, Ralph Parsons, who was then a district manager and clerk in charge of establishing posts in the eastern Arctic, recommended hiring people who spoke “the language” in some capacity.¹ This suggestion resulted in the presence at many posts of interpreters from Labrador (where white-Inuit intermarriage had resulted in the hybrid Settler culture and many people who could speak both English and Inuktitut). Despite the interpreters' presence, there was still an expectation that traders would learn some “Eskimo,” as the language was commonly called. When he traded with locals for the first time in 1934, HBC man Bruce Campbell experienced a kind of light hazing at the hands of the trappers: they requested items in Inuktitut without pointing at them and waited for him to grab the correct one. Though this was done in good fun—afterward Campbell felt that “the ice had been broken” and that he had passed the test for friendship—it was also the articulation of a ground rule: white-Inuit

¹ Wolstenholme post report, 1909–10, s.v. “General Remarks and Suggestions,” B.368/e/1, microfilm no. 1M1260, HBCA-WPR. Parsons was also the HBC's fur trade commissioner from 1931 to 1940 and therefore significantly influenced how the company's trade was conducted during those years, not to mention the impact he had in his capacity as a district manager and inspecting officer from 1909 to 1930. Parsons, William Ralph, biographical sheet, AM-BS.

trade and interaction would be governed by a hybrid set of rules, but the lingua franca would be Inuktitut.²

HBC trader Peter Nichols explained that originally people were brought from Labrador as interpreters because the HBC's white traders did not speak the language. The company built up a staff of "Eskimo linguists" until finally the traders learned the language themselves and the interpreters were "dispensed with." Inuit reportedly did not like to use interpreters and did not trust them, fearing that their personal financial affairs would become public information. By Nichols's time, interpreters were used only in exceptional cases—when a staff member wasn't proficient enough in the language or when a trapper didn't want to put anything toward his debt but the manager felt he should, at which point the interpreter "was called in so that there could be no misunderstanding as to where [the trapper] stood."³

Inuktitut expressions and phrases made their way into the HBC men's writings, evidence that traders became proficient in Inuktitut, if not fluent. In the journal entry for January 18, 1924, at Wolstenholme, for example, the post manager reported that "Aoudlak, Pootoolik and Jardine" had lost their rifles and some darts on the sea ice: "It is a sorry business but as the Eskimos say, I-ona-mut." Since the phrase was not given in syllabics and I lack proficiency in Inuktitut, I cannot know the phrase's meaning with certainty, but the manager evidently expected future post men looking over the journals to be familiar with it.⁴ His instinct was not wrong. The memoir of A. Dudley Copland (b. 1901), who traded in the western Arctic from 1923 to 1939, contains a very similar phrase: "Ayeongnirmut—how could it be otherwise?"⁵ Another journal entry states that an Inuk had brought some poor-quality "muktuk" to trade. The writer's choice of the Inuit term to describe whale

² Bruce D. Campbell, *Where the High Winds Blow: Adventures in the Arctic with the Hudson's Bay Company*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 9–10.

³ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 6, 1983, tape 6 of 8, T11-59, HBCA-OHI.

⁴ Wolstenholme post journal, 1923–24, entry for January 18, 1924, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/9, HBCA-WPJ.

⁵ A. Dudley Copland, *Coplalook: Chief Trader, Hudson's Bay Company, 1923–39* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1985), 235 (italics original).

meat shows a degree of acculturation and language acquisition.⁶ HBC man Bob May's (1918–2008) autobiographical story "Walrus Hunt" similarly made use of Inuktitut words, as did Bruce Campbell's memoir, which even included a glossary of Inuktitut terms to guide readers.⁷

Becoming Generous Partners

The quest for gain in the marketplace encourages participants to know their customers and to accommodate them as much as necessary to get their business. To gain the goodwill of Inuit, HBC and other traders had to familiarize themselves with the local culture and had to court locals. Like many other cultures, Inuit culture values generosity, particularly with food, so to maintain good relations, the fur traders mimicked Inuit food-sharing practices by feeding everyone who came to the post.

HBC employee Wally Buhr remembered that natives were fed and looked after when they came in to trade, explaining that at Lake Harbour his wife, Marge Buhr, was responsible for those arrangements.⁸ Accordingly, the post journal entry for June 6, 1914, at Lake Harbour notes that "rations, Mess etc" were served to the arrivals. In fact, HBC posts had "gratuities" budgets specifically to meet this cultural expectation (though the post men often found it insufficient to satisfy visitors). So established was this unique custom that it was rare for visitors to have to feed themselves, as happened at Wolstenholme in 1934: the annual ship was late, and none of the Inuit who had come to the post wanted to return home, so the post manager asked everyone to feed themselves, the post's "present allowance" being insufficient to feed them all.⁹

⁶ Wolstenholme post journal, 1938–39, June 6, 1939, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/17, HBCA-WPJ. *Muktuk* refers to beluga whale meat and blubber.

⁷ May, Bob Marden, biographical sheet, AM-BS; "Bob May, 90: Fur Trader, Trapper, and Outfitter," January 8, 2009, Narkive Newsgroup Archive, accessed July 1, 2024, <https://alt.obituaries.narkive.com/6D6qngpC/bob-may-legend-of-the-eastern-arctic-as-hudson-bay-post-manager>; and B. M. May, "Walrus Hunt," *The Beaver*, September 1942, Canada's History Archive featuring *The Beaver*; and Campbell, *Where the High Winds Blow*, vi.

⁸ W. A. Buhr, interview by Wendy Owen, July 21, 1981, tape 2 of 4, T11-11, HBCA-OHI.

⁹ Lake Harbour post journal, 1914–15, entry for June 6, 1914, microfilm nos. 1MA34 and 1MA35, H2-30-4 (B.430/a/1), HBCA-LHPJ; and Wolstenholme post journal, 1934–35, entries for August 22, 1934, and August 27, 1934, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/16, HBCA-WPJ.

Wherever there were competing traders, it was a trapper's market, and Inuit gave their business to the highest bidder. As noted earlier, the HBC's biggest competitor in the eastern Arctic was Revillon Frères (RF). In 1926 the HBC closed a deal to acquire 51 percent of RF's shares over the next eight years, and in 1936 it absorbed RF outright.¹⁰ From 1924 to 1939, independent traders and former HBC men Herbert Hall (1880–1938) and Solomon Ford (1884–1939) competed with RF and the HBC at Diana Bay (near present-day Quaqtaq, Quebec, just west of Ungava Bay, HBC post open 1936–40), and they competed with the HBC in the Sugluk Bay area from 1924 until 1939.¹¹ Finally, the Baffin Trading Company (BTC, established 1939), managed by former HBC man James Cantley (1895–1969), gave the company a run for its money in Cape Dorset, Port Harrison, Diana Bay, and Sugluk Bay until 1949, when the HBC bought the BTC out as well. A lesser competitor was the Sabellum Trading Company (established 1911 in London), which traded at former whaling sites on Cumberland Sound and elsewhere on southeastern Baffin Island. Rather than hiring white employees, Sabellum partnered with local native traders, who became its representatives. However, the company was inconsistent in resupplying the traders and left the market in the mid- to late 1920s.¹² Two short-lived but disruptive competitors were Lamson and Hubbard (LH) and the Ungava Trading Company. LH was

¹⁰ Peter C. Newman, *Merchant Princes*, vol. 3 of *Company of Adventurers* (Toronto: Viking, 1991), 212–13; and Arthur J. Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 160–61.

¹¹ “Hudson’s Bay Company. Diana Bay,” record creator, AM-RC; Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 103–04, 106–08, 110–11; Newman, *Merchant Princes*, 207–8; Susan Lofthouse, “Parc National Iluiliq Project: Historical Overview of Post-Contact Occupation in the Parc National Iluiliq Project Study Area” (unpublished report submitted to the Kativik Regional Government, Nunavik Parks Division, Nunavik, QC, 2017), 52; Toby Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay: An Illustrated History of Inuit, Naskapi, and Eurocanadian Interaction, 1800–1970* (Westmount, QC: Avataq Cultural Institute, 2016), 92–93; and Frank Melton, interview by J. W. Anderson, September 5, 1958, tape 1 of 2, T6-15, HBCA-JWA.

¹² Peter J. Usher, *Fur Trade Posts of the Northwest Territories, 1870–1970* (Ottawa: Northern Science Research Group, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, March 1971), 153, 161, 127–30; David Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 19; and Kenn Harper, “The Sabellum Trading Company,” *Nunatsiaq News*, May 17, 2013, https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/65674taissumani_may_17/. See also Shelagh D. Grant, “Niaqutiaq (Niaqutsiaq, Neahkoteah, Neakuteuk),” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 15, University of Toronto / Université Laval, 2003–, article last modified in 2005, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/niaqutiaq_15E.html.

established in Boston in 1882 and active in Canada from 1918 to 1923. LH was a formidable rival to the HBC in the Mackenzie Valley (which spans the present-day Northwest Territories) but only a momentary nuisance in the eastern Arctic (1920–21 near Cape Wolstenholme). The HBC bought LH out in 1924. The Ungava Trading Company was established in 1936 by former RF man Jean Berthe, among others, and traded near Diana Bay and later at Payne Bay (present-day Bellin, Quebec, on the western coast of Ungava Bay, HBC post open 1921–87), but it failed in 1939.¹³

Due to their values, Inuit weighted the food gifts that traders offered along with the fur prices in determining who was offering the best overall compensation for their furs. For example, in 1920, LH opened a post right near the HBC's post at Wolstenholme.¹⁴ Though the LH post closed just the following year,¹⁵ its presence shook up trade more than the distant RF posts that had concerned Parsons a decade earlier (see chapter 4) ever could have hoped to. LH stocked higher-quality goods and paid more for furs, setting off a brief bidding war.¹⁶ To show off, the first Inuk to be paid LH's higher price came by the HBC post with a list of the goods he'd received—a pair of black moleskin trousers, ten pounds of lard, an axe handle, a checkerboard, two pounds of chewing tobacco, a white blanket, five pounds of sugar, and a shirt.¹⁷ But more important than the higher fox prices was the superior quality of the free food offered by LH.

On the LH post's official opening day, the Wolstenholme post manager reported, "They are feeding the Natives on the best of grub, jars of Milk, Sugar, Cheese, and the best of butter, and if we are to keep up with them it will increase our Gratuities 500%, and I am afraid that we will have to follow

¹³ "Hudson's Bay Company. Payne Bay," record creator, AM-RC. From 1921 to 1935, RF ran a competing post at Payne Bay.

¹⁴ Wolstenholme post journal, 1920–21, entries for September 1–16, 1920, and December 31, 1921, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/6, HBCA-WPJ; and Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluliliq Project," 44.

¹⁵ Wolstenholme post journal, 1920–21, entry for September 25, 1921; and Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluliliq Project," 45.

¹⁶ Wolstenholme post journal, 1920–21, entries for December 13, 1920, and January 15, 1921.

¹⁷ Wolstenholme post journal, 1920–21, entry for January 15, 1921.

their lead as the best means of holding an Eskimo is through his stomach.”¹⁸ Naturally, the locals flocked to LH—a power move in a fairly open market.

Just a month later, the Wolstenholme post manager reported, “The Eskimo have been arriving almost every day and the expense in feeding them will be increased fully 500% in other years more especially as the Opposition are feeding them on the very best of grub, and we have to do the same.”¹⁹ Inuit trappers were undeniably allowing themselves to be courted, coming by both posts simply to see what the traders were willing to offer. The HBC’s attempt to keep up with LH’s gratuities shows that although the going rate for furs was an important consideration for Inuit, the quality of the complimentary food was just as important, if not more so. Visitors had to be fed, and the company understood the importance of observing this custom—it would have been extremely inhospitable to do otherwise. But after Inuit encountered others offering better gratuities, they saw the HBC’s gifts as miserly. Once competition had broadened the natives’ sense of what a complimentary meal should consist of, traders were forced to adapt, at least in the short term.

On another occasion, in 1934, having heard from some Stupart’s Bay Inuit that “plenty of everything could be had [at the HBC’s Stupart’s Bay post (open 1914–40)]—free—including a weekly ration to all and sundry (presumably on the Government account),” Wolstenholme natives complained that they never got much to eat when they visited the post.²⁰ As will be addressed in more depth in chapter 8, relief was funded by the Canadian government wherever there were competing traders. In areas that were served by only one trading entity, however, trappers received relief at the trader’s expense and were therefore issued relief only as needed. Such was the case in the Wolstenholme area, where there was no competition after the LH episode. The government relief issues at Stupart’s Bay likely exacerbated the Wolstenholme natives’ sense of being underfed, perhaps

¹⁸ Wolstenholme post journal, 1920–21, entry for September 17–30, 1920.

¹⁹ Wolstenholme post journal, 1920–21, entry for October 12–31, 1920.

²⁰ Wolstenholme post journal, 1934–35, entry for August 27, 1934; and “Hudson’s Bay Company. Stupart’s Bay,” record creator, AM-RC. In 1940 an outpost called Wakeham Bay took Stupart’s Bay’s place at the same location.

foreshadowing how increasing intervention in private arrangements would destabilize the trade, which will be discussed in part 3.

But regardless of their origin, there was clearly a difference between the gratuities given at Wolstenholme and those given at Stupart's Bay. Having found out about it, Wolstenholme's trapping families had revised their expectations, as all market participants do with expanding knowledge. The Wolstenholme post manager conceded that the complaint was "quite true as it is impossible to satisfy their appetites while keeping within the amount allowed us for gratuities under the present budget." Although he told the natives that "only in cases of real necessity [could] they expect to be aided," he added that "in the matter of gratuities to natives visiting the Post, it will undoubtedly react to our benefit to feed them on a more generous scale than has been possible hitherto."²¹

It's no surprise that HBC traders were more generous at Stupart's Bay, because RF was already operating a post in nearby Wakeham Bay when the HBC showed up in 1914. Like LH, RF seems to have been more openhanded with food. In the very first journal entry for the HBC post, the manager, worried about how little dog food the post had cached for the season, added that local Inuit were reporting a total lack of dog food and that they were not even procuring enough meat for themselves. He blamed it on RF: "The opposition here are greatly to blame for this state of affairs as I learn that when natives came to their post to trade they were allowed to 'help themselves' to whatever meat they required for themselves and their teams. Their meat store was never locked. So I do not wonder that very little or no provision is made by the natives to lay in their winters supply of dog feed. I am informed that Revillon Freres here are discontinuing this custom perhaps!"²²

It seems that in addition to serving the conventional mess to visitors, which typically consisted of simple foods such as hardtack and tea, RF also provided "country food," as the traditional foods of the land are called, allowing people to draw on the post's meat cache not only for dog food but

²¹ Wolstenholme post journal, 1934–35, entry for August 27, 1934.

²² Stupart's Bay post journal, 1914–18, entry for November 7, 1914, microfilm no. 1MA67, H2-31-1 (B.484/a/1), HBCA-SBPJ.

also for their own meals. This generous practice likely led Inuit to favor RF Inuit over the HBC. Of course, as the post manager's final comment about RF implies, when competitors could agree to not undercut one another on something—like free food—such a factor could lose importance in the struggle for Inuit patronage. However, such agreements tend to be short-lived at best, since businesses can't pull ahead of one another by offering the same thing.

In addition to being generous with meat, RF was also very generous with credit at its post in Wakeham Bay. As the manager of the Stupart's Bay post reported in 1914, Inuit claimed that "when they have nothing whatever to trade the 'other man' gives them anything they want. (which I know to be a fact) \$40,000 BOOK DEBT for 4 years trading would justify that statement."²³ This account suggests that RF was trying to mire the locals in debt to keep the fur coming in, knowing that Inuit regarded their debts as very serious obligations. In the same entry, the HBC trader also noted that he was having a very difficult time convincing the locals to trade with the company because they felt bound to bring their foxes to RF due to the balances they had with the company. Significantly, the trader also reported that Inuit were "greatly frightened to leave the French or carry their hunts to us as the agent [had] threatened them with 'jail' if they [did] so."²⁴

But it seems that there was more than deception behind the people's refusal to trade with the HBC until they'd settled their debts with RF: even though the HBC man succeeded in getting indebted trappers to understand that there was nothing to fear from trading with the HBC, this only netted the company ten foxes out of the fifty sold to the two posts by November 1914.²⁵ The post journal documents that at least some Inuit continued to fear retaliation for switching trading partners, but it is possible that some also felt committed to RF due to the Inuit values of mutual aid and keeping one's word, regardless of what they told the HBC.²⁶ A history of strong

²³ Stupart's Bay post journal, 1914–18, entry for November 7, 1914.

²⁴ Stupart's Bay post journal, 1914–18, entry for November 7, 1914.

²⁵ Stupart's Bay post journal, 1914–18, entry for November 7, 1914.

²⁶ Stupart's Bay post journal, 1914–18, entry for November 13, 1914.

interdependence in weathering Arctic winters may have engendered a lasting sense of obligation to RF.

The corollary to their strong feelings of responsibility toward traders in the fur trade was that Inuit needed to be able to count on their trading partners in hard times. A bad fur year was bad for all concerned; without credit, it could mean deprivation of store staples for Inuit. Traders needed to be generous with credit, despite the risk of Inuit's defaulting on very high balances or taking a long time to repay them, and RF met its end of this deal at Wakeham Bay. The HBC post manager explained the situation in a long missive:

The number of fox which I know to have been sent out by the opposition for the 3 years previous to last is certainly discouraging to any business concern and would not be looked upon as "business" at all with the Hudsons Bay Co. However last year they did well and it is to be hoped that this year will again "look up" but along "our way." . . .

Among the many obstacles we are up against in opposition is, The French company sell their goods at cost or considerably below and where a profit is shown it never goes above 25%. which is damnable. take for instance Duffle costing 1²⁰ per yard is sold to natives at 1⁰⁰. 44/40 Cartridges—30% below cost and all other Cartridges at cost. Rifles at cost and in fact after cutting down our prices to the very finest reasonable selling prices We don't come near the "Fire Sale" prices of the opposition. . . . Nothing has been sold less than previously and many articles have been higher priced [since the HBC post opened]. I understand that since Revillon Freres have been here they have never shown a profit on Merchandise Account.

The opposition are owed heavy debt by every hunter and . . . the people . . . think their debts must be paid or given the cream of their hunts towards them or as is my opinion they are really too cowardly to leave the never failing cache of the French company and come with us and Hunt. Again, they are given their goods cheaper than they can be bought for in civilization, Paid the highest prices for their furs and lastly when they have nothing to trade which is not seldom they are advanced the same goods at the same slaughter prices and charged to their accounts (never to be paid) but serving only as a very expensive means of protection against opposition, for invariably when a hunter

brings in Furs he wants full payment for them and he gets it there, and both parties are Evidently satisfied.

... WE have the Stock which I believe Revillon Freres have not and our prices are fair. We give no Debt (as yet). We cannot get the people to take our traps and give us such Furs as are got from them.

We really have to discourage such Hunters as can be discouraged against the French, give them advances in accordance with their hunts and watch and Trip to do any business.²⁷

It seems from the foregoing that at Wakeham Bay RF took a long view of the trade. It extended ample credit over three poor fur years, finally netting a good catch in the 1913–14 season. Given the low reported selling prices for goods and the lack of any profits on merchandise since the RF post's opening in 1910, it seems clear that the extension of credit was not an artifice to entrap people. The high debts, in fact, seem very par for the course in the aftermath of consecutive poor years. And considering that fox stocks were known to fluctuate cyclically and that Inuit tended to pay their debts, the traders likely did not expect the locals to drown under this debt. RF, rather, seems to have to put all its chips on fur sales. It was willing to help the native population weather the bad years in the hopes of a jubilee in fur returns later on. This commitment earned the company credit with the locals, many of whom were reluctant to default on their debt or change traders.

To win over the locals, the HBC at Stupart's Bay raised fur prices to \$4.50 per pelt and raised them again after RF countered with \$5.50, but this alone was not enough of an incentive.²⁸ People kept taking their furs to RF due to a combination of their debt there, fear of trading with the HBC while indebted to RF, and simple comfort with the preexisting business relationship with RF. To encourage people to bring their furs to the HBC, the post manager yielded to native custom: on at least one occasion, he gave food gratuities to visitors who'd brought no furs to trade. On another, he even

²⁷ Stupart's Bay post journal, 1914–18, entry for November 7, 1914.

²⁸ Stupart's Bay post journal, 1914–18, entries for November 7, 1914, and November 16, 1914.

sent a team out to buy furs from the local camps, equipping his men with the all-important gratuities even though the company was coming out to the people.²⁹ But the post manager reported that because the HBC had not advanced the locals anything, they would not accept the company's traps, which would have signaled a commitment to the HBC.³⁰ The natives traded just six foxes with the HBC representative. The post manager concluded, "It seems that we shall have to give advances to get anything like a share of the trade, and I have therefore promised the Eskimos just left that if they trade a few of their Foxes with us next visit I will allow them some advance according to the amount of furs they trade with us."³¹

To bring furs in, the post had to be accommodating. Even with these promises, the company gained business only slowly. RF remained a going concern until 1936, although in 1926 the HBC and RF did make "an agreement on fur prices and merchandise," a partial cartelization of the market that muted the impact of RF's competition.³² Showing generosity with food and extending credit with leniency were important strategies for increasing market share, and the HBC adopted them throughout the North, building them into their budgets and business plans.

The fruits that cultural accommodation could yield are well illustrated by the unique situation at Sugluk Bay, where the HBC competed for decades with an independent trading post. According to archaeologist Susan Lofthouse, the company dragged its feet on opening a post there until "former HBC traders Herbert Hall . . . and Solomon Ford (Salamonie) . . . set up an independent post along the eastern shore of Salluit" in 1924, reviving the company's resolve. Lofthouse writes that these free traders "posed a challenge to the HBC, who were accustomed to many of the hunters from that area travelling to Kangirsukallak [Wolstenholme]."³³ Hall and Ford's

²⁹ Stupart's Bay post journal, 1914–18, entries for November 13, 1914, and November 14, 1914.

³⁰ Stupart's Bay post journal, 1914–18, entry for November 25, 1914.

³¹ Stupart's Bay post journal, 1914–18, entry for November 26, 1914.

³² "Revillon Frères," in François Cartier and Guislaine Lemay, "Exploration in the Canadian Arctic," McCord Museum, accessed March 26, 2018, http://collections.musee-mccord.qc.ca/scripts/printtour.php?tourID=GE_P3_5_EN&Lang=2 (this page has been removed from the museum's website); and Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 93 (quote).

³³ Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluiliq Project," 52 (both quotes). Also, A. Stevenson, "Arctic Fur Trade Rivalry," *The Beaver*, Autumn 1975, Canada's History Archive Featuring *The Beaver*.

fox prices were very good. When locals brought news of their presence to the HBC's Wolstenholme post manager, he called the traders "as liberal as can be . . . by the prices I have heard about."³⁴

That the HBC opened Sugluk East the next year is a testament to Hall and Ford's potential to win local Inuit's patronage. In fact, their potential was so great that the HBC also opened Sugluk West, which was even closer to the independent post, four years later. Ford's cultural fluency informed how he ran his post. Not only did he speak Inuktitut very well, but the natives "regarded Solomon as one of themselves," coming and going through his quarters as they pleased, according to HBC man Bruce Campbell.³⁵ By contrast, people trading with the HBC were not allowed to come and go freely through the store. Frank Melton of Wolstenholme admitted only one man at a time.³⁶ Usually people would arrive and summon the trader (sometimes from his bed, since people often arrived at night), who would open the store and trade with them one by one.³⁷ There was no self-serve shopping.

Ford also offered his goods at much lower prices than did the HBC—so low, in fact, that they did not make business sense, according to HBC man Wally Buhr.³⁸ This too may have been a way of adhering to the Inuit value of generosity more closely than the HBC traders were willing to. Whatever the reasons behind Ford's admittedly unique practices, they made him a formidable competitor, despite Buhr's assessment. Ford and Hall took the largest share of foxes in the Sugluk Bay area from 1924 to 1939, when Ford died on site.³⁹

Working under the BTC, a small operation with posts at Cape Dorset and Port Harrison, Ford's brother, Henry, took the business over in 1940.

³⁴ Wolstenholme post journal, 1924–25, entry for November 16, 1924, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/10, HBCA-WPJ.

³⁵ Campbell, *Where the High Winds Blow*, 85 (quote), 86.

³⁶ L. G. Budgell, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, December 14, 1982, tape 3 of 7, T11-55, HBCA-OHI.

³⁷ Peter Nichols noted the frequency of night business in P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 6, 1983, tape 7 of 8, T11-60, HBCA-OHI.

³⁸ Buhr interview, July 21, 1981.

³⁹ Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 93. Hall had died a year earlier, in 1938. See Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 92; and Hall, Herbert Hanley, biographical sheet, AM-BS.

Henry, a former HBC interpreter at Fort Chimo, was also fluent in Inuktitut. Judging from their Inuktitut fluency and Solomon's Labrador birthplace, Henry and Solomon Ford may have had some Inuit ancestry, although Campbell identified Solomon as a white man.⁴⁰ Henry too may have had good relations with Sugluk locals due to his linguistic and cultural fluency, though I have found no record of his interactions with locals. The HBC bought the BTC in 1949 and ran the Hall and Ford post until 1952.⁴¹ The enduring presence of Hall and Ford's outpost is a testament to the importance of cultural accommodation in business. Through its entire existence, the HBC's Wolstenholme and Sugluk posts had to contend with this unlikely rival equipped with higher fox prices, lower store prices, and the advantages of what may have been a stronger willingness to adapt to Inuit culture.

Respecting Native Autonomy

Another crucial thing fur traders did was stay out of internal Inuit affairs as much as possible. Melton attested that the company "never tried to interfere with their customs in any way" and explained that both sides adhered to an ethic of "my house, my rules."⁴² Traders did not engage in missionary work, nor did they try to change local habits. They did not interfere with families' education of their children.

Certainly, the traders' presence impacted Inuit societies. Traders favored and rewarded certain types of individuals, especially the most productive trappers. Men and women employed by the company gained certain privileges around the post and so rose in status locally. Disfavor could come in the form of denial of credit. Later, as conduits for police-administered welfare,

⁴⁰ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 5, 1983, tape 5 of 8, T11-58, HBCA-OHI; W. A. Buhr, interview by Wendy Owen, August 31, 1981, tape 4 of 4, T11-19, HBCA-OHI; Campbell, *Where the High Winds Blow*, 85–87; Ford, Solomon Richard, biographical sheet, AM-BS; and Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 93; and Stevenson, "Arctic Fur Trade Rivalry," 49.

⁴¹ Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluiliq Project," 52–53; Wolstenholme post journal, June–August 1941, entry for August 19, 1941, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/19, HBCA-WPJ; Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 93; and Buhr interview, August 31, 1981.

⁴² Frank Melton, interview by J. W. Anderson, September 25, 1958, tape 1 of 2, T6-15, HBCA-OHI.

traders would also create distinctions among people by recommending certain people for relief and not others (see chapter 8).

Most crucially, white traders aided agents of the state, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the military, and government-sponsored doctors and nurses, which ultimately helped government coercion smother the Arctic like a lead blanket. Indeed, most white traders were ready to assist government workers (as well as missionaries and competing traders), seeing them as fellow members of the same broad culture and civilization. This could mean unquestioningly storing equipment for the air force; providing the RCMP with census data and other intelligence; and reporting people to the police at ship time or at a detachment.⁴³ Other white people, no matter who they were, were often a source of excitement for isolated white traders in the Arctic. The post journals, employee interviews, and traders' memoirs attest that RCMP constables would sometimes visit with traders and share meals, drinks, conversation, and even card games like good friends.⁴⁴ In their loyalty toward and alignment with the state, traders, wittingly or unwittingly, helped the state conquer the Arctic, end Inuit sovereignty, and impose a program of Canadianization in the North.

That said, none of the lifestyle changes Inuit made in relation to the fur trade were made under duress from the traders. The choices Inuit made in response to changing circumstances must be respected as those of free and sentient agents, even if they might seem to be poor choices in hindsight. The bottom line is that traders got involved in local affairs only as much as

⁴³ Long-serving HBC employee Peter Nichols stated that the Royal Canadian Air Force kept caches of fuel at many posts during World War II and that post staff were given a pistol and a spiked axe and were instructed to blow up the gasoline if enemies landed. The air force also established a ground observer corps, enlisting whites and Inuit to watch for aircraft and report them. P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 5, 1983, tapes 4 and 5 of 8, T11-57 and T11-58, HBCA-OHI.

In a 1947 Sugluk West post journal entry, one trader reported "fixing up births and deaths for [RCMP] Cpl." Sugluk West post journal, March 1947–July 1949, entry for March 3, 1947, microfilm no. 1MA69, B.486/a/15, HBCA-SWPJ. Long-serving HBC employee Wally Buhr mentioned that posts registered births, deaths, and marriages and sent them to headquarters, which forwarded them to Ottawa. Buhr interview, August 31, 1981.

⁴⁴ Buhr recalled that having rabbit was an occasion for inviting "the police boys" over for dinner. W. A. Buhr, interview by Wendy Owen, July 13, 1981, tape 1 of 4, T11-8, HBCA-OHI.

Inuit (who could be as divided or as unified as any group of people) would let them. The focus on trade rather than on proselytization and geopolitics was a source of peace and prosperity for traders and trappers alike.

Traders did, of course, want Inuit to trap more (including doing what was necessary to improve their harvests, such as relocating to the best trapping areas) and to buy items from them. They also wanted natives to be productive in hunting so that they would have a good reserve of meat, fat, and dog food for the winter. But these were only hopes. No doubt traders' noninterventionist stance was prompted by their goal of running a successful business. Trying to "reform" people could lead to unnecessary frictions or put the traders in a burdensome, quasi-paternal position. But at the heart of the matter was the simple truth that "what was good for the Eskimo was good for the Hudson's Bay Company," in HBC trader Peter Nichols's words.⁴⁵ Although traders certainly had opinions about what was good for Inuit, they could not and did not decide Inuit communities' courses of action. The recurrent accusations of laziness and complaints about people's failure to cache food in the HBC post journals are proof of the traders' inability to use force or threats to exploit Inuit.

Rather, traders supported the people in pursuing their traditional livelihood alongside their newer occupation of trapping. The HBC set up shop near good hunting and trapping grounds, outfitted people with the items their evolving lifestyle demanded, and respected the hunting calendar. The company cached meat to give away in cases of destitution and provided other items as aid or on credit. Traders also offered basic nonprofessional medical aid gratis year-round to those who desired it, which was nothing to sneeze at: HBC men were trained in first aid, and they did everything from pulling teeth to treating a boy's frostbitten penis,⁴⁶ and they radioed for expert guidance on more complex procedures in the years before planes came into commercial use.⁴⁷ The HBC also stocked some medications and

⁴⁵ Nichols interview, September 6, 1983, tape 7.

⁴⁶ Wolstenholme post journal, January 1945–November 1946, entry for April 1, 1945, microfilm no. IMA74, B.368/a/20, HBCA-WPJ. I do not think the report of a frostbitten penis was an April Fool's joke.

⁴⁷ Buhr interview, July 13, 1981.

administered them for free as needed.⁴⁸ More important, traders allowed native communities to function on the most significant level: as peacekeeping legal entities.

Traders largely permitted the Inuit legal infrastructure to operate unobstructed, allowing communities to resolve their own conflicts. Traders did not have the resources to monopolize justice: they did not have the staff or the time to monitor people, and their ability to take someone into custody and hold him depended on the locals' cooperation. Neither could traders prevent the people from resolving their own conflicts. Trappers were scattered across a land that could be very difficult to navigate in some weather. Even when natives wanted outside help or advice, the post was not a phone call or a quick drive away; getting there was a journey, and sometimes there was no time to spare.

Moreover, notwithstanding the substantial leeway granted to the HBC and other large trading companies in the Arctic (see chapters 2 and 8), traders remained subject to state authority, which meant that they were by default barred from taking legal action and compelled to wait for agents of the state to dispense justice. They were not permitted to enforce law themselves. In special cases, traders did assume legal power, but they tended to defer to the state in wielding it—for example, by requesting permission to make arrests, albeit sometimes retroactively. But traders' expanded legal authority was provisional and episodic at best. In contrast, Inuit were not state subjects, and adults retained their full power to arbitrate conflicts, to protect themselves and others, and to exact retribution from aggressors according to Inuit natural law. Of course, their decisions were in turn subject to the judgment of those around them. This was not a lawless world.

The most illustrative examples of traders' legal nonintervention concern the extreme case of using lethal force against someone who has become insane and aggressive. In HBC post journals and employee interviews, there are at least a few stories of Inuit who went mad, threatening out of the blue to kill others, and were executed by members of their community in self-defense. The cases I discovered took place in the twenties and thirties, and

⁴⁸ Buhr interview, July 21, 1981; R. Knight, interview by Wendy Owen, August 5, 1981, T11-16; and Mary Swaffield, interview by Wendy Owen, September 2, 1981, T11-24, HBCA-OHI.

they are of interest because the traders were told about what had occurred and either did not involve or minimally involved the Canadian state in the matter. No detention, no charges, no trial. These cases constitute qualitative evidence of traders' noninterventionist policy during the period of de facto statelessness in the eastern Arctic from roughly 1900 to 1945.

In November 1924, for example, the Wolstenholme post manager reported the following incident, which had occurred in July of that year:

Arrivals from Cape Smith. . . report the people there in a very hard-up state. They also had a very poor fall and summer being without any grub or ammunition, to do any hunting at all. They had to use the methods of the olden days. Spears! . . . They also brought the news that David was running wild there sometime in July. and was going to break into the [store]house and get cartridges to shoot some off the people. he was going about in a funny way, and prevented all the people from leaving their tents, "fired a dart at a young boy," sharpening his knife very often, and making threats, treating his wife and family very severely, and making other trouble amongst other men's wives. So they held fire and decided to put him out of the way, so his older brother Amamukhiak and Allookoo[illeg.]ark shot him. This person was always giving us a certain amt. of trouble and minding everybody's business more than his own.⁴⁹

The manager on this occasion was not critical, and he took care to note the charges against David—his specific threatening acts—which formed the basis for the camp's decision to sentence him to death. The manager's comment about David's character at the end may have been another way of vouching for the veracity of the story. The post manager does not appear to have brought the matter to the attention of the RCMP at Pond Inlet, nor was there an arrest or a trial. This man had all the details with which to file a police report, which would have initiated legal proceedings that might not even have ended badly for the men who had made the difficult choice to execute someone they knew well—and who was a blood relative to at least one of them—to save themselves and their loved ones. With peace and security restored to the community, the traders chose to let the matter rest.

⁴⁹ Wolstenholme post journal, 1924–25, entry for November 12, 1924.

Probably the most extreme case of traders' legal nonintervention occurred at Lake Harbour in 1926. A local Inuk had allegedly gone mad and killed some of his own family members. Some local men decided to confront him, and the HBC employees at Lake Harbour not only did not interfere but decided to join them. The men all surrounded the killer's lone igloo and fired at it at the same time so that no particular person could be charged with the killing. After hearing rumors, the RCMP came down from the Pangnirtung detachment (present-day Pangnirtung, Nunavut, on eastern Baffin Island, established 1923) to investigate. Corporal J. W. G. Wright stated that the HBC men had not reported the incident. The company defended the men, and no one seems to have been charged. But for the brazen act of taking the law into their own hands, the federal government punished the Lake Harbour community with direct police surveillance, opening a detachment there in 1927.⁵⁰

A similar incident occurred at Wolstenholme in July 1933:

The natives were unable to trap constantly as they were terrorized by one—Ooshuajuke—who went crazy late in the fall. Of the innumerable things that he did and said the most outstanding was his constant threatening of the natives with his rifle. His wish being that, when he had sufficient cartridges, he would shoot everyone. In February he shot at some of the men and soon after informed all that he intended killing all of them during the following night. Worked up by these incidents and almost ill with constant worry and fear for the safety of their wives and children some of the men tried to shoot him—but were unable to do it. Next morning three natives—Solomonie, Pugvik and Thoomasie—shot him dead outside his igloo. This is a very regrettable incident but one can realise the state of mind of the natives after having this man amongst them for a greater part of the winter and one can appreciate their thoughts for the safety of their families and their reasoning that one life taken would in all probability save many others.⁵¹

⁵⁰ George Pitseolak et al., *Niurrutiqarniq: Trading with the Hudson's Bay Company*, ed. Shannon Partridge, interviews supervised by François Trudel (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2009), 125n7.

⁵¹ Wolstenholme post journal, 1934–35, entry for July 24, 1933, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/16, HBCA-WPJ. Elder Sarah Qualingo (b. 1912) corroborated this report: "We had a frightening experience that lasted whole winter, until the man [Usuarjuk] died . . . we had a large igloo and almost all the people of Pujjunaq [Mansel Island] stayed with us . . . men,

The post manager showed sympathy for his acquaintances in their decision to execute a deranged member of their community. He seems to have understood the limits of menacing behavior. He does not appear to have meddled in the affair: although he recorded the incident, there is no indication that he involved the police, who since 1922 had been stationed at Pond Inlet and were usually mentioned if they were around. The community's decision made sense to him, and peace and normalcy having been restored, he apparently was not compelled to question it or anyone further.

These incidents may sound unthinkable to contemporary readers living in heavily policed societies the world over. But the stranger thing is to demand an investigation and trial by complete strangers for a defensive act carried out against an aggressor by his victims. In the three cases mentioned, it would have been inappropriate for the traders, who were not party to these conflicts nor asked to adjudicate them, to get involved in them. Interference would essentially have amounted to reopening a closed case and tormenting the victims.

That the traders operated with an ethic of noninterference does not mean that they were not concerned with what went on in Inuit communities. To the contrary, they closely followed the social developments in the communities with which they did business. This is evidenced by the above reports and by the many details that traders noted about various individuals' and families' circumstances. Peace was the traders' greatest concern. When a trader heard in April 1939 that someone's adopted child might have died of abuse rather than of flu and kidney issues, he traveled to the camp to get the story straight. Although the post men thought "the whole tale [was] absurd," they wanted to put an end to the rumor, "as it could do untold damage." Fortunately, the traders found no reason to believe that it was true.⁵² Peace in the Inuit community meant security for all and the continuation of trapping and trading to meet everybody's material needs; both sides were invested in it.

with guns, kept watch at nights in the porch" until the community executed him. See Sarah Qualingo oral account, quoted in Lofthouse, "Parc National Iluiliq Project," 68–69.

⁵² Wolstenholme post journal, 1938–39, entries for April 29, 1939, and May 1, 1939.

Although noninterference was the traders' *modus operandi*, they were also subjects of the Canadian state, as mentioned earlier. States project power through their subjects by intimidating them and commanding them to take certain actions. As "law-abiding citizens," the traders were latent agents of the state who could be mobilized at any moment. The post-World War II period would see the Canadian government trying to force modern Canadian law on Inuit communities, and to the extent that they cooperated with the encroaching federal presence in the North, traders became a part of the oppressive machinery of the state (see chapter 7).⁵³ And as the official government presence in the Arctic intensified, fur traders themselves would see their activities threatened and even restricted. Ultimately, the state would come between traders and trappers, harming both and ending an era of peaceful, largely unrestricted commerce.

⁵³ As in the infamous case of Kikkik, a woman who was charged with murder and child neglect in 1958, though she was eventually acquitted. See the discussion of her case in chapter 7 and "Kikkik Inuit—When Justice Was Done," *Mysteries of Canada*, accessed April 13, 2018, <https://www.mysteriesofcanada.com/nunavut/kikkik>. For similar cases of government interference in Inuit affairs, see Shelagh D. Grant, *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); and Dorothy Harley Eber, *Images of Justice: A Legal History of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut as Traced through the Yellowknife Courthouse Collection of Inuit Sculpture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

PART 3

Canadian Government Intervention in the Fur Trade and Inuit Lives

The end of the semifree fur trade era began in the early 1920s with the Canadian government's encroachment into the eastern Arctic, seeking to put an end to what it perceived as threats to its sovereignty—namely, the ongoing free trade and travel through the region, especially by foreigners. The Canadian government attempted to expand its footprint in many ways, but in particular by establishing a police presence and trying to control the commerce that predated the government's presence by hundreds of years.

The trade that had once been virtually free found itself assaulted from multiple angles: Totalitarian moratoria on fur auctions during both world wars put stress on the Hudson's Bay Company's business, provoking austerity measures that damaged the relationships and trust between traders and trappers (chapter 6). Government credit expansion and US-Canadian military operations in the Arctic during World War I, World War II, and the postwar era induced synthetic booms that couldn't last (chapter 6). In the 1890s, baseless conservation measures began to bar the expansion of the trade, and game preserves covered large swaths of the Inuit homeland as the twentieth century advanced (chapter 7). Misplaced and uninformed

concern over Inuit well-being pumped hundreds of government workers and more government money than ever into the North in the forties, fifties, and sixties (chapter 8).

Inuit were lured off the land and into squalid hamlets in the fifties and sixties. After 1945, the advent of Family Allowances transformed Inuit from trappers into welfare shoppers. The fur trade rapidly became a retail trade, and trading posts were transformed into modern stores, but all the spending was backed by stolen taxpayer money rather than Inuit communities' own labor (chapter 9). With its power over this new income, the state pressed families to surrender their children's minds to strangers: no school enrollment, no welfare money. Inuit communities endured physical hardship and attempted cultural annihilation at the hands of the Canadian state. They have been fighting for self-determination ever since.

CHAPTER 6

Destabilizing the Market: Wartime Restrictions and Bubbles

The mid-1910s brought the advent of World War I (1914–18) and the war economy, one of the earliest in a long line of government interventions that gradually enervated the white fox trade. When the British Empire entered the conflict in 1914, so did Canada, which did not control its own foreign policy. Both Great Britain and Canada forcibly directed domestic production away from people’s needs and toward the goods the empire needed to fight its war, such as ammunition and other military supplies.¹ This was done by prohibiting some of people’s self-chosen prewar productive activities and by temporarily enslaving people in the military.

World War I Economic Restrictions and Changes in the Fur Trade

In 1914, Canadian politicians made the War Measures Act law. As Denis Smith explains, the act “gave the government full authority . . . to censor and suppress communications; to arrest, detain and deport people without

¹ Desmond Morton, “First World War (WWI),” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, August 5, 2013, last modified August 24, 2021, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/first-world-war-wwi>; and Roger D. Hall, David J. Bercusson, Norman L. Nicholson, William Lewis Morton, Ralph R. Krueger, et al., “Canada,” s.v. “World War I,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified June 18, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Canada/World-War-I>.

charges or trials; to control transportation, trade and manufacturing; and to seize private property.” This act would remain in effect until 1920.² Similarly, Great Britain’s political rulers imposed the Defence of the Realm Act in 1914, essentially rendering people subject to the whims of a military junta, which among other barbarous provisions could requisition or seize “any part of the output of any factory or workshop in which arms, ammunition, or warlike stores or equipment, or any articles required for the production thereof, are manufactured”—a grossly broad category. Accordingly, as the United Kingdom Parliament’s website admits, the act was “used for everything from banning narcotics to censoring the press. It introduced . . . prohibition, rationing, . . . British Summer Time, and . . . [widened] police powers. It was even used to ban bonfires, whistling in the street and flying kites!” A few years later, in 1916 and 1917, respectively, both Great Britain and Canada adopted conscription, breaching the sanctuary of individual bodily autonomy.³ The fur trade lost many employees to conscription,

² Denis Smith, “War Measures Act,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, July 25, 2013, last modified March 13, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/war-measures-act>. Note that the War Measures Act was not repealed until 1988, and it never really went away. It was replaced by the Emergencies Act, whose broad provisions are not very comforting (see the section “Public Welfare Emergency,” for example, which was used to great effect during the covid-19 crisis). See Emergencies Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. 22 (4th Supp.)), <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-4.5/>; Denis Smith, Richard Foot, Eli Yarhi, and Andrew McIntosh, “Emergencies Act,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/emergencies-act>; Lee Friday, “Covid Is Just the Latest Excuse for Canada’s Politicians to Violate the Constitution,” *Mises Wire*, November 28, 2020, <https://mises.org/wire/covid-just-latest-excuse-canadas-politicians-violate-constitution>; Friday, “Canada Has Abolished Civil Liberties in the Name of ‘Safety,’” *Mises Wire*, March 28, 2020, <https://mises.org/wire/canada-has-abolished-civil-liberties-name-safety>; and Friday, “Here in Canada, the Regime Considers a Peaceful Protest a ‘National Emergency,’” *Mises Wire*, February 17, 2022, <https://mises.org/wire/here-canada-regime-considers-peaceful-protest-national-emergency>. On American war tyranny, see Murray N. Rothbard, *War Collectivism: Power, Business, and the Intellectual Class in World War I* (Auburn, AL: Mises Institute, 2012).

³ “Defence of the Realm Act 1914,” UK Parliament, accessed October 15, 2023, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/parliament-and-the-first-world-war/legislation-and-acts-of-war/defence-of-the-realm-act-1914/> (quoted); Nicholas A. Barr, William A. Chaney, Mark A. Kishlansky, Lacey Baldwin Smith, Asa Briggs, Bentley Brinkerhoff Gilbert, Ralph Charles Atkins, Michael Charles Prestwich, Margaret Hastings, Linda J. Colley, et al., “United Kingdom,” s.v. “Britain from 1914 to the Present,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified July 14, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Britain-from-1914-to-the-present>; and J. L. Granatstein and Richard Jones, “Conscription in Canada,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 6, 2006, last modified February 25, 2022, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/conscription>.

but one of the most disruptive wartime policies was the British Board of Trade's suspension of fur auctions in London in fall 1914. Although auctions were allowed to resume in 1915, the British government's aggressive attempt to curb wartime spending on what it considered frivolities had lasting consequences.

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) put a moratorium on fur purchases as well as on issuing credit for the winter of 1914–15. After the British government changed its policy in the spring of 1915, the company started to buy fur again in the hope of retaining native goodwill and loyalty. But due to the uncertainty created by the authoritarian war economy, it purchased only on a very reduced scale and set the 1914–15 fur prices 83 percent below recent rates. The company also limited credit, since trappers' limited fur income due to the company's reduced operations would not allow them to repay their debt.⁴

Originally the HBC shipped all its furs to London to be sold, but auction houses started to pop up in North American cities (Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, North Bay [Ontario], Montreal, Saint Louis, and New York City) during World War I to meet the strong local demand for fur, which was fueled by high employment and low supply. "To be competitive, you had to cater to the North American trade in North America," HBC man Robert Chesshire (1902–99) explained, but he thought the war hastened the HBC's transition because it minimized London auctions even if it didn't end them entirely. The company quickly opened an auction house in Montreal.⁵ In June 1916, it also authorized sales to the United States to try to get in on the profit opportunity created by American demand,⁶ buying out a company in New York City and operating there under the name HBC Fur Sales. These sudden investments burdened the company with large expenses that it may not have been prepared to make.

⁴ Arthur J. Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 98, 105. See also Peter C. Newman, *Merchant Princes*, vol. 3 of *Company of Adventurers* (Toronto: Viking, 1991), 105, 233.

⁵ R. H. Chesshire, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, September 10, 1981, tape 1 of 2, T11-28, HBCA-OHI; and Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 98–100, 223.

⁶ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 99.

The warring British state so drained the economy's life force that restructuring was the only way for the company to keep fur operations viable.⁷ But a combination of infighting, the increasing profitability of the HBC's land and retail sales in southern Canada, and the instability of the fur market in light of wartime interference led the company to suspend fur sales in Canada and the United States from 1917 to 1924. Even after it began selling fur in Canada again, the company capped sales at \$250,000 per season.⁸ During this period, the HBC basically hung back while competitors served North American fur buyers and New York rose as a major locus of the fur trade, though the company did continue to buy fur to sell in London, whose place as "the world entrepôt for furs" the company wanted to preserve.⁹

And how did the HBC make up this revenue shortfall during the war? At least in part by becoming a beneficiary of the coercive war economy, striking a deal with another government that was redirecting its subjects' productive power for its own benefit. In October 1914, the HBC became the French government's overseas purchasing agent. As geographer and ethnohistorian Arthur J. Ray explains, "This role involved creating overseas subsidiaries and agencies, arranging credits for the French government, organizing steamship service, as well as purchasing and transporting food-stuffs, fuel, lumber, and munitions. In the end the company handled more than 13 million tons of cargo under this contract. Since they were making profit elsewhere, the [HBC] governor and committee were not prepared to devote their energies to the conduct of the fur trade under the extremely volatile circumstances of the time."¹⁰

Like other economic shutdowns, the sudden "canceling" of the fur trade created uncertainty and threatened people's livelihoods; it put at risk native and HBC employee incomes, as well as the solvency of the company—not to mention the viability of all the firms that did business with the HBC. It also weakened the relationships between natives and the HBC. Although the company foresaw that struggling trappers might turn on it,

⁷ Chesshire interview, September 10, 1981.

⁸ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 99–100.

⁹ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 99 (quote), 100.

¹⁰ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 99.

its countermeasures were halfhearted. The HBC's severe reduction of trade and credit issues from 1914 to 1915, though admittedly short-lived, violated the trust that the trade had been built upon, so much so that many post men violated the company's directives and used secret ledgers to continue issuing credit.¹¹ The company's reduced operations, which were catalyzed by the British government's economic intervention and offensive foreign policy, and which persisted for years after the moratorium was rescinded, spelled the end of an era: loyalty no longer paid, and the universal need to survive pushed natives on the western frontier to trade with whoever offered the best price at any given time.

Thus, World War I ushered in the end of the HBC's dominance of the fur trade. While the company pulled back on its fur operations, American competitors of various sizes rushed in to bridge the wartime gap between supply and demand. They put serious dents in the HBC's market share, acquiring most of the fur. As noted, auction houses assumed a prominent role in the industry, allowing many businesses' stocks to be compared and purchased in one place, a benefit in what had become a more diversified industry.¹²

Although the eastern Arctic was more isolated and thus did not experience the flood of small "free traders" that the western frontier did, what was going on in western Canada impacted the HBC's overall health and direction, which affected its entire area of operation. Even before wartime interventionism pushed the company to virtually freeze its fur operations, the company's directors already saw the subarctic fur trade as a lost cause and were looking to the Arctic as the last frontier.¹³ The arctic fox and its habitat, still remote in the modern era, held the promise of a renaissance of the old fur trade dominated by the HBC. The directors knew the golden age would be short. Eventually even the most distant frontier would close, they thought, and before the war the company's land and retail profits

¹¹ Newman, *Merchant Princes*, 233; Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 105; Philip H. Godsell, *Arctic Trader: The Account of Twenty Years with the Hudson's Bay Company*. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1934), 149–50.

¹² Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 96–97, 105.

¹³ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 95, 154.

already dwarfed its fur income.¹⁴ Still, with the HBC's market share in the subarctic declining and white fox prices on the rise, the company's directors decided to undertake a major expansion of their Arctic operations in 1913. But the cloak of war thrust upon the trade and most aspects of life forced the jettisoning of these plans until 1919.¹⁵

Finally, the company began trying to regain the ground it had lost during World War I. It set in motion its original plan to build a network of posts in the central and western Arctic and to swallow up its competitors.¹⁶ This plan was seemingly also put in motion in the eastern Arctic, where the HBC opened multiple posts in the 1920s, including Amadjuak, Povungnetuk, Payne Bay, Pond Inlet, and Pangnirtung in 1921; Cape Smith in 1922; Clyde River in 1923; Southampton Island and Blacklead Island in 1924; Sugluk East in 1925; Arctic Bay in 1926; and Sugluk West and Mansel Island in 1929. But the 1920s were an artificial boom time fueled by British and American credit expansion in the wake of World War I.

British Credit Expansion in the Interwar Period: A Lesson in Austrian Economic Theory

Great Britain's monetary policy in this period is relevant to our discussion of the Canadian economy because the metropole enlisted the United States in its inflationary efforts, and until 1938 the Canadian dollar was pegged to the US dollar (rather than having a free-floating exchange rate on the world market). Great Britain had suspended the pound's gold convertibility during World War I and forced people to hold pounds as the Bank of England basically conjured paper money to finance the state's war. Unable to flee to a more stable store of value, British people had to keep transacting in pounds, whose purchasing power was rapidly falling in real time. They could do nothing as the state indirectly robbed them of the value of their labor. After World War I, Great Britain wanted to return to the gold standard and to reset the pound's exchange rate with gold at the prewar

¹⁴ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 99.

¹⁵ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 95.

¹⁶ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 139, 154.

rate, even though the pound was now worth much less vis-à-vis gold.¹⁷ Great Britain essentially wanted to pretend that dramatic credit expansion and price inflation had not occurred during the war.

But prices aren't arbitrary numbers. They are established by the interplay of countless individuals' subjective sense of worth and by conditions affecting supply and demand. Decreeing an exchange rate doesn't change reality. As economist Murray N. Rothbard explains,

Britain insisted on returning to gold at a valuation that was 10–20 percent higher than the going exchange rate. . . . British prices would have had to decline by about 10 to 20 percent in order to remain competitive with foreign countries, and to maintain her all-important export business. But no such decline occurred, primarily because unions did not permit wage rates to be lowered. Real wage rates rose, and chronic large-scale unemployment struck Great Britain. Credit was not allowed to contract, as needed to bring about deflation, as unemployment would have grown even more menacing—an unemployment caused partly by the postwar establishment of government unemployment insurance (which permitted trade unions to hold out against any wage cuts). As a result, Great Britain tended to lose gold. Instead of repealing unemployment insurance, contracting credit, and/or going back to gold at a more realistic parity, Great Britain inflated her money supply to offset the loss of gold.¹⁸

Great Britain's outflow of gold was an incarnation of Gresham's law—summarized for laymen as “bad money drives out good.” With the pound's price in gold forcibly set above what people thought it should be (which is indicated by their day-to-day transactions), the currency market was imbalanced. People knew they could get more for gold abroad, which created

¹⁷ Murray N. Rothbard, *America's Great Depression*, 5th ed. (Auburn, AL: Mises Institute, 2000), 142–43. I rely on Rothbard's scholarship to describe the economic consequences of World War I monetary policy in Europe and North America, but other economists share his interpretation of the events of this period. See, among others, Benjamin M. Anderson, *Economics and the Public Welfare: A Financial and Economic History of the United States, 1914–1946* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1946); Melchior Palyi, *The Twilight of Gold, 1914–1936: Myths and Realities* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1972); and Hugh Rockoff, “Until It's Over, Over There: The U.S. Economy in World War I” (NBER Working Paper Series 10580, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, June 2004).

¹⁸ Rothbard, *America's Great Depression*, 143.

a perfect opportunity for arbitrage: buy gold with pounds, sell it abroad, and exchange the foreign currency for more pounds than you would have received if you'd exchanged the gold directly for pounds in Great Britain. Gresham's law is a symptom of the market's effort to clear and thereby restore more accurate price relations. The British government could not trap all the gold within the country, so the interplay of buyers and sellers abroad helped keep its price closer to what market actors thought it should be at any particular moment, partially circumventing the state's price fixing. The gold flowed off the isle and into the United States—market justice against the government tyrants!

But this was too fair. In the 1920s, rather than allowing the exchange rates to reflect reality, the British government got the United States to inflate the dollar to “fix” the problem of the gold outflow. And in spite of ups and downs, the United States largely went along, increasing the supply of dollars by 62 percent.¹⁹ With the dollar now also overvalued relative to gold, Brits lost one more haven for their hard-earned wealth, having to accept fewer dollars and pounds for gold. At the same time, the inflation of the currencies ate away British and American purchasing power and the fruits of people's labor. Not only did they get fewer dollars and pounds than they should have for their gold, but those dollars and pounds bought less than they had before.

Great Britain also convinced Continental powers to adopt pseudo-gold standards in the 1920s, hoping that this would facilitate a broader undervaluing of gold relative to European currencies and increase British exports. Many European nations adopted either a gold bullion standard, in which only the state transacts in gold because gold coinage is outlawed, or, more commonly, a gold exchange standard, in which nations hold another country's currency rather than gold, entrusting their gold reserves to that country. In the twenties, many European powers therefore kept their titles to gold in New York or London and dealt in dollars or pounds instead. Pyramiding on the global gold supply, Great Britain and the United States precipitated massive international inflation through credit expansion, notably via long-term foreign-aid loans to war-torn European countries.

¹⁹ Rothbard, *America's Great Depression*, 102–5, 143–48.

As Rothbard explains, “The close international Central Bank collaboration of the 1920s created a false era of seemingly sound prosperity, masking a dangerous worldwide inflation.”²⁰

Because the Canadian dollar (adopted by some areas in 1858 and standardized in 1871) was pegged to the US dollar until 1938 (and again from 1962 to 1970), Canadian and American monetary fortunes rose and fell together.²¹ The Roaring Twenties saw several smaller business cycles in which the US Federal Reserve System giddily inflated the dollar supply, creating a “boom,” and then inflated even more (only through different monetary instruments) when busts threatened, “stimulating” the economy even more.²²

Of course, pumping more money into the economy doesn’t change reality, so there were recessions in 1920–21, 1923–24, and 1926–27—which the Fed “solved” by turning to even more monetary inflation. These downturns were mild because the Fed created more liquidity (money and thus credit) in the market and kept the full crash from occurring. These events make it seem as though an acute economic crisis can be suppressed indefinitely, and as though governments and central banks can maintain an ongoing boom by creating more money and credit. This is essentially what Keynesians and other monetarists believe. As a corollary, many economists and laymen consider business cycles a natural feature of capitalism and one of the many reasons why markets need to be regulated. In reality, business cycles are a symptom of government intervention in the economy via the financial sector because the state cannot conjure wealth any more than ordinary individuals can.

Central banks such as the Bank of England (founded 1694), the US Federal Reserve (created 1913), and the Bank of Canada (established 1934) try to create economic growth by setting interbank interest rates, often

²⁰ Rothbard, *America’s Great Depression*, 148–50, quote on 149.

²¹ Paul Boothe, “Canadian Dollar (CAD),” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 7, 2006, last modified October 24, 2017, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/dollar>; and Bruce W. Wilkinson, “Gold Standard,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 7, 2006, last modified December 16, 2013, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/gold-standard>.

²² Rothbard, *America’s Great Depression*, 111–16, 138–39, 153–56, 158–62, 164–66.

lowering them to encourage lending, borrowing, spending, investment, and low but steady price inflation. To influence the interest rates to move in the direction they've decided they should go, central banks engage in so-called open market operations, buying and selling government bonds to add and remove money from the banking system and the economy. When the central banks buy bonds, they inject new money into the system, which encourages bank credit expansion and generates an unsustainable boom.

Interest rates and loan offers, of course, influence spending decisions at all levels of the economy, and more credit at better rates tends to encourage consumer spending and especially investing.²³ There is more business activity because people think there's more funding for investments (more savings) available than is really the case, so they start new projects—firm expansions, real-estate developments, and other ventures. But the financial fortitude needed to complete many of these projects or to weather rocky periods isn't actually there. Real financial integrity comes from real production at various levels of the economy. When there is enough production to generate savings, investments organically increase and credit naturally becomes available. The availability of credit also pushes interest rates down, encouraging borrowing. But these changes are based on real wealth, so the funding behind them will not suddenly disappear, nor will the economy be drastically harmed if a project proves unprofitable, because people were in a good position to take on a healthy amount of speculative risk.

Central bank credit expansion, by contrast, essentially siphons the existing wealth from ordinary people to the financial class (whose assets, such as real estate and stocks, appreciate during inflationary periods) and to the politically connected, such as government contractors (who benefit

²³ For an overview of the monetary policy tools of the Bank of Canada and the Federal Reserve System, whose goals and methods are fairly similar, see "Understanding Our Policy Interest Rate," Bank of Canada, April 13, 2022, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/2022/04/understanding-policy-interest-rate/>; "Understanding Quantitative Easing," Bank of Canada, June 6, 2022, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/2022/06/understanding-quantitative-easing/>; "Understanding Inflation," Bank of Canada, August 13, 2020, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/2020/08/understanding-inflation/>; and Federal Reserve System, Public Education and Outreach, *The Fed Explained: What the Central Bank Does*, 11th ed. (Washington, DC: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2021), 31–39, <https://www.federalreserve.gov/aboutthefed/files/the-fed-explained.pdf>.

from the state's near-bottomless budget). These groups get the new wealth first because they are near its source (the government and the banking system), which means they can spend it before prices in other parts of the economy have risen (this unevenness and lag in the spread of price inflation is called the Cantillon effect). In this way, financial and political elites get a great bang for their buck while many others find that their wages, pensions, and savings cannot keep up with rising prices.

Quite unlike natural economic growth, artificial credit expansion encourages riskier speculative activity and typically does so during periods of economic vulnerability, which only exacerbates this debility. When they should be tightening the belt or not expanding their investments, people at all levels of the economy spend their way into precarious positions, so when the bust comes, they are hit really hard, and many ventures do not survive. Overheated credit markets stimulate risky lending, imprudent investment, and unsustainable leveraging at every level of the economy but especially in the capital goods sectors. Easy credit encourages many households to live beyond their means, assuming they'll keep their jobs and have time to pay everything off later. Even if they're not heavily indebted, many live from hand to mouth, hoping there will never be a rainy day.

Everyone also experiences the domestic currency's devaluation during the boom time. There is suddenly more money floating around, even though people haven't generated any more wealth than usual. This new money creates an unexpected spending spree in the economy (in goods as well as assets), as well as shortages as market actors adjust to the changed market conditions. The result of all this activity is price inflation (or relatively static prices in cases where better productivity should have meant falling prices). Accordingly, there's actually general impoverishment (falling real wages) during booms as people begin paying more for things and squandering their resources on projects that ultimately don't have the backing to flower into self-sustaining businesses. The large-scale, if sometimes subtle, impoverishment that always accompanies credit-induced "growth" shows that it is unsustainable.

The inflation bonanza has to come to an end eventually. Even central banks, the very arbiters of inflation, acknowledge that high price inflation rapidly erodes wealth, both by chipping away at real income and by creating

an inhospitable business climate.²⁴ Quickly rising prices threaten to become hyperinflation, destroy the monetary order, and bankrupt the state. When central banks and the banking system finally start to raise interest rates and reduce lending, which removes inflationary money from the economy and starts deflating prices (monetary and price deflation), many people and businesses find that they have overextended themselves. Recession ensues, characterized by shuttering enterprises, downsizing, layoffs, and other resource liquidations. The recession reveals how much human effort and resources were wasted under central banks' distortion of economic signals—signals that if allowed to transmit clearly might have encouraged strategies more appropriate for the times (different, of course, for each person, depending on his personal circumstances and interpretation of market conditions). The infamous financial crash of the late 1920s and the depression that followed it revealed precisely this sort of malinvestment, and on a massive scale.

The White Fox Bubble and Crash

During the 1920s, many people in Europe and North America thought they were more prosperous than they really were (as they would come to find out at the end of the decade). Unsurprisingly, they demanded luxury goods, so white fox prices were very high, with a pelt fetching as much as \$60.²⁵ While the fox cycles were in their favor, many Inuit also felt rich. In these heady times, many of them lived large and bought huge quantities of everything they wanted (flour, tea, and tobacco, especially), even though their costs of living were increasing along with those of the rest of the population. Fur prices were high enough that Inuit incomes outpaced price inflation, and families enjoyed more of the store foods they wanted.²⁶ Some people were making so much that they cut back on trapping, thinking they could slow down for a bit. Others kept trapping and actually had extra credit at the trading post!²⁷ But many Inuit did not like to keep credits on traders'

²⁴ See, for example, "Understanding Inflation," Bank of Canada.

²⁵ Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 108.

²⁶ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 107, 109, 200.

²⁷ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 107, 109.

books, so they would often “cash out” in goods, many of which were perishable foodstuffs and did not make the best stores of their productive wealth. No doubt expecting a flow of credit from trading posts as needed, and certainly not anticipating a global financial downturn, many Inuit left themselves little in the way of a rainy-day fund: no credits at the trading post, and perhaps less traditional savings such as meat caches. When fur prices fell in 1930, with fox pelts fetching roughly \$12, many Inuit found it hard to weather the storm, especially since high freight costs limited how much goods prices could fall in the Arctic.²⁸

Inflationary monetary policy also influenced the HBC’s operations. In 1910, before the boom, the company made plans to build a chain of “modern department stores” in the Canadian South, seeking to target a more urban clientele.²⁹ By the 1920s, the company was waist high in this expansionary venture, having opened stores in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, Victoria, and Vancouver, as well as smaller cities.³⁰ In that decade, the company sustained massive losses on this project and failed to increase its market share.³¹ While engrossed in this painful retail expansion, the HBC was also increasing its presence in the North. From ten posts across the western Arctic, the Keewatin District, and the eastern Arctic in the 1910–14 period, and only twelve in 1915–19, the company’s footprint rapidly expanded to thirty-four posts in 1920–24 and fifty-one posts in 1924–29.³² The HBC’s stubborn drive to continue expanding in the Southern retail sector despite huge losses and its audacity to take on another expensive and risky expansion almost simultaneously is precisely the kind of behavior that goes on during the speculative upswings of central bank-created business cycles. Rather than pausing the expansions to regroup and perhaps reconsider, a

²⁸ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 108. Ray notes that despite some price deflation in 1930–31, native incomes trended downward through 1945, but his data is very broad and includes Indians in many parts of Canada. See Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 200–201.

²⁹ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 99.

³⁰ Newman, *Merchant Princes*, 266.

³¹ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 171; and Newman, *Merchant Princes*, 266.

³² Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 171; and Peter J. Usher, *Fur Trade Posts of the Northwest Territories, 1870–1970* (Ottawa: Northern Science Research Group, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, March 1971), 16, cited in David Damas, “Shifting Relations in the Administration of Inuit,” *Études/Inuit/Studies* 17, no. 2 (1993): 6.

sensible move when a plan is not yielding the anticipated fruits, the company ran head first into a brick wall, with retail operating losses soaring from 1929, the year of the infamous US stock market crash, to 1931. By 1937, the company had closed over a hundred stores.³³

But though recessions are painful, they constitute a healthy correction in the market: deflation provides relief from high prices, and the liquidation of failed businesses' assets at reduced prices provides fodder for new, more sustainable businesses. As an example, in 1922, small fur traders were giving the HBC a run for its money by selling merchandise at very low prices. These traders were able to use this strategy because they had gotten their wares on the cheap at postcrash bankruptcy sales in 1920.³⁴ Lower labor prices during downturns also encourage new and surviving businesses to take new workers on. In this way, economic normalcy is soon restored, though not overnight, of course. Mass hardship is the sad price of both the political elites' ill-gotten gains and individual households' and businesses' poor choices.

However, it's important to add that a recession must be allowed to fully play out in order to restore economic health. The recession can't be a slight dip stemmed by more central bank monetary inflation, as the late 1920s downturns were, or even a deep trough accompanied by job-creation schemes, welfare, and government loans to big business and banks financed by deficit spending (which means more money creation), as the 1930s were in the United States.³⁵ Any government or central bank intervention to soften the impact of the recession only prolongs the equilibration process because it begins to fuel a new boom. Intervention drags out the hard times for most, sometimes leading to stagflation (low growth and high price inflation), while unsustainable businesses get yet another break, propped up by cheap credit.³⁶ The Great Depression was indeed prolonged by intervention, so

³³ Newman, *Merchant Princes*, 280, 241; and Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 108.

³⁴ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 153.

³⁵ These were the policies Herbert Hoover undertook in the early years of the Great Depression; see Rothbard, *America's Great Depression*, chap. 11.

³⁶ Rothbard, *America's Great Depression*, xix–xx.

much so that a supposed truism in the United States is that it took another huge war to get the country out of the rut.³⁷ That's a decade-long downturn!

The Depression and Interventionism in the Eastern Arctic

When the American economy hit the dirt, where it would wallow for a decade, Canada was affected as well. As mentioned, fur prices fell hard in 1930, and the HBC began closing stores due to operating losses. Fox prices rose slightly over the next two years and then steadily declined for the rest of the decade.³⁸ Interest rates were also high, so companies couldn't afford to stock too many goods—this in a place where there were only one or two opportunities to restock per year—adding to the strain on Inuit livelihoods.³⁹ Pumping money into the economy had sent the fur trade into the stratosphere artificially, resulting in an unnaturally severe downturn—much worse and longer lasting than what might have occurred in a market free of monetary manipulation.

With fur prices so low, many Inuit weren't making much of a living and suffered from food shortages, so they turned to trading posts for credit or relief as they usually did in tough times. However, many traders would not extend credit when it was most needed. Especially in the West, where there were more competitors, many smaller traders had liberally issued credit to natives to entice them to trap for their operation and now faced low fox prices, low repayment, and bankruptcy. Naturally, many began to scale down or refuse credit.⁴⁰ But larger trading operations such as the HBC did continue to issue limited credit. More important, they began to issue larger-scale relief subsidized by the Canadian state (discussed in more detail in chapter 8).

³⁷ This is the Austrian argument, which is best articulated by Murray N. Rothbard in *America's Great Depression*. Keynesians and monetarists argue that the Depression was caused by insufficient government intervention. One of the best-known expositions of this interpretation is Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz's "The Great Contraction, 1929–33," in *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

³⁸ See Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, fig. 41.

³⁹ W. A. Buhr, interview by Wendy Owen, July 27, 1981, tape 3 of 4, T11-12, HBCA-OHI.

⁴⁰ Shelagh D. Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936–1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 33, 39.

In the eastern Arctic throughout the 1930s, government-funded relief issues were highest in Arctic Quebec.⁴¹ Thinking themselves more disinterested and sympathetic than the private sector, Canadian bureaucrats had designated themselves responsible for Inuit when they began instructing private companies to provide relief and reimbursing them for it. The Depression prompted austerity measures and administrative cutbacks in the Canadian government, as is well known. Budgetary constraints—and bureaucrats' long-standing fear that relief recipients would become a permanent public burden—meant that the state issued aid reluctantly, and always with a view to cutting costs.

The Canadian state's involvement in relief only furthered the harm to Inuit that the Depression had wrought. It created bad incentives all around. By feeding relief to the natives via the trading companies, the state kept both hanging by a thread, ironically stabilizing a precarious situation. Where it had competitors and thus was entitled to government subsidization of relief, the HBC earned money from issuing relief in kind and then billing for it (corporate welfare), which may have encouraged the company to remain in the fur trade at a time when it might otherwise have reconsidered. Inuit, of course, received government income more directly than the HBC. This income very thinly cushioned their reduced fur income and allowed many to survive the nadir and remain in the fur trade when the uniquely severe downturn might otherwise have prompted them to reconsider their own participation or to change their role in it significantly. Instead, Inuit weathered the 1930s downturn as they had more ordinary market fluctuations in the past: by eking out a living from whatever was available within the parameters of the fur trade economy.

Inuit trappers continued to pursue the best prices for their furs during the downturn. At Wolstenholme in 1938, low fox prices were mentioned, and foxes were very scarce to boot. But although 1938–39 saw the “lowest fox hunt ever obtained” at the post, this outcome was not for lack of effort.⁴² When the Wolstenholme trappers got wind that the HBC Wakeham Bay

⁴¹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 56.

⁴² Wolstenholme post journal, 1938–39, entries for October 14, 1938, and May 31, 1939, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/17, HBCA-WPJ.

post was paying more for foxes, they candidly notified the Wolstenholme staff that they were going to trade there, just as they would have done any other year.⁴³ Inuit trappers also pivoted to other markets to make ends meet, just as most market actors do in crises. In good and bad fox years, Inuit brought in all kinds of country products besides foxes to trade: whale meat, fish, birds, wild eggs, sealskins, polar bear skins, caribou skins, and more. Their living had always depended on the land, so the constitution of said living differed from year to year, and this remained true throughout the fur trade; different animals presented income opportunities as markets fluctuated. Because foxes were so hard to come by in 1938–39, Wolstenholme Inuit traded much larger quantities of sealskins and partridges to purchase necessities. In fact, they were very openly displeased when the bottom fell out of the sealskin market in June 1939.⁴⁴ But they still persisted in bringing in sealskins, and when prices rose again in July, they took many of them to Solomon Ford, the HBC's competitor in the Sugluk Bay area, whose prices they reported to be more stable than the company's.⁴⁵

Before and during the fur trade, Inuit followed their livelihoods, both food and fur animals. If a place was barren, they would head for figuratively greener pastures. People did tend to set up shop within a certain radius of trading posts (though in the eastern Arctic this was a wide radius and did not result in a so-called home guard—natives who lived and worked very near or at the trading post—as in the subarctic).⁴⁶ Inuit trappers continually reported on fur stocks and often were willing to move their traplines to prosper in the trade. Like all humans, Inuit in the white fox trade were fundamentally dynamic, adapting to their ever-changing environment and to the circumstances around them to survive. They were more than capable of changing course if faced with a permanently depressed fur industry.

⁴³ Wolstenholme post journal, 1934–35 and 1938–39, entries for February 14, 1935, October 14, 1938, and March 22, 1939, microfilm no. 1MA74, B.368/a/16, B.368/a/17, HBCA-WPJ.

⁴⁴ Wolstenholme post journal, 1938–39, entries for June 3, 1939, June 4, 1939, and June 11, 1939.

⁴⁵ Wolstenholme post journal, 1938–39, entries for June 4, 1939, July 10, 1939, and July 11, 1939.

⁴⁶ Home guard Indians are discussed in Daniel Francis and Toby E. Morantz, *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay, 1600–1870* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983); and Shepard Krech III, ed., *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984).

By keeping everyone on economic life support, the state atrophied the postcrash market reconfiguration process—the search for a more sustainable way to make a living—for traders and trappers alike. Intervention may have put off the end of the Northern fur trade, but it may also have checked a shift toward a more sustainable fur industry or a more diversified, and therefore more stable, Northern economy.

Inuit and other native peoples had adapted to the unique ecosystem of the fur trade by hedging their bets. They knew that fur prices fluctuated, and they counted on the credit system and on the occasional charity that traders provided as a backstop. But this ecosystem began to be disrupted as the state entered the eastern Arctic in the 1920s and gradually strengthened its presence. Traders and trappers' response to the severe downturn of the 1930s was altered by a false sense of security and of the costs of their investments. Because of the state's involvement in relief, the HBC increasingly shunned its responsibility for its trading partners as economic conditions tightened. It now asked the entity that had declared itself the natives' knight in shining armor to do more of the heavy lifting.

But the state was unable and unwilling to support Inuit as the realities of wild fur production and a fluctuating market required. As will be discussed in chapter 8, the government often took a senselessly hard stance in dispensing relief, disregarding conditions on the ground, and bureaucrats chose to experiment with Inuit lives rather than bear the economic burden they had committed to. The state's desire to aid Inuit—but to do so as little as possible, in order to prevent their dependence on welfare—led to unnecessary suffering in situations where traders likely would have extended credit or relief with little hesitation. The state's policy also resulted in cruel and coercive relocations of Inuit far from home and family (described in chapter 7), sometimes ending in starvation and death, and bad living conditions in new settlements (chapter 8).⁴⁷

World War II Economic Restrictions and the Fur Trade

The horrible trespasses of the war economy were unprecedented in recent history and seemed like a one-time affair. But the dictatorial powers that

⁴⁷ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 110.

many states were able to harness and wield during World War I, ultimately with impunity and sometimes even with the enthusiastic support of their subject populations, all but guaranteed that sweeping government abuses would return at some point. In the late 1930s, states set about disrupting freshly rebuilt lives, businesses, and communities in the name of a second world war. In Canada, the War Measures Act was reinvoked in August 1939, essentially voiding human rights once more. In September, the Defence of Canada Regulations were put in place, allowing for mass censorship and for the detention of anyone who objected to the crimes that the political class was committing at home and abroad. In the same month, the Wartime Prices and Trade Board was created to commandeer the economy. The board implemented price controls that predictably wreaked havoc: prices were nominally low, but the goods in question were nowhere to be found because a wrench had been thrown in the market's natural price-regulating mechanism. Where high prices would have kept some stock of dear goods available to those who needed them most, and would have signaled producers to prioritize bringing those goods to market until the shortage ended and normal prices were restored, price controls created lasting shortages that kept important goods out of everyone's hands.⁴⁸

Matters were similar in Britain. In 1939, Parliament declared the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act law. It "allowed the government to issue whatever controls and regulations it felt were necessary," as Parliament's website explains. As if this weren't enough, the political class expanded the act's provisions in 1940, allowing for the same poisonous cocktail of detention without trial and theft of property for state use as during World War I.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Denis Smith, "War Measures Act"; and John R. English, "Wartime Prices and Trade Board," in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 7, 2006, last modified February 17, 2015, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/wartime-prices-and-trade-board>.

⁴⁹ "Home Front," UK Parliament, accessed October 15, 2023, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/yourcountry/overview/homefront/>; and "Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939," UK Parliament, accessed October 15, 2023, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/yourcountry/collections/collections-second-world-war/second-world-war-legislation/emergency-powers-defence-act-c20-1940-/>.

A note on terminology: seizing by force and indefinitely availing oneself of someone else's property is theft.

In 1940, the British government hacked into the fur trade again. Since the HBC was not among the corporate interests privileged with a seat on the Board of Trade, the board's members did not hesitate to imperil all those whose livelihood was tied to fur.⁵⁰ The state again prohibited fur imports, but that was not all. The Board of Trade also imposed clothing rations and a 100 percent purchase tax on furs. By 1943 these coercive measures had reduced the value of the British fur trade to 8 percent of what it had been in 1940.⁵¹

But the HBC had learned from its last run-in with the Board of Trade. In the late 1930s, the company, anticipating renewed government aggression, had presciently established a headquarters in New York City, and its leadership wasted no time in shifting gears to run the business from there (the United States would not enter the conflict until December 1941).⁵² The HBC refused to conduct business in London until trade restrictions were lifted. Toward the end of the war, Britain finally eased up due to the British fur trade's enervated state, lowering the fur purchase tax in January 1945, but the embargo on imports wasn't ended until November.⁵³ Despite the HBC's defensive measures, however, its share of the Canadian and global fur trades contracted substantially during the war, in large part due to the market's latest transformation in its continual quest to give people what they want: fur ranches (discussed in chapter 7) were rapidly gaining ground because they could produce fur more consistently and affordably (although this development affected the white fox trade less, since foxes were difficult and expensive to raise).⁵⁴

Although World War II restrictions clearly obstructed the fur trade and created difficulties, between 1940 and 1945, fur prices steadily recovered from their 1940 nadir.⁵⁵ By 1946, fox prices had risen to about \$25, a good

⁵⁰ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 137.

⁵¹ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 136.

⁵² Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 137.

⁵³ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 138.

⁵⁴ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 166–68; and W. O. Douglas, interview by J. W. Anderson, March 12, 1959, tape 2 of 2, T6–26, HBCA-JWA.

⁵⁵ See Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 158, fig. 41.

turn for traders and trappers alike.⁵⁶ Fox cycles also smiled on everyone: 1941 and 1942 were peak years, and HBC man Peter Nichols noted that at Cape Smith (present-day Cape Smith, Nunavut), where he was working at the time, the store sold out and people had lots of credit to spend on incoming supplies.⁵⁷ In 1946 at Wolstenholme, trappers were not as successful, but the post manager nonetheless reported that they were “all able to pay debts in full and most of them have a bit left over for tobacco money.”⁵⁸

The World War II Military Boom in the Canadian Arctic

Although the World War II era saw a measure of prosperity in the fur trade, especially compared to the 1930s, the intense military activity in the North also created an artificial boom that would later harm Inuit (as such booms harm all ordinary people who find that they have been involved in unsustainable bubble activities). During the war, the Canadian Arctic was considered a vulnerable area that had to be protected because it could potentially serve as a gateway for an enemy attack. To protect the area, the Canadian government temporarily jettisoned its sovereignty concerns and teamed up with the US government to build a military defense network across the Canadian Arctic.

At some preliminary meetings between Canadian and American military leaders in summer 1940, the United States expressed a desire to build bases in the North, and it received authorization to take over “operations in certain defined regions within the Dominion” if Canada was attacked. In historian Shelagh D. Grant’s words, “The Canadian military had agreed to what amounted to U.S. military occupation in the event of invasion prior to any formal defence agreement.”⁵⁹ This slanted “joint defense” agreement between Canada and the United States was formalized on August 18, 1940, with the Ogdensburg Declaration, which created the Permanent Joint Board on Defence. The agreement allowed US military personnel, vessels, and aircraft to travel freely through Canada and to use its “military, naval

⁵⁶ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 108.

⁵⁷ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 5, 1983, tape 4 of 8, T11-57, HBCA-OHI.

⁵⁸ Wolstenholme post journal, January 1945–November 1946, entry for July 25, 1946.

⁵⁹ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 57 (both quotes).

and air facilities.”⁶⁰ Of course, these provisions were nominally mutual, but it was Canada whose territory was supposedly threatened by invasion. And from the beginning, the United States had pressed for more power in Canada, so it was the American military that was making itself at home on Canadian soil rather than the other way around.

The Canadian government built a chain of airfields across the North in 1941. The same year, the US Air Force built a network of dual weather-radio stations, which of course also surveilled the area, particularly the airspace.⁶¹ By the end of the war, the United States had built twenty-eight airfields and fifty-six weather stations across the Canadian Arctic and the Inuit homeland (see figure 2).⁶² Additionally, the US Department of War (in 1947 reincarnated as the Department of “Defense”), flooded Ottawa with requests to build what Grant describes as “substantial defence facilities” throughout the Canadian North, but the military footprint ended up being deepest in the western Arctic, where the US government built several military bases.⁶³ In the eastern Arctic, there were mostly weather stations. The only base in the region proper was at Frobisher Bay (present-day Iqaluit, Nunavut; eight hundred people total), though there were two more at the peripheries of the region, at Southampton Island (five hundred people) and Fort Chimo (seven hundred people).⁶⁴

The Canadian and American governments’ military activities in the North siphoned wealth from and burdened the local populations in addition to the American and Canadian publics. As a small-scale example, in 1942 the US military requisitioned (read: stole) the RMS *Nascopie*, which had been the HBC’s transport ship for most of the century, to take matériel and personnel to the new weather stations at Fort Ross and Arctic Bay, forcing

⁶⁰ Joint Statement by the Governments of Canada and of the United States of America Regarding Defence Co-operation between the Two Countries, Can.-U.S., August 18, 1940, E100977-CTS 1947 No. 43, Government of Canada, accessed October 15, 2023, <https://www.treaty-accord.gc.ca/text-texte.aspx?id=100977>.

⁶¹ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 60–62; and Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 117.

⁶² Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 132.

⁶³ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 73.

⁶⁴ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 132, app. D.

the HBC to find another way to transport its employees, furs, wares, and post supplies around the eastern Arctic.⁶⁵

Military activity also gave rise to local bubbles—economic activities that were unsustainable because such an extensive military presence in the middle of nowhere was itself unsustainable. While civilians were rationing things, the political class had other people's money to burn, and an opportunity to get on the gravy train was hard to resist. Bases drew Inuit as well as nonnative labor toward them, which destabilized the fur trade and other Northern industries. In the Mackenzie Valley (present-day Northwest Territories), for example, US military operations drew the local labor force away from mines and other local businesses, shuttering some of these and creating hardship for the rest.⁶⁶ As HBC man Nichols explained, the bases were large operations, housing hundreds of soldiers, so they employed many local people. And they paid "much more than was typical in Canada and especially the Arctic." Accordingly, Inuit sought jobs there, just as many other people did. Inuit employees of the military had much more money than they'd ever had at their disposal, and they were also free to buy relative luxuries such as alcohol from these bases' commissaries.⁶⁷ Military personnel themselves were in an unnatural position; they too received above-market pay, and they had few expenses and few places to spend their money. Flush with cash, they inflated the prices of local goods.

It's normal for labor markets' composition to change over time or as new needs arise. As people seek income and head toward the best-paying industries, those industries grow, which puts downward pressure on their input and product prices, benefiting everyone. What is problematic is when people are lured into bubble activities, because these are decidedly short-term opportunities that can dry up quite suddenly, leaving participants to pick up the pieces. This is exactly what happened with many of these Northern bases. When HBC man Bert Swaffield started working at the Southampton Island post in 1950, for example, there were "all kinds of

⁶⁵ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 86.

⁶⁶ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 86.

⁶⁷ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 6, 1983, tape 7 of 8, T11-60, HBCA-OHI.

operations there—hospital, US Army, air force, Department of Transport.” Planes came and went several times a day, and the mail service was “almost like living in civilization.” But by the time he left in 1956 there was hardly anything there “because the war had ended.”⁶⁸ Inuit who were drawn into the temporary military labor market with its artificially inflated wage rates experienced disappointment and hardship in the aftermath of the war, when the going rates for those relatively unskilled positions came back down to more normal levels for the area.

Base personnel also had the impression that Inuit lived in poverty, which created other negative effects. Locals received handouts from these people and, according to Nichols, “realized that they could maintain their way of life without working for it, a foreign concept previously, and gave up living on the land.” The bases affected the local economy even years after they had closed: Inuit had made a habit of searching the bases’ trash dumps for food and scraps of material that could be used to build and heat their homes, a habit that continued as long as anything of value remained at the abandoned sites. Nichols noted that he didn’t sell flour at the HBC post for five years after the military left Southampton Island, “because when the base was disbanded there, they left behind a warehouse full of flour.”⁶⁹

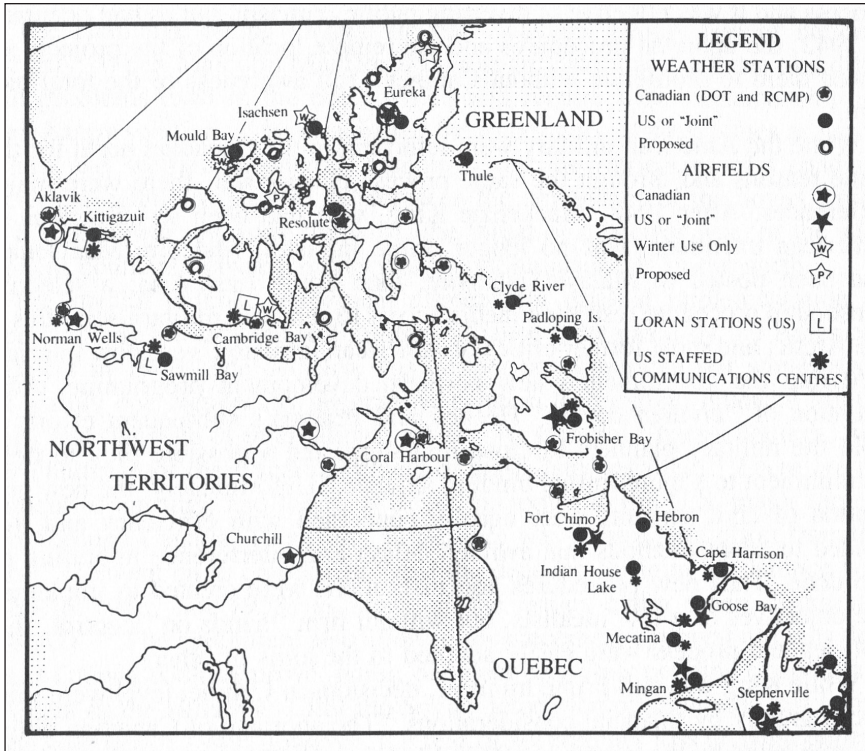
The Cold War Pop-Up Public Sector

Although the receding tide of military activity after World War II forced many to scramble to make a living as they had before, the war had decidedly altered the geopolitical arena. So that there would be no questioning of its Arctic claims, the Canadian government in 1944, swiftly compensated the US government for all the construction costs of building the Northern defense network and took possession of all the air bases and weather stations; the infrastructure to access, surveil, and control the area remained in place. In exchange, the United States withdrew its personnel from the

⁶⁸ A. T. Swaffield, interview by Wendy Owen, August 26, 1981, tape 3 of 3, T11-22, HBCA-OHI.

⁶⁹ Nichols interview, September 6, 1983, tape 7.

Figure 2. Arctic and northeastern weather stations, airfields, loran stations, and communications centers, summer 1948



Source: Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 214, fig. 21.

area immediately, and Canada managed the operations with much-reduced manpower.⁷⁰

Military activity in the Arctic began to increase again in the late 1940s. There were intrusive aerial surveys and more construction.⁷¹ With the onset of the Cold War, the Canadian government soon found itself taking a

⁷⁰ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 116; and Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 132, app. D. The appendix shows the prices paid for each military installation.

⁷¹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 118; and Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 239, 206. For more on postwar military operations in the Arctic, see Shelagh D. Grant, *Polar Imperative: A History of Arctic Sovereignty in North America* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2010), chap. 10.

defensive posture against the Soviet Union and collaborating with the United States again.⁷² A wave of American military personnel arrived secretly in 1948. All joint military operations in the Arctic were now to occur under civilian cover to hide them from the public.⁷³

The fifties saw the erection of radar stations throughout the North, an effort which culminated in the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, a network of more than sixty manned radar stations stretching from the Aleutian Islands to Greenland and built to facilitate communication between the United States and Canada during the Cold War (see figure 3).⁷⁴ Like the World War II air bases, these posts distorted the Arctic economy. Duncan Pryde, who worked for the HBC from 1958 to 1966, noted that he tried to sell furs at DEW Line posts whenever possible because he

could get far better prices from them than from anyone else. Some workers there bought three and four skins each. . . . We knew very well that not all those skins were prime, certainly not good enough to command premium prices at the trading post, but the DEW line men didn't know that. They couldn't tell a good bear from a bad bear; they judged simply by size—the bigger it was the more they were happy, almost eager, . . . to pay for it. A polar bear skin traded to the Hudson's Bay Company in those days brought no more than about \$125. Those DEW-liners were happy to pay \$300 and better for even a mediocre pelt. They made good money up there at those isolated radar sites and had nothing to spend it on.⁷⁵

⁷² Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 158.

⁷³ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 206, 238–39.

⁷⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Distant Early Warning Line,” last modified March 20, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/Distant-Early-Warning-Line>. The DEW Line was replaced by the North Warning System starting in 1985, and the original posts were abandoned or dismantled. The North Warning System has been maintained and operated by government contractors since 1987. See Paul Tukker, “The DEW Line at 65: Future Unclear for the North’s Aging Radar Sites,” CBC, May 10, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/dew-line-65-years-norad-1.6446875>; “Operating the North Warning System,” ATCO Frontec, accessed November 11, 2024, <https://frontec.atco.com/en-ca/projects/frontec-nasittuq-north-warning-system.html>; “North Warning System,” Nasittuq Corporation, accessed November 11, 2024, <https://www.nasittuq.com/projects/north-warning-system/>.

⁷⁵ Duncan Pryde, *Nunaga: Ten Years of Eskimo Life* (New York: Walker, 1971), 156.

The DEW Line stations' presence also prolonged Inuit postwar dumpster diving, sometimes in lieu of a viable livelihood. Inuk Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak (b. 1957) remembered living on DEW Line waste as a girl:

We pitched our canvas tent on the DEW-line site, probably three miles away from the community. . . .

I don't remember much about the DEW-line site itself. I remember there was a great big airstrip. There must have been a construction crew working there. Also, there was a garbage dump there for the community as well as for the DEW-line workers. People would come to visit us at our tent. It was very nice. . . . There were some Qallunaat [non-Inuit] men from the DEW line hanging around, maybe buying carvings from Dad sometimes. . . . We were far away from everyone in the settlement. We weren't sharing any of their meat, and Dad wasn't hunting. In the Hall Beach area [now Sanirajak, Nunavut, in the western Arctic] the water was shallow. I think the only hunting there was walrus, which was maybe twenty or thirty miles away. It was hard for us.

When we were back at home on the land, we always had meat around. Dad would go out hunting every day and come back with meat. We usually had a cache of seal meat five miles away, a cache of caribou forty miles away. It was like that. We would have a supply of frozen meat next to the house, or dried meat, like fish drying on the tent. We always had meat around. This time we were away from home, and Dad, he was just hanging around. We didn't have much to eat.

. . . I remember falling asleep one night not having eaten anything, except maybe tea or something like that. . . . The next morning I woke up to these wonderful smells! It was a nice sunny day, a beautiful day. I woke up and my father had fried up hot dogs in a pan. . . . He gave me tea and gave me some delicious sausages, wieners to eat. I remember that morning so clearly. . . . it was kind of a lazy summer morning and my father gave me this beautiful stuff to eat, Qallunaat food, hot dogs.

I found out later that he had gotten those sausages from the DEW-line dump, where all the DEW-line guys tossed out their garbage. They were unused meat, packages of unused meat—they had never been opened. I don't know why the people at the DEW-line site didn't just give the meat to us directly, they just dumped it out. . . . They were

fresh wieners. That sort of stuff happened all the time—teachers or workers would leave perfectly good food out because it was frozen or old, things like packages of meat, oranges, and apples. We would just take the top off and they would be fine.⁷⁶

The DEW Line dump yielded just enough food to sustain Rhoda's family—enough that they could afford to cut themselves off from their community, so unthinkable for Inuit in the past that exile was akin to a death sentence. But the family didn't live well, because being near the DEW Line post also meant being in a less-than-ideal spot for hunting. This was economic life support par excellence: short-term gains, hardship down the road—thanks to industries that did not originate in people's concrete wants and needs but in politics.

During the Cold War, Inuit were once again drawn away from their previous, sustainable pursuits and into the pop-up public sector to work unskilled roles in construction and other manual labor.⁷⁷ Due to a mixture of cronyism and paternalism, the state tried to keep the Inuit within the fur trade by forcibly limiting native employment opportunities to two or three years during World War II and by setting relatively low wage rates for public sector employment during the Cold War.⁷⁸ But of course Inuit were motivated by the prospect of a better living, as all humans are, and these policies were attempts to cure the symptoms rather than the disease: the state's sudden crashing of the Arctic economy. They merely forced people to jump through more hoops to achieve their ends.

Many Inuit still went to work for the Canadian and American militaries in unskilled roles, eschewing or devoting less time to their former livelihoods—the ones that would still be there should the state and its deep pockets depart. And the shift did not necessarily prove to be a good one. As Grant explains, career prospects in relation to the military were very limited for Inuit due to their lack of technical education. Without a Western

⁷⁶ Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak, in Nancy Wachowich, *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women*, collab. Apphia Agalakti Awa, Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak, and Sandra Pikujak Katsak (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 163–65.

⁷⁷ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 206, 247–48.

⁷⁸ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 88, 206.

Figure 3. DEW Line radar sites (black dots)



Source: Department of National Defence, in Paul Tukker, “The DEW Line at 65: Future Unclear for the North’s Aging Radar Sites,” CBC, May 10, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/dew-line-65-years-norad-1.6446875>.

education, they could not really advance to skilled roles, which offered the possibility of a higher living standard in the longer term, perhaps even during economic retractions.⁷⁹ When HBC man Gordon Rennie (1929–2019) visited Frobisher Bay in 1954, there was just an HBC post, and “you would have to fill your forty-five gallon drum with water and carry it with a yoke, and then in the winter you’d cut ice for water. It wasn’t like that long.”⁸⁰ When the DEW Line post opened in 1958, it set off a huge boom. Inuit came from all over, from as far west as Southampton Island (present-day

⁷⁹ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 247–48.

⁸⁰ Gordon Rennie, in George Pitseolak et al., *Niurritiqarniq: Trading with the Hudson’s Bay Company*, ed. Shannon Partridge, interviews supervised by François Trudel (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2009), 241–42.

Nunavut, at the mouth of Hudson Bay), Gjoa Haven (present-day Gjoa Haven, Nunavut, on King William Island), Cambridge Bay (present-day Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, on Victoria Island), and even Coppermine (now Kugluktuk, Nunavut's westernmost settlement) to work on the line. The roughly two hundred American military personnel that inundated the hamlet kept the HBC store so busy that the company had to bring in more employees from the South and expand its employee facilities to serve the customers.⁸¹

By weakening the cooperative relationship between traders and trappers, the wartime economic interventions and the bubbles created by deficit war spending, postwar currency manipulation, and the frenzy of US-Canadian military operations formed the first arm of a three-pronged government assault on the white fox trade. The second arm was Canadian conservation policy.

⁸¹ Rennie, in Pitseolak et al., *Niurrutiqarniq*, 251–52, 245, 249n.

CHAPTER 7

Smothering the Trade: Forced Animal Conservation and Inuit Relocation

When it claimed sovereignty over the Arctic in the late nineteenth century, Canada also claimed the region as Canadian public property. What this really means is that the Canadian government claimed the region as its private property: the Canadian government would henceforth decide how the land would be used—the fundamental mark of ownership. Inuit and even fur traders' existing landed property titles were subsumed under and curtailed by Canada's illegitimate territorial claims, which, like those of other states, are ultimately based on conquest rather than on honest land use or purchase. Horrified by the near extinction of bison in the North American prairies and other such cases, which they attributed to a lack of regulation, Canadian bureaucrats were concerned that Northern game and fur-bearing animals would also be overexploited, leading to native hardship and a lost asset in the Arctic lands. So the state—essentially a group of interlopers with no right to the land—aggressively intervened in Inuit families' and fur traders' land use. Canada arrogated to itself the right to tell people where and what to hunt and, by extension, where and how to live. Although the earliest restrictions were passed in the late 1880s and 1890s, conservationist sentiments really began to materialize as policy beginning in

the late 1910s.¹ Besides being groundless, the Canadian government's intervention in Arctic land management was completely unnecessary to protect the land and only caused hardship for those who took their living from it.

Market incentives were already prompting the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) to create preserves to ensure the viability of the wild fur industry. Traders had also begun experimenting with fur ranching, which could potentially allow them to produce more and better-quality furs (by controlling the animals' breeding, diet, and living conditions), and thereby also escape the variability of wild fur production. The institution of private property also encouraged Inuit to maintain the land's long-term productivity because they knew that they would be returning to the same areas—to their kin group's land—year after year to make a living. Nevertheless, Canadian bureaucrats set out to protect caribou and musk ox herds from the supposed threat of native hunters equipped with guns, as well as from the white trappers who were flowing into the western regions.²

Animal Conservation Policies and Legislated Starvation

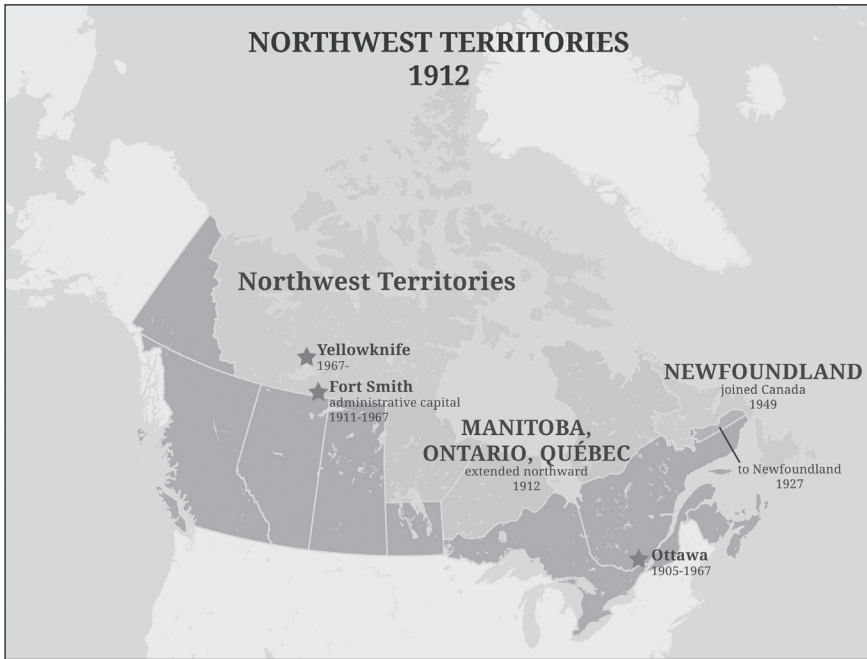
In 1917, the Canadian Parliament passed both the Migratory Birds Convention Act and the Northwest Game Act. The Migratory Birds Convention Act, which was a product of the 1916 Migratory Bird Treaty between the United States and Canada, prohibited hunting certain bird species and harvesting their eggs throughout Canada.³ The Northwest Game Act was far broader and in force throughout the Northwest Territories, which after the extension of the northern boundaries of Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec in 1912 included all of present-day Nunavut in addition to its current boundaries (the Yukon had become a separate territory in 1898). The act declared "closed seasons on caribou, moose, mountain goats, mountain sheep, deer and certain migratory birds" and outlawed musk ox, elk, and bison hunting. The act also made it illegal for nonnatives to hire natives to

¹ Peter Kulchyski and Frank James Tester, *Kiumajut (Talking Back): Game Management and Inuit Rights, 1900–70* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 32.

² Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 23–31; and Shelagh D. Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936–1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 38–39.

³ In 1918, the US Congress passed its own version of this law, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, to fulfill its end of the treaty.

Figure 4. Canada, 1912–99



Source: Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, in David J. Hall, “North-West Territories (1870–1905),” *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 6, 2006, last modified August 18, 2022, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/north-west-territories-1870-1905>.

hunt for them, a long-standing practice. These were blanket rules, and native peoples were not exempted from any of them, as they had been in the past. Luckily, this set of rules did not apply to marine food sources such as whales, seals, walrus, and fish and were waived in cases of imminent starvation, giving Inuit more leeway to provide for themselves.⁴

⁴ Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 14–16 and 16, citing R. Quinn Duffy, *The Road to Nunavut: The Progress of the Eastern Arctic Inuit since the Second World War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), 4; David Damas, “Shifting Relations in the Administration of Inuit: The Hudson’s Bay Company and the Canadian Government,” *Études/Inuit/Studies* 17, no. 2 (1993): 11; and Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 32–35.

Then, in 1921, the Northwest Territories Council (NWT Council) was formed per the provisions of the revised 1905 Northwest Territories Act, which was modified after oil was discovered in Norman Wells in 1920. Whereas since 1905 the Northwest Territories had been nominally governed by a lone commissioner in Ottawa but by the Royal North-West Mounted Police in practice, according to R. Quinn Duffy, now the Territories would be more actively ruled by a commissioner and a six-person council. The NWT Council had the vast power to single-handedly make law for the Northwest Territories, which in 1905 still included the northern regions of present-day Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, and it did not hesitate to use this power. In 1923, the Department of the Interior organized the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch, which was responsible for Northern land management. It was vested with the significant power “to license trading posts, to establish game preserves, and to organize investigations of game conditions,” according to anthropologist David Damas. The branch enhanced the NWT Council’s power: bureaucrat O. S. Finnie (1876–1948) was not only the director of the branch, but also a member of the council.⁵ The NWT Council was responsible for many of the conservationist regulations that thwarted fur trade operations and Inuit hunters’ efforts to feed their families and to aid their neighbors in lean years.

In 1924, the NWT Council created six game preserves (see figure 5). Only indigenous and Euro-indigenous people were permitted to hunt on the preserves. Although they could also hunt outside of the preserves, there these hunters might find themselves competing with nonnative hunters for resources.⁶ Although they didn’t affect Inuit hunting or trapping, these preserves harmed the trader side of the fur industry. Preexisting trading posts on the protected lands could remain open, but new posts were banned. This ban threatened the fur business’s long-term viability, which of course affected trappers and native customers as well.⁷ The council did seem to have it out for the HBC in particular. Heeding Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) men’s reports that Inuit didn’t have fur clothing for wintertime

⁵ Damas, “Shifting Relations,” 11.

⁶ Damas, “Shifting Relations,” 12.

⁷ Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 38–39.

because the HBC had encouraged them to sell their caribou skins, the council threatened the company with turning the Arctic coast and the Arctic Islands—where many of the fox posts were located—into a preserve in which trading posts would be forbidden.⁸ But the RCMP's allegations were blatantly false. As Damas explains,

The Company denied bringing any pressure on Inuit to kill caribou for skins only and . . . argued that surplus skins were purchased to be sent to locales where there was a shortage of clothing. Contrary to reports received by Finnie, Inuit were not encouraged to remain at posts, and extortionistic pricing practices were also denied, with the specific examples which had been presented addressed. It was also stated that the Company provided free equipment, medical services, employment at unloading of their ships, and they often cancelled outstanding debts. . . . With regard to the accusations . . . that people were relocated to poor hunting areas for . . . trapping, [the HBC] asserted that choices of relocations were made by the natives themselves and that good trapping sites coincided with good hunting places. It was also pointed out that the HBC paid for sick and destitute Inuit and that doctors were carried on Company ships.⁹

None of the explanations mattered: In 1925 the NWT Council imposed seasons on fur animals and also prohibited caribou skin exports.¹⁰

True to its word, the NWT Council in 1926 created the Arctic Islands Preserve, which included all the Arctic Islands and a good chunk of the mainland, declaring the area a musk ox preserve exclusively for local native use. In 1927 it created the Thelon Game Sanctuary (today the Thelon Wildlife Sanctuary) in the lower Keewatin Region, which closed off roughly 20,000 square miles (52,000 square kilometers) of land around the Thelon River (today on the border between the Northwest Territories and Nunavut).¹¹ The HBC had opened two new posts on the islands in 1926, at Arctic Bay (present-day Arctic Bay, Nunavut, on northwestern Baffin Island) and Port

⁸ Damas, "Shifting Relations," 12–13.

⁹ Damas, "Shifting Relations," 13.

¹⁰ Damas, "Shifting Relations," 15.

¹¹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 106; and Damas, "Shifting Relations," 16.

Leopold (present-day Somerset Island, Nunavut, northwest of Baffin Island and southwest of Devon Island), and the state shuttered both of them. The thirteen older HBC posts and six competing posts already on the land that had suddenly been decreed a preserve, most of them on Baffin Island, were allowed to remain open.¹² Inuit starvation in the Arctic Bay area would later be attributed to distance from the posts rather than depleted game stocks. The Arctic Bay post was finally allowed to reopen in 1933 and existed until 1987.¹³

Now working on preserves, the HBC and other traders were suddenly required to ask strangers with no real property or interests in the area (besides the hazy, abstract “national interest”) for permission to open a post where they had previously had property rights. For example, in 1930, the HBC applied to the NWT Council to open four posts, but it was only allowed to open two. Although fewer applications were denied after that, these restrictions were nevertheless detrimental because they hampered traders’ ability to serve their customers and trading partners.¹⁴ The combination of conservationist regulations, the Depression, and stiff competition from independent traders on some fronts reduced the total number of HBC posts from 334 in 1931 to 230 by 1937.¹⁵

For Inuit, the regulations threatened their livelihoods and were an affront to their property rights, arduously established through generations of hunting and managing the land. All of a sudden, according to new laws made up by distant outsiders, Inuit had to justify their kills to the new strongmen of the area, who were hell-bent on accusing native hunters of waste. The situation’s saving grace was that the Canadian state had bitten off more than it could chew with the North: the Northwest Territories were so vast and the government’s resources sufficiently limited that the area had

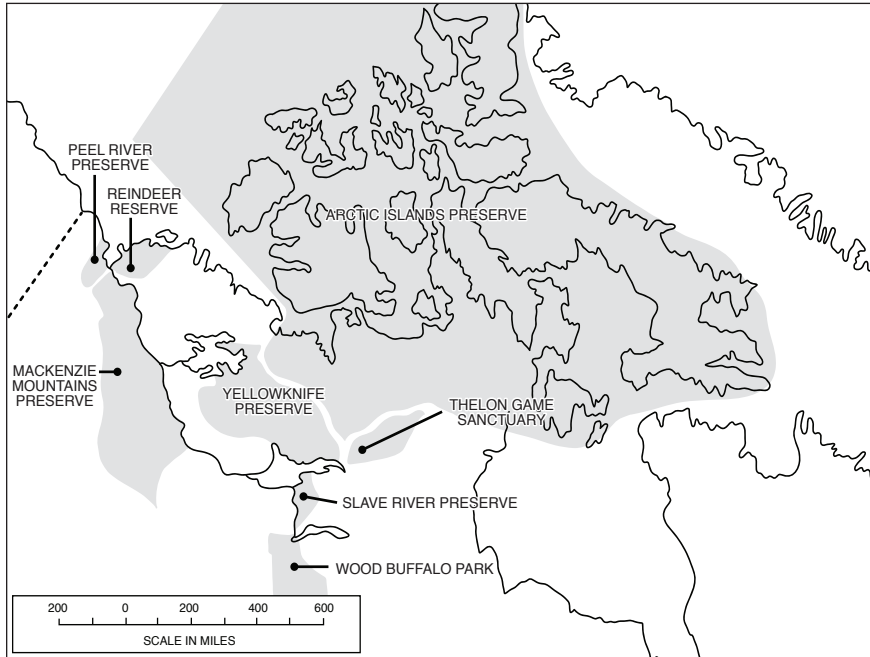
¹² Damas, “Shifting Relations,” 16; and Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 106.

¹³ Damas, “Shifting Relations,” 16; Diamond Jenness, *Eskimo Administration*, vol. 2, *Canada* (Montreal: Arctic Institute of North America, 1964), 56; and “Hudson’s Bay Company. Arctic Bay,” record creator, AM-RC. The record creator lists ca. 1931 as the reopening year, but Damas’s research points to 1933 as the correct date.

¹⁴ Damas, “Shifting Relations,” 16.

¹⁵ Morris Zaslow, *The Northward Expansion of Canada: 1914–1967* (Toronto: McClelland, 1988), 134, cited in Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 106.

Figure 5. Territorial game preserves, 1945



Source: Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 38, fig. 4, adapted from Trevor Lloyd, "The Geography and Administration of Northern Canada" (unpublished manuscript for the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1947), chap. 8.

no dedicated game officers in the 1920s and 1930s. The responsibility of enforcing game laws was therefore dropped on the RCMP, which brought no charges against Inuit under the Northwest Game Act in those decades and only sporadically enforced the Migratory Birds Convention Act (which it was formally charged with enforcing in 1932).¹⁶ But paternalistic public concerns that Inuit would not be able to survive due to their ignorant decimation of their own food sources set Canadian bureaucrats on a mission to better enforce the laws.¹⁷

¹⁶ Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 35–36, 47.

¹⁷ Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 38.

And they did. As indigenous studies scholars Peter Kulchyski and Frank James Tester have documented in detail, the bureaucrats who ultimately decided whether Inuit would have to struggle even more than they already did to survive and whether they would be dragged before inherently biased government courts to defend their hunting decisions relied on “rudimentary and unreliable” techniques to determine the size of the caribou and musk ox populations. They conducted aerial counts and relied on conflicting anecdotal reports drawn largely from nonnative hunters, and they compared their faulty numbers against inflated figures for precontact game stocks.¹⁸ But pseudoscience and arbitrary pronouncements have real consequences when a state’s vast resources and machinery of violence are at hand. Early attempts to “educate” a hunting society about hunting gave way to legal coercion in the 1950s.¹⁹

In 1949, the NWT Council and commissioner repealed the Northwest Game Act and replaced it with a much more stringent game ordinance that required all people hunting in the Northwest Territories—Indians, Inuit, and métis included—to have general hunting licenses, although indigenous hunters did not have to pay for their licenses. Licenses were needed to hunt birds and to gather eggs. Only one moose could be taken per year. Females and creatures under a year old could not be taken at all. Hunters were forced to use certain weapons and techniques. Moose meat and meals containing game meat could not be sold. Traders were prohibited from selling caribou meat. It was now a crime to use caribou or moose meat as dog food, as well as to bait animals with food-grade game meat, prohibitions which placed heavy burdens on Inuit.²⁰

The 1949 game ordinance established closed seasons on many species, including musk ox, buffalo, and caribou, which were all thought to be endangered. The closed seasons on these species of course coincided with native peoples’ traditional fall hunt. During the closed season, a special

¹⁸ Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 48 (quote), 51, 65–69, 81.

¹⁹ On the education efforts, see Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 83.

²⁰ “New Game Regulations in the Northwest Territories, 1949,” *Polar Record* 5, no. 40 (July 1950): 627–28; and Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 84–85.

license was required to hunt caribou, a major source of food and clothing for Inuit and other indigenous peoples. And to get a license, a person had to be at least sixteen years old and a head of household, requirements that disregarded Inuit culture, in which boys started hunting with their fathers early and in which the nuclear family was not the social unit of account. The license allowed natives to hunt caribou in March for their families' personal consumption, in August and September for their families' clothing, and at any time to prevent starvation. But even licensees could only take five caribou. As Kulchyski and Tester explain, "No Inuit family living on the land, as were virtually all Inuit in 1949, could survive on five caribou a year. . . . The 1949 game ordinance amounted to little more than . . . legislated starvation." In 1950–51, the ordinance was modified to allow people under sixteen to hunt with their parents. In 1953, it was finally amended to allow hunting of all game and birds at any time to prevent starvation.²¹

Although on paper the ordinance made at least some provision for the circumstances of Inuit life, the larger issue was that all Inuit hunting decisions were subject to state officials' interpretation. Inuit could still be charged with shooting protected animals unlawfully and with abandoning or otherwise wasting food-grade meat.²² This imbalance, one that is inherent to the state's sweeping and rigid legal mechanisms, would land Inuit and other native hunters in trouble. The state-paid police and legal officials who were tasked with enforcing the state's laws questioned whether Inuit were really starving when they shot animals, why they didn't come back for meat left behind within an arbitrary time frame (completely disregarding the challenges of Northern travel), why they shot the number of animals they did, and whether they couldn't have gone to a trading post to get relief (even though one of the reasons for regulating game stocks was to prevent dependence on welfare by ensuring that native peoples could continue to live off the land!). Although enforcement varied, it's no wonder that the late 1950s and 1960s saw the first Inuit charged with and prosecuted for

²¹ "New Game Regulations," 627–28; and Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 84–86, quote on 85.

²² "New Game Regulations," 627–28.

violating hunting regulations.²³ Eleven people were convicted of hunting musk ox illegally, and there were at least two convictions for abandoning meat fit for human consumption, though Sissons overturned these.²⁴

The High Arctic Relocations and State-Imposed Suffering

Concerned with native (and, in the West, white) overhunting but also with indigenous people's condition and their potential to become a public burden if they could not provide for themselves in the traditional way, the government went a step further and decided to relocate Inuit to what allegedly were better hunting grounds. No doubt the state also hoped to secure Canada's claims to the Arctic Islands by moving Inuit, whom it was actively working to transform into Canadian citizens and now hoped to use as flagpoles.

In 1953 and 1955, the state moved fourteen families from Port Harrison (present-day Inukjuak, Quebec, about midway up the eastern shore of Hudson Bay, in the subarctic, HBC post open 1920–87) and Pond Inlet (northern Baffin Island) to the High Arctic (the northern Arctic Archipelago, which basically consists of the islands above the latitude of Baffin Island, most of them in Nunavut today). The Inukjuak families were supposed to learn to live in the colder climate of the northern Arctic Islands with the help of the Pond Inlet families, who had no experience with it themselves (regardless of how close Pond Inlet might look on a map) and therefore no knowledge of how much more extreme the seasonal changes are in the High Arctic.²⁵ But unexpectedly for everyone, the group was split up. Some families were taken to settle Ellesmere Island and the rest to live on Cornwallis Island. The government opened trading posts on both islands to serve the new residents but situated the posts very far from the camps to prevent so-called dependence. Quite unlike the HBC's efforts to convince Inuit to move to areas that made sense to both traders and trappers, which involved discussion with Inuit and much smaller distances, the state was aggressive and

²³ Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 91, 95–96.

²⁴ These cases are described in Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 96–103.

²⁵ Larry Audlaluk, *What I Remember, What I Know: The Life of a High Arctic Exile* (Iqaluit, NU: Inhabit Media, 2020), 27–28, 34, Kindle.

deceitful in its mission to relocate Inuit. As Larry Audlaluk, whose family was exiled to Ellesmere Island in 1953, when he was three years old, explained,

An RCMP constable came to Uugaqsiuvik [Audlaluk's birthplace and ancestral homeland, west of Inukjuak, Quebec] in the spring. The first time he came, nobody was interested in what he had to say. . . . He came back again, trying to convince us to move to this great new place. Even upon his second arrival, we did not say yes. But he kept coming back, and each time he came, he seemed more desperate in his attempts to make us agree. He came back again and again until people didn't know what to do other than agree. We found out later that the same constable was going to other places in and around Inujjuak trying to entice our village leaders to agree to his proposals to move, and in some villages, he had become angry when he was refused. . . .

When the constable told my family that our relatives in other villages had agreed to go, we started to think about his proposals. . . .

After we moved, we compared stories. It turned out that he had said the same thing in each place, and told all of us that our relatives in other villages had already agreed to go.²⁶

The families did not want to be separated, so all the members decided to relocate under false pretenses. They boarded the CGS *C. D. Howe* together to head north. Imagine their shock when they found out on board that they were going to be separated: "The Inujjuarmiut [people of Inukjuak] thought they would be settled close to their relatives, the people they had lived with all their lives. It was only once the *C. D. Howe* was halfway to Craig Harbour from Pond Inlet that the families discovered they would be sent to three different places. Officials started to dictate who was going to Craig Harbour [southeastern Ellesmere Island], who was going to Resolute Bay [Cornwallis Island], and who was going to Alexandra Fiord [further north, on the eastern shore of Ellesmere Island]."²⁷ The RCMP ignored the people's protests and proceeded with the move.

²⁶ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 25–26.

²⁷ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 28. Note that the Alexandra Fiord relocation failed due to ice. Those bound for that area ended up in the Craig Harbour area and became part of what

Audlaluk's family and the other families that were exiled along with them settled the area that is today known as Grise Fiord (southern Ellesmere Island), and they had a miserable time. As Simon Akpaliapik, one of the misled recruits from Pond Inlet, recalled, Inuit were told to bring "the barest essentials" because everything else would be provided by the government.²⁸ In reality, Inuit weren't supplied with anything. Ignorant government bureaucrats expected the people to live in igloos, but as Audlaluk explained, "The High Arctic is like a polar desert and can never get enough snow before December to make a good-sized iglu, especially where we got dropped off. . . . There was also not enough scrap wood to build sod houses, so my family ended up living in their tents. My brother Elijah never forgot that when they went to bed at night, they'd be wearing their clothes, for it was so cold in their makeshift tents."²⁹ Inuit typically undressed when they entered igloos and wore their underclothing, if anything, to bed. That they slept fully clothed speaks volumes about how cold Audlaluk's family must have been. Sleeping in an uninsulated tent, they were basically sleeping outside. The High Arctic also has a long dark season that even the Pond Inlet natives were not used to, let alone the Inukjuak people. Heather was the only fuel available to the Inukjuak families, who were accustomed to using wood stoves rather than oil lamps to stay warm. There were no trees. There was no driftwood.³⁰

The High Arctic is not a land of plenty in terms of hunting either. Whereas in Inukjuak people ate a varied diet of caribou, seals, walrus, whales, fish, shellfish, waterfowl, and berries, the High Arctic offered them a much more limited spread, as Audlaluk explained:

Caribou-hunting areas were . . . a minimum of thirty miles . . . away and were heavily regulated. The waterfowl that far north is also very limited. There are snow geese, but no Canada geese, eider ducks, king eiders, red-throated loons, or old squaws (long-tailed ducks). . . . In the spring and summer, you have to go elsewhere to hunt different types

is now the Grise Fiord community. See Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 30.

²⁸ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 32.

²⁹ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 32–33.

³⁰ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 34–36.

of waterfowl and to find areas where tides get low enough to collect clams. . . . There are very few lakes, and seafood is limited mostly to sculpin and a few sea urchins. . . . Mountain sorrel is available, but many different kinds of berries, such as blackberries and cloudberry, don't grow in the High Arctic.³¹

The people relocated to Resolute Bay faced the same issues. Being relatively close to a military base and weather station, they tried to pull through by “scroung[ing] for sandwiches, meals, anything edible from the base dump at the Department of Transport six kilometres [almost four miles] away.”³²

Thanks to government policy and regulations, the exiles found themselves starving. And as it turns out, the Department of Resources and Development “even admitted that no wildlife resource studies had been conducted” before the relocations occurred.³³ When the Grise Fiord families journeyed by dog team to the very distant, inconsiderately located government post at Craig Harbour, about thirty-five miles (fifty-six kilometers) away, to get more supplies in mid-October 1953, they received another surprise. Samuel Arnakallak, one of the Pond Inlet “volunteers,” “had brought nothing to trade with, thinking he could get a credit as they always had with the HBC back in Pond Inlet. He was flatly refused.”³⁴ Relocates had been marooned in a totally different landscape and were expected to tough it out without the customary safety net of the credit system. This was a cruel arrangement that would never have come to pass in the fur trade but is only too characteristic of governments’ coercive, shortsighted schemes.

The people had a tough trip back to Grise Fiord from Craig Harbour. The long distance and poor weather forced them to consume some of the supplies their starving families were in dire need of. They also had to shoot two musk ox to feed the dogs so they could make it back. Of course, they shot them with the newfound unease created by arbitrary government policy, Audlaluk recounted, “even though they knew they were going to have to

³¹ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 37–38. The Inukjuak diet is described on the same pages.

³² Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 50.

³³ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 15.

³⁴ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 38–39, quote on 39.

report the killing of the ‘forbidden’ animals [on which there was a closed season], which could cost them a \$5,000 fine or even get them arrested.”³⁵

The first two years in the High Arctic were extremely difficult ones, and no amount of pleading with the “authorities” could get the exiled families back home, even though they’d been promised that they could return home after two years. In the end, several people, including infants and elders, died for lack of medical attention, and the pain and suffering that the rest endured formed the sinews of two new communities in the far north, Grise Fiord and Resolute, which remain inhabited to this day.³⁶ According to Audlaluk, between 1953 and 1961, the RCMP flat-out lied about the Grise Fiord people’s condition, feelings, and desire to relocate.³⁷

Only one family, Arnakallak’s, made it home before 1978, when Audlaluk’s older brother Samwillie successfully returned to Inukjuak after his mother’s death, using the paid travel assistance that he was entitled to as an employee of the territorial government after the RCMP refused his request.³⁸ With single-minded determination and against the wishes of the state, Arnakallak decided to move in spring 1955. He packed his family’s belongings, brought them to Grise Fiord, and boarded the *C. D. Howe* when it arrived on its annual voyage. Only his grandmother didn’t make it back; the homesick eighty-year-old woman was discovered to have tuberculosis, was not allowed to disembark at Pond Inlet, and was forcibly transported south to a sanatorium, where she died alone and far from home. For her own good.³⁹

³⁵ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 40.

³⁶ The deaths and suffering are described in Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, chap. 5.

³⁷ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 55–56, citing A. C. Fryer, “Eskimo Rehabilitation Program at Craig Harbour,” *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Quarterly*, October 1954, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/sru.00004_195410; Glenn Sargent, *Eskimo Conditions, Craig Harbour Area, Period Ending December 31st, 1955*; Sargent, *Eskimo Conditions, Craig Harbour Area, Period Ending December 31st, 1956*; R. S. Pilot, *Conditions amongst Eskimoes Generally—Annual Report—Grise Fiord Area, N.W.T., Year Ending December 31st, 1958*; and Sargent, *Conditions amongst Eskimoes Generally—Annual Report—Grise Fiord Area, N.W.T., Year Ending December 31, 1959*, all in Craig Harbour area—General file—Grise Fiord (game conditions), 1954–63, RG85-D-1-A, vol. 1446, file 1000/133, pt. 1, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/redirect?app=fonandcol&id=1583117&lang=eng>.

³⁸ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 57.

³⁹ Audlaluk, *What I Remember*, 52–53, 59.

The Ennadai Lake Inuit Relocations and Canadian Political Law

Nor were these the only forced relocations Inuit experienced. People in the Keewatin Region (most of which is now the Kivalliq Region of Nunavut) were also moved, and this relocation did not end well either. The Ennadai Lake Inuit, an inland people who relied primarily on caribou and burned wood for warmth, were relocated twice, to Nueltin Lake in 1950 and to Henik Lake in 1957 (all three lakes are in present-day southern Nunavut). Reports of destitution and the starvation of four people in the late 1940s prompted the first move, which was carried out against the people's wishes. To the Ennadai people, these instances of hardship and starvation were not a sign that it was time to abandon their homeland. Harsh as it may sound, periodic hardship and starvation were part and parcel of living off the land in the Arctic and subarctic. If Inuit and other Northern peoples had abandoned every place where someone starved or where they suffered privation, they'd have had nowhere to go.

But government bureaucrats thought they knew better, that these episodes proved Ennadai Lake unlivable. Their plan was for caribou hunters to now base their diet on fish. This did not pan out, of course. The natives weren't given any fishing gear at Nueltin Lake, nor does it seem they were very skilled fishermen—or, at any rate, interested in relying on fish. The whole concept of shifting gears to an unfamiliar and uncertain new livelihood was nonsensical. Within the year, the Ennadai Lake people had moved back home, where no less than four groups of observers reported them to be living in plenty, their dogs well fed.⁴⁰

Although the Ennadai Lake community's lives were disrupted by the first relocation, they at least made it back home. They were not so lucky the second time around. The relocation to Henik Lake was prompted by poor caribou hunts in 1955 and 1956, possibly due to insufficient ammunition.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 211–17. Duncan Pryde confirms that the so-called Caribou Inuit (all those who lived and continue to live in the Kivalliq Region, west of Hudson Bay) “rarely ate fish at all.” Pryde, *Nunaga: Ten Years of Eskimo Life* (New York: Walker, 1971), 218.

⁴¹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 217–18. The Ennadai Lake people may have been transitioning from spear to rifle hunting and consequently required more ammunition than

With families short on caribou meat, the government found itself needing to hand out what they called “relief”—some of it was actually past-due wages issued in kind.⁴² Soon clueless but arrogant bureaucrats decided that the people should be moved again. This time, the thought was that the Ennadai Lake Inuit were too far from government offices and trading posts. Now they needed to be closer to these so that their subsistence activities could be supervised.⁴³ Again the natives were expected to rely on fish—which, it should be noted, are generally much less substantial than caribou and other big game. Lewis Voisey, a half-Inuit government worker, was supposed to teach them how to fish. A Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources press release reported that the natives had expressed enthusiasm in a discussion about the move, explaining that Henik Lake had once been their home and that they knew some good fishing and camping spots. But this report also seems to have been fabricated: two exiled couples reported that they were only informed that they were moving a day before the relocation in May 1957.⁴⁴

In June 1957, only a month after their arrival, several Ennadai Lake men and a local Inuk broke into a nearby mining camp and stole foodstuffs and supplies. The two instigators, Ohootuk and Mounik (the Henik Lake man), were arrested by outsiders, tried in what to them was a foreign court, convicted, and sent to prison, an unusual (if not exactly cruel) punishment in Inuit society. Some telling truths slipped into the continuing positive reports from the state. It was late summer, and the people still hadn’t built their boats. It was late summer, and they hadn’t shot enough caribou to make clothing and survive the winter. It was early fall, and Voisey, who

more experienced shooters to bring in their catch.

⁴² Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 218.

⁴³ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 218–19.

⁴⁴ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 219–20, citing Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, “Eskimos Fly to New Hunting Grounds,” press release, May 24, 1957, Ennadai Lake—NWT, 1956–57, RG85-D-1-A, vol. 1267, file 1000/179, pt. 1, Library and Archives Canada, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=1582004&lang=eng>; and Dorothy Harley Eber, *Images of Justice: A Legal History of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut as Traced through the Yellowknife Courthouse Collection of Inuit Sculpture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 59–60.

was also supposed to “supervise” hunting and meat caching, had run out of provisions and was being flown out of the area. And the caribou still hadn’t shown up. In December, people again broke into the mining camp and stole food and supplies. Internal reports noted that they were struggling with fishing. And the caribou still hadn’t shown up. Ultimately, seven people starved or died of exposure, and five ended up in the hospital.⁴⁵

The stress of looming starvation also led one hunter, Ootuk, one of whose daughters had starved to death, to murder his brother-in-law, Hallow, because he would not consent to moving the camp to a different fishing spot. Hallow’s family was also starving, but Hallow at least managed to catch a fish per day, sharing with his brother-in-law’s family when possible. One day, Hallow left the igloo to go to his fishing pole. Ootuk followed shortly after. He went to where Hallow was fishing and shot him from behind. Ootuk returned to Hallow’s igloo and took the dead man’s rifle. When Hallow’s wife, Kikkik, attempted to take it back, Ootuk shot at her but missed. Figuring out what had happened, Kikkik stabbed Ootuk to death, perhaps a combination of self-defense and retribution. Then she laid her husband to rest.⁴⁶

Now widowed and in even worse danger of starving, Kikkik decided to go for help. The next morning, she loaded up her sled and began making her way toward the inland HBC trading post at Padley (open 1925–60⁴⁷) with her five children. They had no dogs (a sign of their dire straits), so they pulled the komatik themselves. On the way, they ran into Howmik’s brother, Yahah, and his family. Since Howmik and Hallow were also siblings, all three may have been related. Kikkik traveled with Yahah’s family to their igloo. Yahah told Kikkik to stay there while he and his family went on to Padlei for help, promising that a plane or dog team would come for them. Kikkik and her children slept in the igloo for five nights. Then, starving and fearing that help would not come, Kikkik decided to get back on the trail.

⁴⁵ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 220–24, 229–30, 232–33.

⁴⁶ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 230–31; and Eber, *Images of Justice*, 62–65.

⁴⁷ The post was also called Padlei. “Hudson’s Bay Company. Padley,” record creator, AM-RC.

The family walked through the numbing frost for several days without eating a thing, closer to death with each step. Finally, Kikkik decided to leave her two youngest daughters behind. They could no longer walk, and continuing to haul them along risked everyone's lives. So Kikkik bundled the girls in caribou skins and left them in the hasty dugout they had all slept in the night before. A search plane spotted her a few hours later. Fearing the RCMP—the conveyor belt that leads into the inhuman legal machinery of the Canadian state, which makes few exceptions as it manufactures political justice—Kikkik told the police that her daughters had died. But she looked away when she said it, so they followed her trail back until they found the girls; one was dead.

In the 1990s, William Gallagher, the RCMP corporal who led the search and ordered the investigation, recalled, "When she told me the children were dead, they were buried alive in the snow. She couldn't drag them any further—they'd been ten days without food. If you had seen how weak they were . . . She couldn't carry them any further, she couldn't drag them any more on a caribou skin in the snow. She abandoned them out of necessity." Nevertheless, Gallagher and his men, enforcers of Canadian political law, arrested Kikkik on February 16, 1958, and charged her with murder. The RCMP took the four surviving children from their mother and held them as the legal battle unfolded.⁴⁸

Like other Inuit before her, Kikkik endured the wrath of a foreign, political, and contrived justice—state justice. Choices that before would have been vetted by her peers and met with exile, ostracism, retribution, or absolution were now being weighed by outsiders with no standing in the Ennadai Lake community, no context about Inuit camp life, and no true authority. Kikkik was hastily charged with murder, abandonment of a child, and criminal negligence and then imprisoned in an igloo near the police station. She was immediately punished in this way even though she was formally awaiting trial and sentencing. In practice, regardless of what state officials reported at the time and have said after the fact, the state

⁴⁸ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 231–32; and William Gallagher, quoted in Eber, *Images of Justice*, 66–68, quote on 68.

saw perishing with her children as Kikkik's only acceptable choice. By her actions, Kikkik had disagreed. And those who disagree with the state are in trouble, because it's the one entity that is socially sanctioned in using aggressive force; in mediating legal conflicts; and in generally making others agree with it.

So Kikkik was deemed guilty until proven innocent. She was interned and then dragged into the state's court twice. From the safety of their courtroom, state prosecutors tried to charge her with manslaughter as a lenient punishment. Thanks to the guidance of Judge John Sissons, one good apple (at least for Inuit) in a mound of rotten government apples, Kikkik was acquitted of all charges. What set Kikkik apart from nonindigenous subjects of the Canadian state was that her community had arbitrated its own conflicts and lived without police surveillance in the recent past. Ordinary people had to make hard choices themselves. Sissons opined that proper application of common law in this case meant understanding Kikkik's "primitive" society, and he judged that there had been no crime. Luckily for her, the jurors agreed.⁴⁹

The Canadian government had no right to try Kikkik or any other Inuit, and it still doesn't have this right today, no matter how many bills the Canadian Parliament passes or how many flags Canadian mercenaries have planted. Neither does the Canadian government have the right to rule its nonindigenous subjects. Governments are not based on consent: actions taken under coercion or duress—like paying taxes, getting a driver's license, filling out census forms, and even voting—can never be counted as being done with full and free consent, just as a person who elects not to physically resist a sexual assault cannot be said to have consented to intercourse. The distinction between colonized and domestic subjects disappears in the light of this insight. The Inuit struggle against the Canadian state is a variety of the age-old struggle of free people against enslaving conquerors.

But what about justice? many will ask. What about Kikkik's helpless daughters? What about her dead husband? What about Ootuk? Who would come forward to make things right for these people, given that this was an

⁴⁹ Eber, *Images of Justice*, 69–73.

intrafamily dispute? The answer is Kikkik's community. The Inuit legal mechanism functioned in spite of and regardless of the RCMP and the Canadian courts' interloping pantomime. Kikkik experienced total ostracism during her imprisonment. Other Inuit would not visit or talk to her. Most said they didn't want her to return to their community. Many feared and otherwise distrusted her, including her own kinsmen—Yahah and Howmik. One couple said they would accept Kikkik's children but not her.⁵⁰

Not long after her release, however, Kikkik remarried and resettled into her community with her surviving children. Because Kikkik's ostracism was oddly impermanent, indigenous studies scholars Tester and Kulchyski believe that it was caused by her unnecessary incarceration and was not a true verdict of guilt. It seems that Kikkik's community acquitted her as well, perhaps judging that the two men's deaths had been reconciled and that the child's death could not be helped under the circumstances. No one had just cause to harm Kikkik, and exile was unwarranted.⁵¹ It seems that Inuit justice worked just fine in this case. Inuit communities' careful way of judging each case individually and based largely on the universal principles of natural law was effective. The reality that a state's judges, police, legislators, and other legal agents are simply normal individuals invested with a dangerous amount of power and privilege should lay to rest any notions that state justice is more fair or more efficient than private justice—justice by the people.

Regina v. Kikkik. The name says it all: the queen versus Kikkik. In other words, the crown versus Kikkik. The state versus Kikkik. True justice puts the accused before her alleged victims and their families, as traditional Inuit justice did. Though the state claims to act for the victims of crime, the state is not a proper mediator, one freely chosen by the disputants. In reality, the agents of the state are unfamiliar interlopers who have forced their way into a dispute. In reality, the offender's actions are weighed against the state's often-arbitrary rules, arbitrary in that they tend to be determined by politics rather than by universal rights, and the wishes of the wronged are

⁵⁰ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 234.

⁵¹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 234–35.

considered only insofar as they align with the state's provisions. Victims and their families receive nothing but a token justice in criminal courts and perhaps arbitrarily determined damages in civil court—not true restitution. In reality, the scales remain unbalanced.

By March 1958, the survivors of the Henik Lake relocation had been moved to Eskimo Point (present-day Arviat, Nunavut, on the western shore of Hudson Bay, HBC post open 1921–87), where without any means of transportation, their dogs having starved, they lived in igloos behind the police station and depended on government handouts. Their knees broken, they accepted the government crutches. In 1959 they were relocated *again*, this time to the government-created settlement of Whale Cove (present-day Whale Cove, Nunavut, on the western shore of Hudson Bay).⁵²

The state's bureaucrats presumed that the Inukjuak and Ennadai Lake communities could not make a living in their homelands due to declining game stocks, which they tried to pin on alleged overhunting and waste. So the Canadian government decided to move these families to help them. But as always in politics, there were political motives as well. As mentioned above, it is widely believed that the High Arctic relocations were also a way for Canada to stake its claims to the Arctic Archipelago with Inuit flagpoles.

A more certain motive that was common to all the relocations was the expediency of reducing relief costs. Because everything has a cost in terms of resources, because taxation is rarely popular with taxpayers, because the lines of public ledgers are drawn by the battles of competing interests, and because the personal values of the flawed individuals turning the cogs of the leviathan bleed into their actions within the government, concerns over growing relief costs played a large role in both of the relocations we've examined. Bureaucrats were determined to eradicate the public-burden issue by any means necessary, even if their actions risked lives. With no right to do so, they moved people like pawns on a chessboard. They isolated people who were used to the interdependent relations of trade and then rigidly withheld aid.

⁵² "Hudson's Bay Company. Eskimo Point," record creator, AM-RC; and Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 232–34, 237, 275–77.

Another possible ulterior motive for the relocations was animal conservation. Bureaucrats were ultimately more concerned with conserving the state's wealth than with Inuit well-being, as shown by their relief and conservation policies. The dispersion of Inuit communities may well have been viewed as a way to protect animal stocks from the ravages of alleged overhunting and overtrapping while preventing Inuit from becoming a drain on the state's coffers.

Semiprivate Animal Conservation Schemes

In reality, there were other solutions to the problem of declining fur and game stocks. Markets account for both the short and long term because of producers' desire to draw profits from a venture for as long as possible and because of all market actors' desire to acquire wealth and goods as soon as possible. In the twentieth century, the HBC began searching for ways to avoid downturns and thus make the fur trade more sustainable. The company had multiple strategies. It attempted to raise reindeer to create a cheap and reliable source of meat for its trading partners; created beaver and muskrat preserves to strengthen these fur stocks; and experimented with raising foxes and mink to supplement or perhaps supplant these wild furs.

In 1920, the HBC decided to try farming reindeer. Cecil E. Bradbury (1901–96), who in 1924–25 worked at the HBC's Amadjuak post (present-day Amadjuak, Nunavut, on southern Baffin Island, open 1921–33), where the project was carried out, explained that reindeer was then a cheap substitute for beef. The company's plan was for some Inuit to learn how to raise the animals and become hired herdsmen for the company.⁵³ The ranched meat could sustain local communities during poor years, feed employees, and perhaps even feed everyone's dogs.⁵⁴ Like caribou, reindeer have hardy fur,

⁵³ "Hudson's Bay Company. Amadjuak," record creator, AM-RC; and Cecil E. Bradbury, *Ten Years in the High Canadian Arctic* (St. Johns, NL: RB Books, 1994), 27–28. Caribou was another cheap alternative, selling for as little as fifty cents a pound. See Pryde, *Nunaga*, 192.

⁵⁴ With the advent of trapping, dog teams ballooned from no more than four dogs to as many as twenty. More dogs were needed to transport all the supplies necessary to trap for a living. These large dogs ate nothing but meat, and working full days in the harsh conditions of the Arctic, they needed a lot of it, so Inuit hunters spent a relatively large proportion of their efforts hunting for the dogs. As Pryde explained, "Having thirteen dogs is like having

and the HBC likely also planned to make reindeer skins and clothing available across its Northern posts to help ensure that Inuit always had winter clothing. The company was already buying wild caribou hides and sealskins to supply communities facing shortages, but the farm-raised reindeer would potentially yield a cheaper and even more reliable supply of winter clothing.

The company imported fourteen thousand reindeer from Norway, and about seven hundred were shipped to Baffin Island. Several died on the voyage, and others were so weak after the trip that they died soon after arriving. The animals were accompanied by some indigenous Lapland families who had been hired to teach Inuit how to care for the herd. Less than half the Amadjuak herd was successfully herded. According to Frank Melton, who established the Amadjuak post in 1921, many of the animals fell off cliffs, had to be killed due to broken legs, were killed by wolves, were trapped accidentally, or mixed with the native caribou and were lost. He noted that the lack of moss made it hard for them to survive near the coast. It was virtually impossible to keep them together because they had to cover too much ground to survive. This difficulty was compounded as the herd shrank. Most of the Laplanders left, with only two families remaining to work with the Inuit apprentices. The reindeer continued to stray, however, and in 1922 the herd—by then down to about forty—finally scattered entirely after local dogs chased them. Commenting on the failure, HBC man Len Budgell noted that Inuit weren't interested in being herdsman, so it seems that the cards were stacked against reindeer farming on all counts.⁵⁵

The company also tried to strengthen fur stocks by creating preserves. In the 1930s and 1940s, looking to expand its conservation activities and to study furbearers in order to predict future harvests, the company established large beaver and muskrat preserves. Robert Chesshire, who had a long career with the company, said that there were 180,000 miles (290,000

thirteen people to feed. . . . The average husky will eat four or five pounds of caribou or seal or fish every day, whether pulling a heavy-laden sled on a trip or sitting on his butt and howling at the moon in camp." Pryde, *Nunaga*, 158, 162 (quote).

⁵⁵ Bradbury, *Ten Years*, 26–30; Frank Melton, interview by J. W. Anderson, September 5, 1958, tape 1 of 2, T6-15, HBCA-JWA; L. G. Budgell, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, December 14, 1982, tape 3 of 7, T11-55, HBCA-OHI. The Canadian government tried to raise reindeer in the Mackenzie Delta in the same way and failed. See Pryde, *Nunaga*, 192.

kilometers) of HBC beaver preserves.⁵⁶ In 1938, the HBC leased three hundred thousand acres from the Saskatchewan government and established a muskrat preserve near the border with Manitoba. Like other crony deals, this lease conferred a private company vast power over what was supposed to be Canadian public land, allowing the HBC to prohibit nonresidents from trapping in the area. According to geographer and ethnohistorian Arthur J. Ray, by the late 1940s the company ran eight beaver preserves covering almost the entire James Bay coast in collaboration with the federal Indian Affairs Branch.⁵⁷

It is notable that the HBC collaborated with the federal and provincial governments in restricting access to beaver and muskrat populations further south, even though the company resented the government's creation of preserves in the Arctic.⁵⁸ Although the company also established preserves alone and in partnership with other companies, its joint efforts with Canadian governments show the corruption and corporate privilege created by the presence in the marketplace of the state, whose power can be bought and unfairly employed to harm competing interests. By simply paying local strongmen off, the HBC and other companies could bar other Canadian citizens from what were alleged to be Canadian public lands (native claims notwithstanding).

Even though the HBC was a private company and, therefore, often dealt with its native trading partners respectfully and fairly—in stark contrast to how agents of the Canadian state dealt with them—the company did not operate in a private world. Rather, it was embedded in a market shot through with state coercion and influence. Such tangled landscapes create opportunities for unfair gain. Companies that can capture the favor of the political class, becoming its cronies, can have their interests furthered and

⁵⁶ Arthur J. Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 117; R. H. Chesshire, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, September 10, 1981, tape 1 of 2, T11-28, HBCA-OHI.

⁵⁷ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 117. Other fur companies established preserves in the prairie provinces as well, though not all of them were preserves in the typical sense. One company's eighty-acre "preserve," on land leased from the Manitoba government for five years, was dedicated to muskrat farming. There were several provincial and private muskrat preserves along the Saskatchewan River. Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 117.

⁵⁸ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 119; Chesshire interview, September 10, 1981.

protected in a very powerful way that is difficult for competitors, consumers, and other interests to fight. The state can bar entry to an industry in various ways to protect politically connected companies, making it impossible for start-ups and even established firms lacking these connections to compete with the government's favorites.

As noted in chapter 2, the HBC came into existence through royal privilege, and its operations were often protected by the British and Canadian states. Although the company resisted state conservation in the Arctic Islands, it was on board with these efforts further south, in part because they were a way to stem the tide of white trappers pouring into the older trapping areas and to harm all the competing businesses that served them. In 1932, Ralph Parsons, the HBC's fur trade commissioner from 1931 to 1940, wrote in support of efforts to keep white trappers out of the Northwest Territories (which then included what is now Nunavut): "It is commonly recognized that the Indians or Eskimos, if left alone, will never exterminate the game or fur bearing animals in their territories. They . . . have every incentive to conserve the resources in them. The white man on the other hand enters the country with the fixed purpose of taking everything that he can out of it, regardless of . . . the consequence of his acts. When he has cleaned up one territory, he moves to another."⁵⁹ But Kulchyski and Tester cut through Parsons's dramatic picture to a more likely reason for the company's stance: the company wanted to keep trapping a native activity because white trappers did not bring their furs to the HBC. For the HBC, it was not a benefit for nonnatives to have free access to Canadian public lands.⁶⁰

In reality, the problem of overtrapping was an issue not of culture but of property rights. Land that nobody owns is land that few users care to protect; this is sometimes called the tragedy of the commons.⁶¹ Indian and

⁵⁹ Ralph Parsons to H. H. Rowatt, Department of the Interior, February 25, 1932, G-1979-042, box 22, 1, Council of the Northwest Territories, 1905-51, Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly fonds, 1877-2023, Northwest Territories Archives, Yellowknife, NT, quoted in Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 58.

⁶⁰ Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 59.

⁶¹ This phrase was coined by Garrett Hardin in reference to what he considered the problem of shared resources: that the short-term interests of individual users (such as harvesting animal skins) can clash with the long-term common interests of all (such as maintaining fur stocks), negatively impacting the resource and its users. I define a commons as land that

Inuit communities tended not to overtrap because the land was theirs; they would have been harming themselves by harvesting wildlife unsustainably. By the same token, the company made efforts to protect the trapping areas due to its long-term interests in the land, interests that white trappers and small-time fur traders did not have. Although the company had transferred most of its ill-gotten landholdings to the British government under duress in 1869 (as detailed in chapter 2), the HBC still retained ownership of the land around its many trading posts, so it was somewhat fixed to these spots. It could move on to greener pastures only at a loss. It could open new posts, and it could close old ones, but keeping the existing posts profitable was ideal—and that meant taking an interest in the health of local fur stocks.

Although the HBC's conservation efforts did not target white fox and although they were partly prompted by anticompetitive motives, the beaver and muskrat preserves show that private actors will try to protect resources that they own or have a direct, lasting stake in. Clearly, then, government intervention is not necessary to preserve wildlife. The government's so-called public lands create an unnatural tragedy of the commons and the illusion that state regulation is the only way to curb overharvesting. But preservation efforts involving the state don't always protect the land. What they do without fail is divide the citizenry into two classes of people: money-eyed business interests, who can buy their way onto state-claimed "public" lands, and everyone else, who can't. There's nothing to suggest that game stocks were not protected in the HBC preserves created with state support, but since those preserves were on what was supposed to be public property, the exclusion of ordinary Canadian citizens from them was little more than blatant corporate privilege for the HBC. The only land conservation

is not owned by any individual or group and is thus completely open to anyone to exploit, including passersby and others who have no concern over the longer-term effects of their land use. Such land indeed is at risk of the ruin that Hardin described. Lands held in common by a specific group, by contrast, are private property and thus are often well protected by the groups that control them, as Elinor Ostrom's work has shown. Land held collectively by a specific group therefore cannot be considered a true commons, however similar it might seem. See Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons: The Population Problem Has No Technical Solution; It Requires a Fundamental Extension in Morality," *Science* 162, no. 3869 (December 13, 1968); and Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

that is not subject to corruption is fully private conservation undertaken by the land's rightful owners. In the case of North America, those owners are native peoples and any newcomers who settled in open areas, bought land, or received gifts of land.

A more honest way that the HBC and other companies tried to tackle the issue of potential resource depletion was fur farming. Fur companies had the brilliant idea to sidestep the issue of fur stock variability by attempting to raise white foxes. In the late 1920s, lagging far behind pioneering firms (which had started farming silver foxes as early as the 1890s),⁶² the HBC opened short-lived experimental white fox farms at Stupart's Bay (1927–31), Port Harrison (1928–31), Pangnirtung (1928–32), and Chesterfield Inlet (dates unknown) in response to high demand.⁶³

The HBC also experimented with raising silver foxes. In 1928, it purchased controlling interest in the McLure and MacKinnon Fox Farm on Prince Edward Island, the biggest fur farm in Canada, which operated until about 1937. In 1929, the company also opened Mingan Fur Farm on Île du Havre (Mingan Archipelago, eastern Quebec) and purchased Muddy Bay Farm in Cartwright, Labrador.⁶⁴

Unfortunately, silver fox ranching “wasn't a paying proposition,” in HBC man Chesshire's words.⁶⁵ Although Muddy Bay Farm “raised fine foxes” under William Douglas's (1895–1978) direction, the feed was very expensive due to freight costs. Mingan Fur Farm also faced the issue of astronomical feed costs, so in 1934 Douglas closed the two farms and moved operations to Winnipeg, where according to HBC man Wally Buhr there were already many fur farms, establishing Bird's Hill Fur Farm. But Bird's Hill's main

⁶² Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 119.

⁶³ “Hudson's Bay Company. Stupart's Bay,” record creator, AM-RC; “Hudson's Bay Company. Port Harrison,” record creator, AM-RC; and “Hudson's Bay Company. Pangnirtung,” record creator, AM-RC. The Stupart's Bay record creator says that the fox farm closed in 1929, but there are fox farm post journals through 1931. See Stupart's Bay Fox Farm post journals, 1930 and 1930–31, HBCA-SBPJ. The Chesterfield Inlet farm is mentioned only in the Pangnirtung record creator. That the Chesterfield Inlet record creator does not mention it and that there are no extant journals for it, as for the other three fox farms, suggest that its existence was indeed brief. See “Hudson's Bay Company. Chesterfield Inlet,” record creator, AM-RC.

⁶⁴ W. O. Douglas, interview by J. W. Anderson, March 12, 1959, tape 2 of 2, T6–26, HBCA-JWA.

⁶⁵ Chesshire interview, September 10, 1981.

product was mink, not silver fox. Mink had been raised at Muddy Bay experimentally, and “this is the animal that took off,” Douglas explained. In fact, long before Mingan closed, it too had become a mink farm.⁶⁶

Cheshire believed that the HBC intended to breed silver foxes on a commercial scale but that falling prices in the 1930s due to the declining popularity of long-haired fur spurred the company to switch to raising mink. But even mink farming was not to last. “After a few years,” the company stopped farming altogether because it wasn’t a commercial proposition. As Cheshire put it, fur farming was “more nuisance than it was worth.”⁶⁷ Ironically, part of the reason the farms weren’t profitable was their success in producing large volumes of fur. As Ray explains, “One of the most important consequences of supply shortages [due to government game preserves and hunting regulations] was that prices of certain luxury furs rose sufficiently to encourage large-scale ranching. . . . Beginning in the 1890s, silver-fox ranching increased rapidly, and by the late 1930s ranches, mostly located on Prince Edward Island, accounted for nearly all the Canadian output. . . . The problem for mink and silver-fox breeders was that they flooded the market, driving prices downward.”⁶⁸ Buhr noted this phenomenon too, explaining that fox prices were much higher before foxes were farmed because of the animal’s rarity.⁶⁹ The steeply falling prices made it harder, though certainly not impossible, for Inuit trappers to earn a living.

The rapid shift to large-scale ranching and the vicissitudes it created in fur prices can in large part be blamed on government policy. Conservation measures forced on allegedly public land suddenly created shortages and high prices, signaling to the market that there were vast profits waiting for whoever could figure out how to meet the demand. These conditions quickly moved ranching from beta into full-blown production. The HBC’s move to drop out of ranching actually went against the grain, and it would cost them a significant amount in market share by the mid-1940s, though the

⁶⁶ Douglas interview, March 12, 1959; and W. A. Buhr, interview by Wendy Owen, July 13, 1981, tape 1 of 4, T11-8, HBCA-OHI.

⁶⁷ Cheshire interview, September 10, 1981.

⁶⁸ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 119.

⁶⁹ Buhr interview, July 13, 1981.

company was still an important producer, especially of white foxes, which did not come to be farm raised.⁷⁰

With true private property arrangements—with various lands fully owned and controlled by different groups rather than by the state—white trappers might not have flooded the West to begin with because they would have had to acquire the land or secure its owners' permission (likely through compensation) in order to harvest its resources. They wouldn't have been able to simply show up and start trapping, as they essentially did. But conservation efforts and other controls only made things worse. They elevated demand unnaturally, stimulating trapping even further and ultimately pressuring the industry to pivot to ranching prematurely, which in combination with other factors sank prices deeply at times, sometimes to as little as \$2.50 per pelt, though according to HBC trader Peter Nichols, prices seldom dipped below \$20.00 between 1953 and 1971 and averaged a modest \$10.00 in the 1950s.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the nadirs in fur prices created problems for trappers, who sometimes found it hard to maintain their standard of living, especially because goods prices in remote regions remained high even during downturns due to the freight costs of bringing them north to market.⁷² The advent of fur farming shows that government intervention in conservation—in addition to being an immoral violation of native property rights—was not necessary to protect fur and other animal stocks. So long as clear property rights exist and producers have a direct stake in the land's continuing fecundity, prices will always push producers to think beyond the short term.

Ultimately, the Canadian government's intervention in the fur trade would smother the industry and turn it into a retail trade based on welfare income. Though many factors contributed to the end of the traditional fur

⁷⁰ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 166–68.

⁷¹ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 6, 1983, tape 7 of 8, T11-60, HBCA-OHI. Tester and Kulchyski paint a picture of drastic and lasting decline in fur prices, but the reality—from people who experienced it firsthand—is that prices continued to have ups and downs during the 1940s and 1950s and did not remain at the extreme lows that these authors focus on. For instances of Tester and Kulchyski's misleading analysis, see Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 4, 61, 98, 107–8; and Kulchyski and Tester, *Kiumajut*, 85.

⁷² See Chesshire interview, September 10, 1981, for mention of freight costs impacting prices.

trade, had the state not intervened, novel strategies to keep the trade sustainable would no doubt have continued to surface. But conservation was only the second front in the multipronged government assault on the fur trade.

CHAPTER 8

The Carrot and the Stick: Government-Sponsored Relief

Due to reports of native starvation and general destitution, the Canadian government began to issue sick and destitute rations to natives at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1893, the federal government directed the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) to issue rations to the Naskapis (northern Innu) with whom they were trading at Fort Chimo, and it promised to provide reimbursement.¹ In 1897, the government expanded this onetime directive into a rudimentary system of relief: it tasked the company with issuing sick and destitute rations "in remote areas" throughout its trading post network.² Sick and destitute rations included "food and other supplies such as twine and shot" and were meant to help struggling hunters and their families pull through a bad season and return to earning their own living. This relief was also issued to people who were unable to hunt due to illness or impairment but who had no relatives to support them.³ By 1905, the HBC and other traders were regularly billing the federal government

¹ Toby Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay: An Illustrated History of Inuit, Naskapi, and Eurocanadian Interaction, 1800–1970* (Westmount, QC: Avataq Cultural Institute, 2016), 139.

² Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 139.

³ Toby Morantz, *The White Man's Gonna Getcha: The Colonial Challenge to the Crees in Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 146.

(specifically the Department of the Interior) for sick and destitute rations issued to natives all across the subarctic.⁴

As historian Hugh Shewell explains, native relief policy from 1917 through World War II stipulated that only people who were ill, had a “physical deformity,” or were able-bodied but temporarily destitute “through unavoidable misfortune” were eligible for aid. People with family to help them, specifically able-bodied sons, were not eligible.⁵ There was no aid for those who were chronically poor, although in 1938 the state began issuing weekly widow’s rations—varying amounts of flour based on how many children the person had.⁶ By 1932, two ways of administering relief had surfaced. One option was for natives to apply for relief with local Indian agents (who were not present in the eastern Arctic) or with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Approved applicants would be issued a credit to be redeemed at the local trading post (usually an HBC post). The other option was for natives to request and claim relief at a government storehouse or at a trading post.⁷ Until the mid-1940s, Inuit in the eastern Arctic either applied for relief at RCMP detachments (though these were few) or requested it directly at HBC posts.

A Semiprivate Relief System

The reimbursement system had several weak points. One was that so many receipts were coming in that bureaucrats suspected widespread fraud. In the 1910s the government began issuing relief directly from its own warehouses, hoping to foreclose this issue.⁸ The government storehouses were run by Indian agents in the subarctic and by the RCMP in the Arctic, but not all

⁴ Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 139; and Morantz, *White Man’s Gonna Getcha*, 146. From 1929 to 1931, missionaries, traders, and the RCMP all distributed relief and submitted their reimbursement receipts to the federal government, which would pay the bills and then charge the provincial governments for their share of the costs. Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 29.

⁵ Hugh Shewell, “Enough to Keep Them Alive”: *Indian Welfare in Canada, 1873–1965* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 104; and Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 63.

⁶ Morantz, *White Man’s Gonna Getcha*, 148.

⁷ Shewell, “Enough to Keep Them Alive,” 118.

⁸ Shewell, “Enough to Keep Them Alive,” 97–99, 118.

areas had storehouses. Where they were present, HBC relief was authorized only when the government ran out of supplies.⁹ This was the situation at Norway House (present-day central Manitoba, on the Nelson River, open 1817–1987), where according to Wally Buhr (posted there 1937–38) the HBC issued no sick and destitute rations to able-bodied destitute individuals. Instead, the Indian Agency issued salt pork, tea, and flour from its own warehouse, although Buhr noted that the goods were of poor quality.¹⁰

The reimbursement system also caused squabbling between Ottawa and the provinces, particularly Quebec, whose government contended that relief payments to Inuit in northern Quebec were the federal government's responsibility. The Quebec government argued that Inuit weren't Indians for the purposes of relief, but in 1939 the Supreme Court of Canada settled this standoff in Ottawa's favor.¹¹

The government and the HBC reached a crony compromise for relief distribution early on. Where its agents were not present, the Canadian state expected the HBC to distribute relief on the government's behalf and according to its criteria. However, to protect the company's trading relationships, taxpayer-funded relief issued by the HBC would be passed off as private relief. Indigenous people whose relief was coming from the government would be made to believe that the company was aiding them as in old times.¹²

Due to the company's historical trading relationship with native peoples, the government also expected the company to bear the financial burden of relief in places where it had no competition.¹³ The RCMP's slow incursion into the eastern Arctic and the relative lack of competing fur traders there meant that the HBC was in charge of administering relief there for longer than in the western Arctic and that it often provided its own charity,

⁹ Shewell, "Enough to Keep Them Alive," 99.

¹⁰ W. A. Buhr, interview by Wendy Owen, July 13, 1981, tape 1 of 4, T11-8, HBCA-OHI.

¹¹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 29–35.

¹² Shewell, "Enough to Keep Them Alive," 88.

¹³ Shelagh D. Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936–1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 37; and Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 26, 63. In Port Harrison the company had to take over the burden of relief from the government in 1949, when it absorbed the Baffin Trading Company. *Ibid.*, 64.

though some eastern Arctic Inuit began receiving federal relief as early as the mid-1920s.¹⁴ For much of the HBC's tenure in the eastern Arctic, it had a competitor at several posts but was the lone operator at many more. For this reason, the company aided many Inuit affected by low fur yields out of its own coffers. At the other posts, the state footed the bill, bestowing on the company the lucrative role of distributing the aid with the promise of reimbursement.¹⁵

Employee testimonies verify this relief arrangement: Lorenz Learmonth, who worked at Port Harrison from 1919 to 1922 and at Lake Harbour until 1925, times when neither post appears to have had competition, explained that the HBC had a reserve set aside from the fur tariff for rainy days at each post and "looked after all relief." He explicitly clarified that this relief had "nothing to do with the government or with a trapper's debt" but rather was private charity.¹⁶ Bert Swaffield, another long-term HBC man, said that although he was never at a post where a lot of relief was issued, those few families who always needed help were given relief "under the Bay account," meaning at the company's expense.¹⁷ Swaffield confirmed that there was no competition when he was at Cape Smith (1930–34) and at Wolstenholme (1935–40).¹⁸ Of his later postings at Pond Inlet (1940–49), Sugluk (before 1940 known as Sugluk West; 1949–50), and Southampton Island (1950–56), only Sugluk appears to have had competition during his tenure. He added that at Frobisher Bay the company had very short-lived competition from the Sabellum Trading Company, though he did not specify when.¹⁹ A random sampling of post journals suggests that the company also issued weekly sick and destitute rations on its own dime at some posts. The post journals for 1928–29 at Cape Dorset, 1938–39 at Lake Harbour, and 1939–40 at Stupart's

¹⁴ Toby Morantz, *Relations on Southeastern Hudson Bay: An Illustrated History of Inuit, Cree and Eurocanadian Interaction, 1740–1970* (Westmount: Avataq Cultural Institute, 2010), 63.

¹⁵ Shewell, "Enough to Keep Them Alive," 88.

¹⁶ L. A. Learmonth, interview by J. W. Anderson, June 15, 1958, tape 2 of 5, T6-4, HBCA-JWA.

¹⁷ A. T. Swaffield, interview by Wendy Owen, July 30, 1981, tape 2 of 3, T11-22, HBCA-OHI.

¹⁸ Swaffield interview, July 30, 1981.

¹⁹ A. T. Swaffield, interview by Wendy Owen, August 26, 1981, tape 3 of 3, T11-14, HBCA-OHI.

Bay document the weekly issue of rations even though the company had no competitors in those places at those times.²⁰

Wally Buhr's experience furnishes some details about relief policy in the eastern Arctic that seem to set it apart from that in the prairies and perhaps also that in the western Arctic. Buhr worked at Cape Dorset (1940–41) and at Sugluk (1946–49), at both of which there was competition until 1949. In this scenario, the state generally covered all sick and destitute rations, but Buhr reported that the company spent its own money on able-bodied destitute relief, while the state was responsible for other cases, primarily the sick.²¹ So in some places, at least, even if there was competition near a post, the HBC might still cover the “destitute” portion of sick and destitute relief. This may have been because destitution in the eastern Arctic was often tied to fox cycles and thus was very short term.

Even when the company was not paying for relief, it was important to issue relief only in the right circumstances. Failure to judge carefully—allowing a camp to starve, say, or allowing them to abuse the aid—would ruin the trade. Accordingly, the traders issued relief at their discretion, guided by company policy. The HBC's guidance in the twentieth century showed a keen awareness of the circumstances of wild fur production and its typical sources of hardship: low fur harvests during the low points of the fox cycle; shortages of seals and other food sources; and the failure of the late-summer walrus hunt for dog food were all acknowledged as valid reasons to request aid, and such aid was not to be counted as part of a trapper's debt.²²

For example, at Sugluk West on March 31, 1937, the post manager wrote: “Another very poor month indeed, although furs appear to be coming around the natives are unable to trap them, some of the Sugluk natives are becoming desperate and again a little relief has been necessary.”²³ At Frobisher Bay in 1939, a poor year for meat there, the post manager reported

²⁰ Cape Dorset post journal, 1928–29, microfilm no. 1MA10, B.397/a/3, HBCA-CDPJ; Lake Harbour post journal, 1938–39, microfilm no. 1MA35, B.430/a/12, HBCA-LHPJ; and Stupart's Bay post journal, 1939–40, microfilm no. 1MA67, B.484/a/14, HBCA-SBPJ.

²¹ W. A. Buhr, interview by Wendy Owen, July 21, 1981, tape 2 of 4, T11-11, HBCA-OHI.

²² Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 70.

²³ Sugluk West post journal, 1932–33, 1937, entry for March 31, 1937, microfilm no. 4M147, E.365, HBCA-SWPJ.

in February, "Some natives came in hungry and had to give them some relief." A month later, he noted, "Equuyapik came in and had to get a little destitute ration, as they are very hard up and he has only one dog." Earlier the post manager had also visited all the camps, distributing the last of the post's walrus meat to the most destitute.²⁴ The post manager's multiple reports suggest that conditions were hard that season and not merely the result of one person's negligence or unwillingness to support himself. Had the trader denied Equuyapik rations, he might have eaten his dog, one of the food sources of last resort. And with his only dog gone, Equuyapik's mobility—and thus his ability to hunt, trap, and trade—would have been severely curtailed. He might have died, his production a loss not only to his family and his community, but also to his fur trade partners. By contrast, Swaffield recalled that at Southampton Island, where he worked from 1950 to 1956, rations were rarely given, because the people were prosperous.²⁵

Clearly, depending on the conditions on the land but also on an individual's particular situation, inability to procure meat and fur could be valid causes of destitution. In addition to fox cycles, weather conditions—which affected both hunters' mobility and game stocks—could absolutely reduce people to starvation, never an uncommon fate for Inuit. Company men were well aware of the impact of weather and could often identify rough conditions.²⁶

The problem with the public-private reimbursement scheme was that it was based on cronyism. Initially, the HBC was the only fur trade operation that was reimbursed for issuing relief. Politically connected from its conception, the HBC had partnered with government in similar ventures before: since 1871 it and the American I. G. Baker Company had been awarded government contracts to supply the treated Indians of the Canadian Prairies with their promised clothing allowances and agricultural tools and supplies. Since the 1870s the two companies had also supplied the North-West Mounted Police and issued most of the native relief. The HBC issued relief

²⁴ Frobisher Bay post journal, 1938–39, entries for February 19, 1939, February 26, 1939, and March 3, 1939, microfilm no. 1MA24, B.411/a/6, HBCA-FBPJ.

²⁵ Swaffield interview, August 26, 1981.

²⁶ Post journal entries always begin with a description of weather conditions.

in Manitoba and the Saskatchewan River valley, while I. G. Baker covered southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan. Ray notes that the two companies together received between \$500,000 and \$1 million in government contracts per year by the early 1880s and adds that the income helped the HBC weather a depression in both fur and land sales in the 1870s and 1880s.²⁷ The government's early preauthorization of relief distribution by the HBC further strengthened the unnaturally prominent corporation.

In the Arctic, the government boosted the HBC above smaller, newer companies.²⁸ For example, in 1940, when the Baffin Trading Company requested compensation for relief expenses at Port Harrison, it was told that only the HBC was authorized to distribute relief there. The HBC post manager at Port Harrison had threatened to withhold assistance from anyone who traded with the BTC, and it seems that the latter had aided people to reassure them and gain their business.²⁹ Unfortunately for the BTC, in establishing a relief system, the state had created an advantage that favored firms could wield against other traders and trappers in the market. Even after 1900, when other companies had a seat at the banquet of taxpayer money, the government's subsidization of relief was still a benefit to the HBC: it retained a steady (if no longer exclusive) income stream from the government. The relief that in former years would have been part of the HBC's normal operating expenses was now covered by the state wherever the HBC had competition—the very places where, without this subsidy, the company might have issued private aid more readily in order to retain Inuit trappers. Now the company didn't have to spend its own money. All the HBC had to do to receive reimbursement from the state was send in reports showing and explaining the charges (at first twice a year and later monthly).³⁰

The result was that the HBC was tempted to unload onto the government what it had for centuries willingly borne as its private responsibility to its trading partners. So, naturally, the reimbursement scheme gave rise

²⁷ Ray, *Canadian Fur Trade*, 39, 42, and table 3 (for the details of the treaty allowances).

²⁸ Morantz, *White Man's Gonna Getcha*, 146; and Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 139.

²⁹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 68.

³⁰ Morantz, *White Man's Gonna Getcha*, 146.

to fraud. At the end of the year, many post managers charged some of the natives' debts to the government relief fund (also called the government account) instead of to the trappers' individual accounts.³¹ With the government defraying the company's credit outlays, the HBC essentially got to advance the natives less, which further lowered its operating costs and increased its earnings.

The financial incentive the government offered the HBC and other companies also had a downside for Inuit, though it might not seem that way at first glance. When one does anything on someone else's dime, one is accountable to that individual or institution, since it holds the purse strings. Because the federal government was covering some of the costs of relief, it now had a say in how much was spent. Mentally and physically distant from Inuit who received state relief, Southern bureaucrats prioritized keeping costs down. As Hugh Shewell explains, in Ottawa denying or reducing relief was equated with success. Accordingly, through the 1930s there were many calls to drop people from the rolls to get costs—which were rising exponentially—under control.³² In the Maritime provinces, native relief was canceled each year from 1919 to 1931 due to the impression of overreliance on it.³³ From the state's point of view, if costs were down from the previous year, everything was great, no matter how dire the situation on the ground.

And the state's involvement in relief meant that private companies were pressured to adopt the state's inflexible blanket rules. One year, for example, Wally Buhr sent in a \$750 welfare bill for Sugluk, where he was post manager from 1946 to 1949, and kept getting letters from Ottawa disputing the "excessive welfare bill."³⁴

Ironically enough, it was fur traders' interest in business success that had given rise to the private system of aid that predated government relief in the Arctic. When state officials intervened in this system, their ignorance and power made hard times worse. Marxist scholars Peter Kulchyski and Frank James Tester generally blame Inuit suffering in the twentieth century

³¹ Morantz, *White Man's Gonna Getcha*, 147.

³² Shewell, "Enough to Keep Them Alive," 118.

³³ Shewell, "Enough to Keep Them Alive," 105, 107–8.

³⁴ Buhr interview, July 21, 1981.

on the fur trade and the state. They claim that the state defended the fur trade to the detriment of natives and then failed to provide aid to the people who had become its responsibility, because hostile antirelief values (frugality and self-sufficiency) underlay its policies. The state's restricted welfare policy clearly created bad incentives in the fur trade *and* led to Inuit hardship, yet Kulchyski and Tester contend that a more generous welfare state would have spared Inuit from suffering, and they promote a paternalistic state that is openhanded with funds and respectful of Inuit cultural and political autonomy.³⁵

But corruption and massive oversights are inherent to a machinery that does not depend on freely given funds but rather can continue to mismanage funds and to fail its constituents with impunity, forcibly drawing money from the public to continue to operate. The welfare state did nothing but grow during the Arctic fur trade, as rising relief bills show,³⁶ yet Inuit often did not receive the help they needed, because state officials were concerned about budgets and dependence, and because state welfare discouraged private aid. The result was that Inuit were moved around the Arctic to cut welfare costs and that they suffered and even perished while attempting to make a living in terra incognita (as detailed in chapter 7). These crimes were followed by even more invasive measures that would transform Inuit society from within.

The Postwar Family Allowance Program

In 1944, the Canadian Parliament passed the Family Allowance Act. Implemented in 1945, the Family Allowance (FA) differed from ordinary relief in that its purpose was to support all Canadians in giving their children (up to sixteen years old) a good quality of life rather than to take the edge off destitution.³⁷ It was not income based but was a universal benefit. Like all government income (and indeed, like all income not earned by one's own efforts), the FA did not truly come free. There were strings attached,

³⁵ Tester and Kulchyski, introduction to *Tammarniit* (and critical comments throughout the book); Kulchyski and Tester, introduction and conclusion to *Kiumajut (Talking Back): Game Management and Inuit Rights, 1900–70* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

³⁶ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 56.

³⁷ Shewell, "Enough to Keep Them Alive," 232–33.

and those strings pulled Inuit children out of their parents' hands, half out of Inuit societies, and into the hands of Canadian bureaucrats whose goal was to Canadianize them. Parents followed their children and their new income off the land and into permanent settlements, where they faced urban challenges such as overcrowding, poor sanitation, and disease (especially tuberculosis, an old menace). As Inuit societies underwent this shift, the fur trade, and the HBC in particular, began its own transformation, which would culminate in a new industry in the North: government-subsidized retailing (discussed in chapter 9).

The HBC and other fur-trading companies had been middlemen in native relief for decades, but the FA greatly intensified this role. Most Canadians received their FA in cash (as a check or a dollar voucher), but most indigenous people received it in kind. This practice was an extension of the indigenous relief policy that had been in place for decades and whose goal was to keep natives on the land. Although the government tried not to give out relief, natives received it in kind when it was given out. Inuit received familiar dry goods, as well as ammunition and other hunting equipment to support their subsistence efforts. According to Shewell, the policy of issuing native relief in kind was reaffirmed in 1952 in *Welfare and Relief Assistance for Indians*, a manual by H. M. Jones of the Indian Affairs Department. The manual contained a schedule of rations to be issued to Indians on relief: flour, rolled oats, baking powder, sugar, tea, lard, beans, rice or potatoes, cheese, meat or fish, salt, matches, and evaporated or powdered milk, although only this last item, intended for children, was a real change from the 1940 ration scale.³⁸ In addition to the goods on Jones's ration scale, the list of FA items included sea biscuits, corn syrup, jam, fresh or powdered eggs, peanut butter, green or dehydrated vegetables, and cocoa. In practice, of course, the items available varied from place to place, and many items were never available.³⁹

Inuit were in a special category as far as the FA was concerned. Even though they were Indians for the purposes of receiving the benefits, as

³⁸ Shewell, "Enough to Keep Them Alive," 239–40. Shewell's rations data is for Indians, but as he shows, the policies were established with both Indians and Inuit in mind and under the collaboration of the supposed representatives of both groups.

³⁹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 74.

established by the 1939 *Re: Eskimos* decision, their special circumstances—that they were still isolated and living off the land—meant that the items Inuit were allowed under the FA differed from what Indians received. For Inuit, the FA was specifically supposed to help parents provide country food for their children.⁴⁰ For this reason, Inuit families were initially not given items like dried fruit and eggs.⁴¹ Ironically, however, Inuit, like Indians, still needed permission from their relief agent to use the FA to obtain hunting equipment, which was on a special list but which could be far more useful than food rations to families on the land.⁴² In 1948, the Inuit food list was finally changed to match the Indian list, and Inuit were also allowed to use their FA credits to purchase items from the special list, such as rifles, stoves, and ammunition, though they continued to encounter pushback when they tried to use the allowance to cover the cost of paterhead boats and replacement engines.⁴³

Canadian bureaucrats had never trusted indigenous people to manage their own money, but in the postwar period, they also became concerned with native nutrition and began to push certain foods on natives. Even though the FA was supposed to support Inuit families in maintaining a traditional diet, in 1947, the Department of Health and Welfare began an aggressive campaign to encourage parents to feed their children milk and Pablum cereal, even creating promotional materials in Inuktitut syllabics. The campaign was begun because medical reports had shown that children living off the land were malnourished.⁴⁴

When the program began in 1945, native FA recipients were also given a wide variety of nonfood items to support their children, including shirts, caps, mitts, towels, footwear, fabric, thread, soap, sunglasses, baby bottles, baby powder, and baby oil.⁴⁵ But in 1956 the Interdepartmental Committee on Relief and Tuberculosis Rehabilitation Rations, which included representatives from the Department of Indian Affairs, the Department of

⁴⁰ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 74.

⁴¹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 87.

⁴² Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 74; and Shewell, “Enough to Keep Them Alive,” 239.

⁴³ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 88, 81–82, 86.

⁴⁴ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 74–75, 82, 85.

⁴⁵ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 74.

Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNA), and the Department of National Health and Welfare, decided to limit the FA payments to food rations wherever Indians and Inuit received the benefit in kind. Canadian bureaucrats had decided that Indians and Inuit needed food more than they needed the variety of other items the FA was supposed to provide for children's welfare. Because the state controls how the money stolen from taxpayers is used, it could make this decision for Indians and Inuit.⁴⁶

With the advent of the FA, the HBC started stocking a variety of goods it had not carried before. These goods had nothing to do with Inuit's tastes and everything to do with bureaucrats' lists. As discussed above, the HBC and other fur-trading entities administered sick and destitute rations first and submitted invoices to the government for reimbursement later. For Inuit this relief consisted of goods they ate, used, and were familiar with, but some of the items on the FA list for Inuit families, such as milk and Pabulum, were unfamiliar to them. In stocking the untested items that the state had mandated Inuit be given in lieu of the cash FA that nonnative families received, the HBC risked losing money by having products remain on its shelves. Inuit receiving the FA could refuse some of the goods, and those not receiving the benefit could of course eschew them as well, but the company still had to stock them. In 1945, before Inuit were even receiving the FA, HBC Fur Trade Department manager Robert Chesshire, making the arrangements to begin carrying the numerous FA items, wrote to Roy A. Gibson (1885–1953), Northwest Territories deputy commissioner (1921–50), expressing concern that Inuit would not buy the new items. Naturally, he was also worried that giving the FA out during peak fox years would discourage trapping.⁴⁷

Although Inuit did take to milk and many other new goods,⁴⁸ Chesshire's concerns about Inuit trapping were reasonable. What he didn't see was that the FA would also create bad incentives for the company, rooting it

⁴⁶ Shewell, "Enough to Keep Them Alive," 233, 239–41, 246–47.

⁴⁷ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 77.

⁴⁸ Martha Tikivik (b. 1956) said that she found the powdered milk "tasty to eat . . . dry" as a girl. Tikivik, in George Pitseolak et al., *Niurrutiqarniq: Trading with the Hudson's Bay Company*, ed. Shannon Partridge, interviews supervised by François Trudel (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2009), 65.

more deeply in the state-industrial complex and pushing it out of the fur trade. Enabled by the state's paternalistic agenda for indigenous peoples, the company mismanaged the distribution of the FA in the first years of the program, continuing to shift onto the state its long-standing responsibility to support Inuit communities in hard times—a typical symptom of the bad incentives that plague public-private ventures.

In 1947, very early in the life of the FA scheme, S. J. Bailey of the Department of National Health and Welfare discovered that in the Mackenzie River area, the HBC was issuing FA supplies to grubstake trappers and as relief—both blatantly fraudulent actions—and tampering with its books to conceal this.⁴⁹ Other actions fell in a gray area. In Tuktoyaktuk, which is east of the Mackenzie Delta, on the Beaufort Sea (present-day Northwest Territories, post established 1933), Bailey found that the HBC traders were allowing FA credits to build up and disbursing them as a lump credit rather than monthly, as they were supposed to. The traders claimed that they had to hold the credits because Inuit would not save them on their own.⁵⁰ Anthropologist Toby Morantz, discussing the similar withholding of transfer payments to Crees in Quebec, makes the excellent point that the practice of issuing the accumulated payments all at once sometimes forced natives to make suboptimal purchases of less valuable goods due to limited stock at the end of the season, which could also facilitate the company's liquidation of less desirable goods.⁵¹ In an interview decades later, HBC man Bert Swaffield noted that the FA credits that were withheld for years helped the HBC out profit-wise.⁵²

But FA credits did not accumulate simply due to ill intent or paternalism. In general, it was hard to promptly pay a monthly benefit out to off-grid people who only came in from camp every few months or who came in at irregular intervals. Furthermore, part of the reason for delayed payments between 1945 and 1947 was that it took several years to register all Inuit children for the program, since they were scattered in remote camps. Few

⁴⁹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 87.

⁵⁰ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 88; and Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 36.

⁵¹ Morantz, *White Man's Gonna Getcha*, 209.

⁵² Swaffield interview, August 26, 1981.

payments were made during this period, but those who were registered late were owed back payments (limited to one year after 1949), resulting in significant accumulated credits, perhaps more wealth than Inuit had ever had at their disposal, which came with its own potential pitfalls.⁵³ Elder Jacopie Adamie (b. 1938?) recalled that he received his accumulated FA credits when he turned sixteen.⁵⁴ Elder George Pitseolak (1928–2005), who worked for the HBC for eleven years, said, “When first people started purchasing things with Family Allowance and began realizing how much money they had collected, it was very tiring for me. People were buying so much fabric, that I got tired of measuring it. They were able to buy large cans of milk by the caseload. Those who had many children would buy fifty pounds of dried milk.”⁵⁵

Wally Buhr provided another HBC insider’s perspective on the withheld FA credits. In an interview decades after the fact, Buhr explained that “at first the idea was that [the FA] would not be paid out monthly but saved for the children so that they could buy a boat or a sewing machine when they came of age,” but that it was finally decided by the government that the allowances had to be paid immediately. The company was instructed to issue the accumulated funds in kind, according to Buhr, and this process was strict: RCMP officers would draw up lists of what the natives wanted along with prices, and the natives would bring it to the store of their choice.⁵⁶

Buhr’s comments suggest that the company was following the state’s directions in withholding Inuit’s FA credits. Tester and Kulchyski’s archival research reveals that the company’s actions were in fact sanctioned by Gibson, who was also director of the Lands, Parks, and Forest branch of the Department of Mines and Resources (1936–50), which received Indians’ and Inuit’s benefits in trust. In 1945, Robert Chesshire, concerned about the FA’s effect on the fur trade, wrote to Gibson asking if the HBC would be expected to issue FA benefits even in good fox years, as the letter of the

⁵³ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 76, 72.

⁵⁴ Jacopie Adamie, in Pitseolak et al., *Niurrutiqarniq*, 65.

⁵⁵ George Pitseolak, in Pitseolak et al., *Niurrutiqarniq*, 141.

⁵⁶ Buhr interview, July 21, 1981.

law suggested. Gibson's answer was no.⁵⁷ James Cantley of the BTC asked Gibson a related question: whether Inuit could draw their 1945–46 back payments in addition to their 1946–47 allowances. This time Gibson gave a more thorough answer, explaining that it would be wasteful to let Inuit claim FA credits in good fox years.⁵⁸ The state was essentially means testing what was legally a universal benefit, going against its own aim of fighting malnutrition and raising living standards through the FA. And to add insult to injury, the HBC and other traders were profiting from the practice.

Although Gibson's correspondence with Chesshire and Cantley suggests that the government was interested in propping up the fur trade to the detriment of native children, the reality was a bit more complex. In 1946 Dr. Percy Moore of the Department of Health and Welfare had testified before the Special Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Indian Act that natives were malnourished. He thought the FA should always be available and that it should be issued in the form of approved foods that would fight malnutrition.⁵⁹ Gibson thought that HBC pressure was behind Moore's agitation to make the FA regularly available at trading posts. To Gibson, it was clear that Chesshire had been pushing the idea that "as fine fur is becoming less abundant in many places and prices are being sharply reduced all down the line, . . . the government [should be] a little more generous with the Family Allowance expenditure on behalf of the natives," as he wrote to J. G. Wright, acting superintendent for the eastern Arctic, in 1947.⁶⁰

Gibson's words shed light on the nature of the abuses of the FA scheme. On the one hand, fur traders and Canadian bureaucrats colluded in means testing the FA and treating it like relief, even though it was supposed to be a universal benefit. As earlier in the twentieth century, the state did not want to be too generous with relief. It did not want natives hanging around trading posts, government warehouses, and military zones collecting free goods. The racketeering state was frugal with its unwitting subjects, preferring to

⁵⁷ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 77–79.

⁵⁸ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 80–81.

⁵⁹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 82; and Shewell, "Enough to Keep Them Alive," 153–56.

⁶⁰ R. Gibson, Northwest Territories deputy commissioner, to Mr. J. G. Wright, acting superintendent of the eastern Arctic, memo, March 24, 1947, RG 85, vol. 1125, file 163–1, pt. 1A, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, quoted in Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 82–83.

share the spoils among its own mobsters and to squander the rest of the stolen money on massive wars and on projects carried out by favored business interests. The HBC was one of these favored interests, boasting a long lineage of political privileges, including owning and having the exclusive right to trade in many native peoples' homelands; receiving contracts to supply treaty Indians and governments with goods; and, of course, becoming one of the most significant conduits for native relief and FA payments.

The HBC was also favored in that it was allowed to run its fur-trading operation with minimal interference, a special courtesy the state did not grant all businesses. Government-sponsored sick and destitute rations were not fatal to the HBC and the fox trade, because the relief closely resembled the aid that traders had always furnished natives prior to the advent of state intervention. State-sponsored sick and destitute rations also were often issued at traders' discretion, so the threat of people's failing to trap was not as great as it otherwise might have been. If anything, state relief propped up the retail side of the HBC's business at the public's expense. FAs were a different matter. As noted, FA goods were more substantial and varied, and all Inuit families were entitled to receive them regularly. The FA was not supposed to be a gift of clemency but a universal right, and this was a huge threat to the fur trade.

Of course the FA wouldn't provide Inuit everything they traded furs to get, and Inuit shared the socioeconomic ambitions of other humans, as they still do. But after the 1948 adjustments, the FA could buy the most valuable goods in traditional Inuit life: a rifle, a boat, a stove, and ammunition, which were no longer relegated to a special list. It bought yards of cloth and dry goods that could not be produced in Nunangat, the Inuit homeland. The FA wealth was certainly finite, expiring after a couple's youngest child turned sixteen, but the most valued goods in Inuit life could potentially last a very long time, especially since Inuit on the land lived a rather minimalist lifestyle. They didn't have five rifles or two boats—not even multiple caribou-skin outfits, which were made each year, the previous set typically needing to be replaced after being worn continually during a long winter of traveling, hunting, fishing, trapping, playing, cooking, mending, butchering, and scraping and stretching furs.

What is more, the Inuit culture of sharing and mutual support meant that they had a way of extending FA wealth to those who did not have children. Inuit families were fluid, and it was not uncommon for couples to give one of their children to relatives or community members who needed or wanted a child. A child could sustain childless people at the end of their lives; adoption could also help ease the burden of a family that was becoming too large. Elder Apphia Agalakti Awa (1931–96) was adopted by her childless great-aunt and uncle, Arvaarluk and Ilupaalik, only a month after she was born:⁶¹ “My father, Kublu, didn’t want to keep me because I was a girl and he had another three daughters from his first wife. He had never had a son, and when he married my mother and I turned out to be a girl, he was disappointed. . . . So they gave me up when we came off the ice, when we got to the seashore to start caribou-hunting.”⁶²

Tester and Kulchyski explain that the FAs made children an immediate source of income, so Inuit parents intentionally began to share their children with “childless and older couples who otherwise had no or very restricted means of support.”⁶³ But because it held the purse strings, the government tried to interfere with these private adoptions. After the 1950s, for the children’s “welfare,” adoptions not only had to be registered with the state’s district registrars, but these strangers would now determine if a placement was “suitable”—by which they meant that the adoption’s purpose wasn’t to gain access to government benefits. State registrars were on the lookout for elderly widows, single women, and inefficient trappers or poor hunters trying to adopt children, which would enable them to claim FA payments.⁶⁴

Regardless of the state’s attempts to regulate adoption in Inuit communities, the FA remained a major source of steady income for Inuit and a great threat to the fur trade. By 1953, over 50 percent of Baffin Island

⁶¹ Nancy Wachowich, *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women*, collab. Apphia Agalakti Awa, Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak, and Sandra Pikujak Katsak (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), 16, 18, 22.

⁶² Apphia Agalakti Awa, in Wachowich, *Saqiyuq*, 21.

⁶³ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 72.

⁶⁴ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 72–73.

Inuit income (and 25 percent of western Arctic Inuit income) came from the government.⁶⁵

On the one hand, allowing the FA credits to be used as relief was the state's way of helping the favored HBC and other trading companies while continuing to push forward with its agenda for Inuit. On the other hand, the state allies with various interest groups only for as long as these have leverage or usefulness of some kind. The state has a self-granted monopoly on violence and other extralegal acts. Its legislatures, courts, and spokesmen underwrite its every move. As the Canadian state began to concern itself with the Arctic, the power, liberty, and autonomy of whalers, scientists, explorers, fur traders, and Inuit alike began to diminish. First, the HBC was pressured to part with Rupert's Land. (Of course the company had no right to this land, much of it already owned and the rest not properly homesteaded by the HBC, but it certainly had more right to Rupert's Land than the British and Canadian states did.) Then, it was forced to close posts when the government declared vast areas around them preserves. And once the state deemed itself responsible for Inuit, it began to usurp a kind of social power from the HBC.

Seeing the government's intervention as a source of income, the HBC welcomed it. And the government's intervention was lucrative for the HBC. As Tester and Kulchyski argue, "With family allowances, the Hudson's Bay Company had found a new source of revenue."⁶⁶ By issuing as little relief and FA as possible, the HBC could pad its sometimes precarious fur profits. But this motivation was shortsighted. As Gibson's suspicion of the HBC's motives and the opening of government warehouses filled with relief supplies show, the state would defer to fur traders less and less as it became more entrenched in the North. It would ignore the company's knowledge of local conditions and customs, question the company's sick and destitute relief issues, and take over the administration of relief and FA.

HBC man Peter Nichols recalled that he and Robert Chesshire made many trips to Ottawa, where bureaucrats asked for their opinion about

⁶⁵ Morantz, *Relations on Ungava Bay*, 150; see also Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 91.

⁶⁶ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 86.

various matters related to the development of the North, but he said that “little notice was taken by the government.” Nichols realized that people “who had served the Arctic in the past had no future in the Arctic as it was developing.” The leaders of the DNA were interested only in university-educated men with degrees in sociology or anthropology but no experience with Inuit; they wanted HBC post managers to confine themselves to the operation of their stores, thinking their usefulness a thing of the past. Nichols explained that all these men had preconceived ideas of what was good for the people and thought that these should be enforced by the DNA if necessary. He thought that Inuit suffered unnecessarily as a result of the policies enacted and recommended by Gordon Robertson (1918–2013), deputy minister of the DNA and Northwest Territories commissioner (1953–63); R. A. J. Phillips (b. 1922), chief of the Arctic Division and director of Northern administration of the DNA (1958–65); and the high-minded young men they sent north.⁶⁷ The HBC’s welfare gravy train was coming to the end of the tracks.

The Family Allowance Act created bad incentives for Inuit as well. Certainly, government income began to make up an ever-larger proportion of their income, and but their fur production does not seem to have slowed much in the first couple of years after the FA came into effect. Tester and Kulchyski’s figures show that 50,970 arctic fox pelts were taken in the Northwest Territories in 1941–42 and 39,739 in 1950–51. That may seem like an overall drop, but 57,750 foxes were taken in 1946–47 and only 9,989 in 1949–50. So, clearly, people were still trapping, and there continued to be variation in harvests due to fox cycles.⁶⁸ But this did not mean that government intervention was not having an impact on Inuit and on the fur trade. The FA made it possible for Inuit families to trap less and yet maintain their standard of living. But as Inuit became more dependent on government money, they made decisions that harmed themselves (at least in the short

⁶⁷ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 6, 1983, tape 7 of 8, T11-60, HBCA-OHI.

⁶⁸ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 62, table 3.

term) in order to keep receiving it; namely, sending their children to state schools and following them into settlements and off the land.

Government-Incentivized Schooling and Settlement

The 1944 Family Allowance Act required families receiving the benefit to send children over six to school or to provide “equivalent training.” Although the addition of section 37 to the law in 1945 permitted this equivalent training to consist of training in traditional Inuit skills, such as trapping, hunting, and sewing, it turned out that the alternative was only an option in cases where there was no way for the child to attend public school.⁶⁹ Apphia Agalakti Awa and her husband, Awa Mathias Awa (b. 1921), sent many of their children to school, but her husband refused to give up their son Solomon. Apphia recalled his words: “He is mine! He is my son! Since you have taken all my other sons away, I am going to keep this son! He is going to help me. He is going to learn how to hunt!” The FA for Solomon was cut off.⁷⁰ Apphia and Awa’s other children struggled under the state’s care. In the schools, which were in the new coastal settlements and sometimes far from parents’ camps, parents could not protect their children. They were subjected to a severe and sometimes abusive assimilation regimen. Apphia’s son Arvaluk reported that a teacher once slapped his hand for speaking Inuktitut.⁷¹ Apphia’s daughter Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak (b. 1957) said of her experience:

When I went to school, when I came off the land, everything changed for me all at once. My parents didn’t have a say anymore in the way I lived my life. When I came off the land, the people with any type of authority were Qallunaat. The teachers were Qallunaat, the principals were Qallunaat, the RCMP were Qallunaat, the administrators were Qallunaat, the nurses were Qallunaat, it was them who told us what to do. . . .

⁶⁹ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 73.

⁷⁰ Wachowich, *Saqiyuq*, 107–8, quote on 108.

⁷¹ Wachowich, *Saqiyuq*, 105–6.

... Once we went to school, we had to comb our hair, brush our teeth, wash our hands, wash our faces, have breakfast, make our beds. We weren't allowed to leave the hostel in the morning until our beds were made. At the camps we used to be able to run outside when we woke in the morning, then come back a while later for some tea and bannock. It wasn't like that for us at school—we had to follow a certain routine and watch the clock. When we were in school, going to school, we had this group of people looking after us, and they weren't our parents. They acted like our parents, but they weren't our parents. It seemed to us at the time that the administrators, the nurses, the teachers, the principals, and whoever else was in authority were talking above our heads, talking about our welfare and not letting us have a say about it. They treated us like we belonged to them, not to our parents.

... As soon as I stepped into the school system, these rules were all forced upon me, and it was a very difficult period. They taught us a new culture, a different culture from our own. They taught us that we had to live like the white people, we had to become like the white people.

... The teachers were brand new in town, they were all from the South, and they didn't know any Inuktitut. ... We weren't allowed to go to school in our caribou clothing, even if it was freezing outside.⁷²

Rhoda was careful to note that her experience was not really remarkable, that Apphia, Rhoda, and her daughter Sandra Pikujak Katsak (b. 1973) all have the same stories as other Inuit who experienced the transition: "These stories ... are the same stories a whole bunch of people my age have."⁷³

Initially, the kids would come home regularly, but Apphia reported that eventually she and Awa were informed that the children "had to stay in the community all year long. We left them there, but we missed them very, very much when they were gone. We missed them so much! They were away from us all winter, and in the springtime we would go and pick them up."⁷⁴ In the settlements, children with perfectly good families of their own

⁷² Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak, in Wachowich, *Saqiyuq*, 194–96.

⁷³ Katsak, in Wachowich, *Saqiyuq*, 194.

⁷⁴ Apphia Agalakti Awa, in Wachowich, *Saqiyuq*, 106.

lived the lives of orphans, put up with foster parents or in hostels, with no real place to call home.⁷⁵

Parents wanted to be near their children, and this bond was a magnetic force that pulled them into the settlements where the state had anchored their children as a condition of issuing the FA payments. But Inuit could not continue migrating to hunt, fish, and trap and still be near their children. They had to choose between their children and a traditional life on the land—between family and their land, their culture, their past, their identities. So people began moving out of their camps in the 1950s as the state built the settlements they were being herded toward (discussed in chapter 9). By 1965, most people had moved off the land.⁷⁶ Apphia and Awa were some of the last people to move into the settlements:

In 1966 or 1967 we moved in off the land for the first time. The first time we moved into Pond Inlet, my oldest daughter, Oopah, was there with her new husband and we wanted to be close to her. . . .

We moved back to our camp for a while, Naujaaruluk. There were barely any Inuit left there and there were no Qallunaat. . . . In 1972 we moved back to Pond Inlet and stayed. It was my mother's idea and also my mother-in-law's idea that we stay in Pond Inlet. My mother, Suula, was getting old, and she wanted us to be close to her. That was the first time we ever lived with Qallunaat around us. We have been here ever since.⁷⁷

But contrary to Tester and Kulchyski's exaggerated claims, Inuit were not coerced into settlement life. They did have the option of refusing the FA and remaining on the land. And in fact, both the state's efforts to concentrate Inuit in settlements and its relocation experiments, which dispersed Inuit, occurred in the 1950s, as anthropologist David Damas has shown.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Wachowich, *Saqiyuq*, 170–71.

⁷⁶ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 73.

⁷⁷ Awa, in Wachowich, *Saqiyuq*, 111–12.

⁷⁸ See Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), chaps. 2–3 and conclusion. Damas's study is a response to Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*.

Nevertheless, there was a wind tunnel pulling Inuit toward the settlements and toward extinction as a distinct culture and as a sovereign people. Even out on the land, the Canadian state had taken the Inuit homeland right from under their feet. It had declared itself proprietor of the Arctic, usurping Inuit communities' private property, and it had taken away the camps' legal power. Inuit on the land were reduced to sneaking around when traditional Inuit practices and legality clashed with Ottawa's political law and justice. They moved into the settlements after the old world had melted away around them.

CHAPTER 9

Ultima Thule: The Transformation of the Fur Trade and Inuit Societies

Despite the great changes occurring in the Arctic, trapping and trading at the old posts continued for decades after the 1950s, when many Inuit moved into permanent settlements. Although scholars including Frank James Tester, Peter Kulchyski, and Shelagh D. Grant argue that fox prices permanently collapsed in the postwar period and rendered the fur trade inviable, the reality is that fur prices continued to fluctuate as they had before; they did not simply fall and remain low.¹ True, prices did not return to the artificial peaks whipped up by the 1920s boom, but this does not mean that fur could no longer support an Inuit family living on the land.

The Welfare Economy Dwarfs the Fur Trade

In 1966, toward the end of the Inuit transition into settlement life, Department

¹ Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 71, 91, 98; and Shelagh D. Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936–1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 164. David Damas agrees with my assessment: “A slump in prices of fox fur at the end of the 1940s appeared at that time to be dictating an end to the trade in arctic fox. This did not actually occur, even though by the 1960s in most places trapping did not provide the most important source of income or trade wherewithal. Fluctuations in prices and supply of fur continued to influence the energy devoted to trapping.” Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 182.

of Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNA) information officer Helen Burgess (1920–94) conducted interviews around the eastern Arctic, and she found that some communities still relied on hunting and trapping. Sugluk DNA administrator G. N. Faulkner told her that Inuit in Sugluk derived most of their income from hunting and trapping, though he was hopeful about the asbestos mine (discussed in more detail below) that was scheduled to open in 1970 and would employ four hundred people. Faulkner also noted that nearby Ivujivik was still “a very successful hunting community.” A. C. Wynne, administrator and principal of the state school at Wakeham Bay, likewise reported that Wakeham Bay’s economy was almost entirely a hunting economy, this despite the fact that it had endured a “series of very poor fox years with gradually dropping catches.” Although fox had become “almost an insignificant article,” people continued to trap, making their living on sealskins instead. But even in this case fox trapping was not a thing of the past: Wynne noted that lemmings were abundant, which boded well for the fox catch. Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) Arctic Bay store manager Jim Stevenson echoed Wynne’s prognostic. Both expected an uptick in the fox trade with the turn of the fox cycle. Moreover, the trade was far from over even in places where it was not a full-time pursuit. As anthropologist David Damas notes, “Even in the sixties the trade continued to play a varied, reduced, but not insignificant role in local economies.”²

The record of fur prices also bears out the trend of fluctuation rather than decline in the fur trade. HBC man Peter Nichols says that during his years as manager of the Arctic Division (1953–71), fur prices seldom dropped below \$20 and sometimes were as high as \$30 or \$35 per pelt. He also mentions that during his first ten years of service, 1933–43, \$10 was the average price, though there were periods where prices were as low as \$2.50 and \$5.00 and as high as \$20.00 (the average at Port Harrison from 1943 to 1946).³ Duncan Pryde, who traded for the company from 1958 to 1966, wrote that during his tenure white foxes sold for roughly \$20, and as much

² G. N. Faulkner, A. C. Wynne, and Jim Stevenson, interviews by Helen Burgess, summer 1966, T39-11, T39-16, and T39-15, HBCA-HB; and Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*, 182.

³ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 6, 1983, tapes 6 and 7 of 8, T11-59 and T11-60, HBCA-OHI.

as \$30 if they were top quality.⁴ According to Wally Buhr, who worked for the HBC until 1949, the company rehired people returning from the front after World War II because business was increasing. Buhr also witnessed fox prices jump from \$5 to \$7–\$8 at Lake Harbour between 1939 and 1940, and from \$10 to \$25 at Cape Dorset between 1940 and 1941.⁵ And Frank Melton, who started with the company before the 1920s boom, reported that foxes went for \$4 in Cape Dorset in 1917 and later got up to \$8.⁶ Clearly, very low prices were a short-term phenomenon. Another force was at work in the transformation of the fur trade.

Although HBC man Bert Swaffield affirmed that fur was less important by the time he left the North (because the company was doing a lot of “Family Allowance business,” in his words), he recalled paying the healthy price of \$25 for polar bears at Southampton Island, where he was posted from 1950 to 1956, and said that Japanese buyers were paying thousands of dollars per skin in the 1980s. Nor was that a new trend. In 1966, Gilbert Turcotte, cook at the Department of Transportation communications center on Nottingham Island (present-day central Nunavut, near the mouth of Hudson Bay), noted that a polar bear skin was then worth as much as \$1,200 on the consumer market and that the HBC was paying \$200 per skin. However, as their prices show, polar bear skins were rare and never a trapper’s main source of income; it was “not everybody” who had a bearskin, as Turcotte put it. Indeed, Sugluk HBC store manager Victor Ingram reported that the 325 people trading at the store in 1966 sold foxes, sealskins, and “an occasional polar bear.”⁷

Like bearskins, sealskins, a natural product of Inuit hunting and fairly abundant whenever the hunt wasn’t terrible, supplemented trappers’ income. Sealskins’ importance to the local economy tended to increase whenever foxes were down, but in the early 1960s their prices suddenly spiked from

⁴ Duncan Pryde, *Nunaga: Ten Years of Eskimo Life* (New York: Walker, 1971), 159, 163.

⁵ W. A. Buhr, interviews by Wendy Owen, August 31, 1981, and July 13, 1981, tapes 4 and 1 of 4, T11-19 and T11-8, HBCA-OHI.

⁶ Frank Melton, interview by J. W. Anderson, September 5, 1958, tape 1 of 2, T6-15, HBCA-JWA.

⁷ A. T. Swaffield, interview by Wendy Owen, August 26, 1981, tape 3 of 3, T11-22, HBCA-OHI; and Gilbert Turcotte and Victor Ingram, interviews by Helen Burgess, summer 1966, T39-9 and T39-19, HBCA-HB.

\$5 to a wild \$28 per skin for no discernible reason. At those prices, sealing could be a family's main source of trapping income. Pryde recalled that after the spike, everyone in Perry River (called Perry Island from 1961 to 1967; present-day central Nunavut, post open 1926–28, 1937–41, 1957–67) trapped seal all summer, weather permitting. Unfortunately for trappers, “the following year brought an uproar over the whitemen clubbing baby seals and skinning them alive off Newfoundland. . . . Exaggerated or not, the hubbub knocked the price of seal in the Arctic from twenty-eight dollars down to two dollars overnight. Naturally, the pragmatic Eskimos simply stopped hunting seals. The price was not worth the effort.” Damas identifies 1965 as the year of the price collapse. But seal prices fluctuated too. In 1966, Port Burwell acting administrator and projects officer Raymond Buffitt said that the state-backed Inuit co-op paid \$12 for square flipper sealskins and \$5–\$6 for jar sealskins. Because of the co-op's collectivist business model, trappers also received a “refund” of up to \$3 per skin depending on the final sale price. Nevertheless, the co-op's initial purchase price reflects a rebound in seal prices, and Damas, writing about the eastern Arctic as a whole, notes that prices “recovered somewhat in 1967–68.” In 1981, Swaffield stated that the HBC still did considerable business in furs and noted that sealskins had also gone up in price to \$10 each, a high price considering that \$1 had been a good price in 1938–39. Sadly, this late revival in seal prices was quashed when the European Union forced its subjects out of this voluntary trade with its 1983 and 1985 boycotts, according to Damas.⁸

Clearly, price fluctuations were not enough to kill the fur trade. Robert Chesshire, who served as manager of the HBC's Fur Trade Department (1942–45), general manager of the Fur Trade Department (1945–57), and general manager of the Bay Stores (1957–62), observed that in the 1950s, 120

⁸ “Hudson's Bay Company. Perry River,” record creator, AM-RC; Pryde, *Nunaga*, 143–46; Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*, 137, 139 (quote), 197; Raymond Buffitt, interview by Helen Burgess, summer 1966, T39-14, HBCA-HB; Swaffield interview, August 26, 1981; and Wolstenholme post journal, March 22, 1939, HBCA-WPJ. Sealskins were only worth twenty cents when Frank Melton was working at Cape Dorset in 1917, and that remained the going rate in later years as well, though prices fluctuated. Melton interview, September 5, 1958; and Wolstenholme post journal, March 22, 1939. Damas corroborates Swaffield's statement about early sealskin prices: “At Frobisher Bay in the 1938–39 trading year, 320 fox brought \$2,700 [\$8.44 per skin] while 1,229 sealskins brought less than \$900,” or \$0.73 per skin. Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*, 21.

out of the company's 185–200 Northern stores were “fully engaged in fur trading operations” and that 35 more “depend[ed] largely on fur to make their operations worthwhile.” What changed in Northern communities, he said, wasn't “the overriding economy, which was fur, but the extent to which the natives' earnings [were] supplemented by a combination of factors that was derived from it, notably the steady income deriving from the payment of social benefits as well as considerable income derived from the many miscellaneous projects concerned with Northern developments,” such as construction and other temporary unskilled work.⁹

Buhr agreed, explaining that even though fur prices actually increased over time, fur became less and less important in proportion to retail sales because “government spending both direct and indirect [i.e., transfer payments to Inuit and reimbursements to the company for issuing relief and Family Allowances] formed a big part of the [HBC] business.” In fact, he stated that the company was still acquiring at least the same volume of furs in 1981 as it had some years before but that the proceeds from these did “not [have] nearly the same importance.” Whereas the company used to make \$10,000 in furs and \$15,000 in retail sales, in 1981 the same fur figure was accompanied by a superhigh sales figure of between \$50,000 and \$100,000, he clarified.¹⁰ Even considering the impact of monetary and price inflation, this was a huge change in the composition of the company's fur-related income. It was government intervention in Inuit society rather than the vicissitudes of the market that changed the makeup of the eastern Arctic economy.

The Canadian state's relief and other redistribution schemes had doomed the fur trade to a very slow and unusual contraction. These schemes drew Inuit into settlements (as discussed in chapter 8), where government construction projects created another short-lived boom for Inuit men.¹¹ And with the children largely institutionalized and undergoing indoctrination

⁹ R. H. Chesshire, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, September 10, 1981, tape 1 of 2, T11-28, HBCA-OHI.

¹⁰ W. A. Buhr, interview by Wendy Owen, July 27, 1981, tape 3 of 4, T11-12, HBCA-OHI.

¹¹ Arctic Bay store manager Jim Stevenson reported that construction of taxpayer-funded new houses (discussed in detail below) was the other major source of income in the Arctic Bay area apart from trapping. Stevenson interview, summer 1966.

in state schools (described in chapter 8), even fewer Inuit would be trapping full-time in the ensuing decades. More important, Inuit were now flush with government welfare money. It was this development—Inuit’s artificially boosted purchasing power—that began to push the HBC toward expansion into full-time retail. The fur trade did not collapse but simply found itself overwhelmed by the swell of the retail sector.

HBC Posts Rebrand as Department Stores

In 1938–40, the HBC began to restructure its fur-trading operations. The goal, according to Chesshire, was to “cater effectively to the more diversified demands arising from the changes and developments starting to take place” in the North. There were plans to renovate the posts, broaden the array of goods offered, and improve the transportation infrastructure, as well as to increase conservation efforts and studies of fur stocks (which led to the creation of private and semiprivate sanctuaries and preserves, as discussed in chapter 7).¹²

But in the late 1940s, the company realized that there were many posts “where fur was not a consideration at all but retailing was,” in Chesshire’s words. These post stores were recategorized and put under the Interior Stores Division (1937–57), which originally consisted of about a dozen small department stores in mining, paper, and other one-industry towns with white or mixed populations. Later, as their focus shifted away from fur, the larger post stores also became Interior Stores.¹³ As the profits offered by the relief economy started to dwarf fur in the 1950s, department store retail operations expanded from a Southern venture to become the company’s focus even in the Arctic, and the company decided to develop more Interior Stores. Chesshire, who managed the Fur Trade Department and the Interior Stores Division from 1949 to 1955, said that existing stores were enlarged or rebuilt and new ones were opened.¹⁴ The division encompassed thirty stores by 1957, when Interior Stores ceased to be a part of the

¹² Chesshire interview, September 10, 1981, tape 1.

¹³ Chesshire interview, September 10, 1981, tape 2; and “Hudson’s Bay Company. Interior Stores Division,” record creator, AM-RC.

¹⁴ Chesshire interview, September 10, 1981, tape 2; and “Interior Stores Division” record creator.

Fur Trade Department. The Interior Stores Division was renamed the Bay Stores department (1957–59) and managed the company's medium-sized department stores.¹⁵

Then, in 1959, the Fur Trade Department, which had been established in 1910 to manage the company's fur trade activities and in the 1950s still included most of the Arctic trading posts, was essentially dissolved. Hugh Sutherland, its last general manager, had proposed that the department be renamed to reflect its new focus on merchandise sales, so it was renamed the Northern Stores Department (1959–87). The small post stores of the Arctic officially became department stores, though the company continued to buy furs at the locations (now paying cash exclusively).¹⁶ Though Arctic trading posts had gradually grown into small retail stores over the preceding several years, the name change served as a formal marker of the end of the traditional fur trade and of traditional life on the land, though there were still many people living, hunting, and trapping on the land.

As Inuit moved into settlements and the post stores' emphasis shifted toward merchandise over the 1950s and 1960s, it became necessary to completely rethink store operations.¹⁷ With people living nearby and able to come in at all hours of the day, the stores needed to be heated and hours had to be set.¹⁸ The stores also experienced a massive inventory expansion: in addition to the old basics, the former posts began carrying dresses, watches, tailored suits, and a variety of other items for customers to choose from. This change created a need for "proper facilities" in which customers could really examine the merchandise and "handle it to see what they were getting."¹⁹ Accordingly, the company raced to build new stores complete with heating, cash registers, and "modern sales fixtures" throughout the Arctic.²⁰ The nights of trading in a cramped, frigid cabin became distant memories.

¹⁵ "Interior Stores Division" record creator; and "Hudson's Bay Company. Bay Stores," record creator, AM-RC.

¹⁶ "Bay Stores" record creator; "Hudson's Bay Company. Fur Trade Department," record creator, AM-RC; and "Hudson's Bay Company. Northern Stores Department," record creator, AM-RC.

¹⁷ Buhr interviews, July 27, 1981, and August 31, 1981.

¹⁸ Nichols interview, September 6, 1983, tape 7.

¹⁹ Buhr interviews, July 27, 1981, and August 31, 1981.

²⁰ Nichols interview, September 6, 1983, tape 7.

Airplanes also revolutionized the business as Inuit became grocery shoppers. Cargo planes made it possible for stores to restock monthly rather than annually, although the Arctic remained isolated due to a lack of airstrips (which meant no planes during freeze-up and breakup) and the enduring influence of weather (which sometimes made it impossible for planes to land regardless of the local infrastructure).²¹ For the first time in its history, the company began to sell fresh produce—eggs, meat, vegetables, fruit, and bread. These products were a hit, and Inuit in the settlements began to buy more of their food at the store, now hunting mostly for sport. Farm-raised beef, poultry, and chicken eggs began to displace wild meat and eggs. Bread took the place of the bannock and hard biscuits of the olden days. The popularity of fresh food necessitated several more investments in the stores' infrastructure and human resources, such as refrigeration and staff training in butchering.²² Eventually, each store would have its own airstrip, and regular air service would shuttle people, goods, and supplies between the Arctic and the South.²³

Despite the policies of paying relief, Family Allowance, and old-age pensions in kind (discussed in chapter 8), barter quickly came to an end as Inuit employed in the settlements accumulated cash wages and began to push for their benefits to be paid by check. The first Inuit to receive check payments were those of the Mackenzie Delta, who started receiving checks in 1954 after complaining of unequal treatment because their Indian and nonnative coresidents received the benefit in this form. Conflict among DNA administrators and resistance from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), which was still administering FA payments, prevented an official policy from arising for several years, but by 1958, Inuit in Frobisher

²¹ For example, in 1966 Cape Dorset was totally isolated from mid-September to just before Christmas and from mid-June to mid-July because there was no airstrip and the ice was either not present or too thin to land on. In the midsixties, much of the region had this issue of being cut off from southern Canada during freeze-up and breakup due to a lack of airstrips. The state at this time was trying to construct airstrips as quickly as possible. In 1966, Sugluk's airstrip was almost finished. David Fisher and Terrence Ryan, interview by Helen Burgess, summer 1966, T39-3, HBCA-HB; and Gilbert Robichaud and temporary administrator, interview by Helen Burgess, summer 1966, T39-10, HBCA-HB.

²² Nichols interview, September 6, 1983, tape 7.

²³ Nichols interview, September 6, 1983, tape 7.

Bay, Churchill (western shore of Hudson Bay), Rankin Inlet (northwestern shore of Hudson Bay), and Aklavik (at the mouth of the Mackenzie River, HBC post open 1912–61, 1966–87) were also receiving checks. In 1960, the DNA took full responsibility for paying out the FA and began to issue checks to all Inuit recipients.²⁴ Wage employment had become a major source of income in many Inuit settlements by the 1960s, though cash had begun flowing into southern Baffin Island Inuit communities as early as 1949 with the beginning of the carving industry, but many people still hunted part-time.²⁵ With the rise of cash as the medium of exchange, the company came to depend on merchandise sales rather than fur.²⁶ By the 1970s, the Arctic stores were as complex as Southern stores, though not quite as large.²⁷

In 1987, the HBC left the North, selling the Northern Stores Department, by then consisting of about 170 stores across the Canadian North, to Mutual Trust and a group of HBC higher-ups who promptly reentered the marketplace as the Hudson's Bay Northern Stores (after 1990 the North West Company,²⁸ its current name).²⁹ In 1991, the HBC stopped selling fur due to decreasing demand caused by a combination of changing fashions and antifur activism.³⁰ Although on December 10, 2019, the North West Company announced that it would stop buying fur, there was so much pushback from

²⁴ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 91, 93, 339–42; and Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*, 110–12.

²⁵ Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*, 134, 136. Damas specifically discusses Resolute and the communities of southern Baffin Island, but this seems to have been true of the eastern Arctic as a whole, if the Helen Burgess interviews are any indication.

²⁶ Nichols interview, September 6, 1983, tape 7.

²⁷ Nichols interview, September 6, 1983, tape 8; and “Northern Stores Department” record creator.

²⁸ No relation to the North West Company that operated in Montreal from 1779 to 1821.

²⁹ “Northern Stores Department” record creator; Leonard Budgell to Claudia Coutu Radmore, January 27, 1987, in Budgell, *Arctic Twilight: Leonard Budgell and Canada's Changing North*, ed. Claudia Coutu Radmore (Toronto: Blue Butterfly Books, 2009), Kindle.

³⁰ “When the Hudson's Bay Company Said Farewell to Furs in 1991,” CBC Archives, January 28, 2021, last modified January 28, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/when-the-hudson-s-bay-company-said-farewell-to-furs-1.4998671>.

trappers in Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Manitoba—though notable silence from the Arctic³¹— that the company reversed its decision three days later.³²

State Housing in Inuit Settlements

In the postwar era, Inuit life was quickly and radically altered by the designs of the government bureaucrats who occupied the North, ferociously attempting to educate, medicate, and domesticate people who had a perfectly decent, organized society of their own—a society no more flawed than any other. The Canadian government taught English to people who already had a flourishing language, Inuktitut. It made literate in English people who had long been literate in Inuktitut syllabics (thanks to nonviolent private missionary efforts to create a written language³³). It fed people who knew how to glean nourishment from the land and in the marketplace. It essentially kidnapped sick people and sent them south, where many of them died alone and far from home. The much smaller number of Inuit who in the short term were dispersed across the land rather than drawn into settlements were told where to make their living and suffered from bad advice (as discussed in chapter 7).

With no cultural awareness and without creating a proper infrastructure, the Canadian state congregated people, creating poor living conditions, as Tester and Kulchyski have documented in stark detail. It put people who already had homes, who had long been familiar with wooden buildings but had not deigned to construct them, in what Inuit came to call matchboxes. These early “houses,” built in the late 1950s, were windowless one-room or one-bedroom plywood shacks heated by an oil stove. Water or ice had to be brought in to perform basic chores, and fuel had to be collected for

³¹ Perhaps this silence was in part because since 2000, Northwest Territories trappers have been unfairly insulated from market fluctuations by the territorial government's Genuine Mackenzie Valley Fur Program, which uses taxpayer money to buy local fur.

³² David Shield, “Trappers Concerned after Northern Stores Stop Buying Fur, Blaming ‘Unprecedented Market Conditions,’” CBC, December 10, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/trappers-northern-stores-fur-1.5391089>; and Avery Zingel, “North West Company Reverses Decision to Stop Buying Fur,” CBC, December 13, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/north-west-company-fur-buying-1.5396415>.

³³ On the history of Inuktitut, see Louis-Jacques Dorais, *The Language of the Inuit: Syntax, Semantics, and Society in the Arctic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010). Dorais discusses the development of the written language in chapter 7.

the stove, as elder Martha Tikivik (b. 1936) described and as Canadian bureaucrats admitted in interviews conducted in the mid-1960s, when the state finally moved to upgrade housing in Inuit settlements. There was no sewage system, as indicated by elder Apphia Agalakti Awa's (1931–96) stories about taking out the “honey bucket” in the morning. The houses were as small as 240 square feet but housed as many as eight people. Helen Burgess reported that in Lake Harbour, many families put their bathtubs outside to create more sleeping space. DNA Cape Dorset area administrator David Fisher described the houses as being “of a minimal standard” due to the need to build quickly. The houses were frigid, especially compared to the igloos that Canadian bureaucrats dismissed as inadequate and inferior housing. “After we moved into government housing,” Tikivik said, “a lot of people came to check our house. . . . When they arrived, they would not all be able to fit inside. I was never really told what they were coming to our house for. . . . Our house used to be so cold that the oil stove didn't seem to make a difference and our water would freeze.” People were not comfortable; they became ill in the cramped and squalid spaces.³⁴

Two- and three-bedroom floor plans emerged in the 1960s, and in 1965, yet another generation of housing surfaced with the launch of a \$12 million program to improve Inuit housing. In 1966, Fisher reported that all the new houses in Arctic settlements had a three-bedroom plan to ensure “adequate living space” for “most families” (two- and four-bedroom houses were also available, according to David Damas). DNA Sugluk area administrator G. N. Faulkner and Pond Inlet area administrator Gordon Rogers reported that the new houses were being built with suspended-ceiling basements or heated crawl spaces to help keep the upstairs floors warm. Fisher stated that the government also planned to provide “sufficient services in

³⁴ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 7, 99, 334; Joe Karetak, Frank Tester, and Shirley Tagalik, eds., *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: What Inuit Have Always Known to Be True* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2017), 29; Fisher and Ryan interview, summer 1966 (Burgess's comment is taken from the same interview); Martha Tikivik, in George Pitseolak et al., *Niurrutiqarniq: Trading with the Hudson's Bay Company*, ed. Shannon Partridge, interviews supervised by François Trudel (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2009), 65–66 (quote), 68; and Apphia Agalakti Awa, in Nancy Wachowich, *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women*, collab. Apphia Agalakti Awa, Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak, and Sandra Pikujak Katsak (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 101, 104.

terms of sewage disposal, water supply, electricity, and oil to ensure that they have a reasonable level of comfort,” as well as \$300 worth of furniture. Arctic Bay HBC store manager Jim Stevenson hoped the new homes would reduce sickness in the community, a testament to the early shacks’ disease-incubating qualities. But despite these improvements, Northern housing remained inadequate. The three-bedroom houses, by far the most common size based on the interviewees’ reports, were only about five hundred to six hundred square feet, and the largest houses available were not much larger at seven hundred square feet, according to Damas. None of them were designed with Inuit families in mind. There was not enough room to butcher animals or fix equipment. There were too many bedrooms for people who were used to sleeping together to keep warm. They were basically one-size-fits-all. Sanitation remained poor, and running water was not available during the winter in many settlements. For example, Rogers explained that Pond Inlet had a “water problem”: during the summer all the houses had running water supplied by a creek, but the creek froze to the bottom during the winter. Because there are no lakes nearby, all water was “chipped from the nearest iceberg” and melted in the winter, so there were shortages. Grace Rogers, Rogers’s wife, added that people had to be very conservative with the water during the winter, alternating wash and bath days. Cape Dorset, which was supplied by nearby lakes, also experienced water shortages, according to Bob Holmes, who worked at the DNA Adult Education Office and was tasked with preparing Inuit for the new houses coming to the settlement.³⁵

Inuit were burdened with payments for these unnecessary homes. As Damas explains, the earliest subpar housing was issued on a rent-to-own basis: Inuit paid \$15 per month for seven to ten years and then owned the houses, which cost about \$1,500. This arrangement was succeeded by a new program in which Inuit took out \$2,000 loans to pay for the newer two- and three-bedroom houses. But by the midsixties, 90 percent of Inuit who received the new housing had fallen behind on their payments, and 50 percent had

³⁵ Fisher and Ryan, Bob Holmes, Faulkner, Gordon Rogers, Grace Rogers, and Stevenson, interviews by Helen Burgess, summer 1966, T39-3, T39-4, T39-11, T39-12, T39-13, and T39-15, HBCA-HB; and David Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*, 120–22.

made only one payment, according to Damas. The houses built after 1965 were part of a new government rental scheme in which people would pay according to their means or purchase the houses outright, per Fisher. These higher-quality houses were of course more expensive: the two-bedroom cost \$4,000; the three-bedroom, up to \$7,500; and the four-bedroom, \$8,000. (The old one-bedroom houses would either be resold to single persons and small families for \$25 to \$50 or, according to Faulkner, purchased by the community councils and moved out onto the land so that hunters and trappers could shelter in them in bad weather.) Again, the taxpayer was footing the bill for the ravages of government policy: poor planning had yielded mass migration into settlements, inadequate construction, housing shortages, and mass unemployment, prompting further socialist measures that would only exacerbate the problems.³⁶

Private Nonfur Ventures and Carving in the Eastern Arctic

In the postwar era, the state decided that the Northern economy had bottomed out in a gully, where it would always lie without government support. So, as will be described below, the state created artificial jobs for people who had real work to do in the marketplace and whose activities had always been the engine of the Northern economy. But in fact the North had weathered economic change before. It had gone from a subsistence economy to whaling to the fur trade, and new industries were continually sprouting up as people attempted get more out of the land.

As we've seen, Inuit brought all kinds of things in to trade, not only foxes and other skins. The HBC and other market actors too sought out new sources of income. For example, already in 1909, Wolstenholme's first year of operations, post manager Ralph Parsons was hoping to set up a summer fishery there, perhaps aiming to minimize off-season losses by mimicking the Labrador subsistence rhythm of trapping in the winter and fishing for cod, salmon, and trout during the summer. Indeed, he recommended staffing the post with Labrador Inuit families, who would have the necessary skills

³⁶ Fisher and Ryan and Faulkner interviews, summer 1966; and David Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*, 120–22, 59–61, 79.

to properly cure the fish. The fishery ultimately didn't come to fruition, as indicated by HBC man Len Budgell's description of eastern Arctic people as having no summer occupation other than subsistence hunting.³⁷

Another germ of a venture for the company was eiderdown, which is harvested from eider ducks. Wally Buhr reported that when he was at Lake Harbour in the late 1930s, the HBC sent a contractor up to start the industry. Unfortunately, the material turned out to be too fragile to work with, and the man also had poor relations with Inuit, who would put rocks in with the down.³⁸

Handicrafts, particularly carvings, presented a better opportunity. According to Buhr, the carvings were "playthings as far as the natives were concerned." But tourists, who in 1933 started visiting the Arctic by ship in small numbers, were interested in them, so the company started buying carvings.³⁹ In the late 1930s, there was already an established trade in Lake Harbour, where according to Buhr (posted there 1939–40) the small walrus ivory figurines were sold to tourists. He added that carvings that weren't sold in the North were sold at the company's stores in Winnipeg.⁴⁰

The number of carvings was originally very limited because walrus only yield two tusks, Buhr said, but the HBC was buying raw walrus ivory as early as 1914, and as demand rose in the 1940s and 1950s, the company began shipping raw ivory to creative centers across the eastern Arctic.⁴¹

³⁷ Wolstenholme post report, 1909–10, s.v. "General Remarks and Suggestions," HBCA-WPR; and L. G. Budgell, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, December 6, 1982, and December 14, 1982, tapes 2 and 3 of 7, T11-54 and T11-55, HBCA-OHI.

³⁸ Buhr interview, July 13, 1981.

³⁹ "R.M.S. *Nascopie*," HBC Heritage, Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation, Hudson's Bay Company, accessed October 29, 2023, <https://www.hbcheritage.ca/things/technology/rms-nascopie>.

⁴⁰ Buhr interview, July 13, 1981.

⁴¹ Buhr interview, July 13, 1981.

Raw ivory purchases at Wolstenholme and at Frobisher Bay are mentioned in 1914 and 1939. Trade in carvings and sale to tourists at Lake Harbour are mentioned in 1939. See Wolstenholme post journal, 1912–14, entry for April 1, 1914, microfilm no. 1MA73, H2-30-2 (B.368/a/3), HBCA-WPJ; Frobisher Bay post journal, 1938–39, entry for April 26, 1939, microfilm no. 1MA24, B.411/a/6, HBCA-FBPJ; and Lake Harbour post journal, 1938–39, entries for February 22, 1939, and July 23, 1939, microfilm no. 1MA35, B.430/a/12, HBCA-LHPJ.

The carving trade seems to have taken off after James Houston sold his collection of Inuit carvings in Montreal in 1949. See "HBC's Interest in the Inuit Art Market," HBC Heritage, Hudson's Bay Company History Foundation, Hudson's Bay Company, accessed October 29,

According to Budgell, who was post manager at Wolstenholme from 1942 to 1943, the Wolstenholme Inuit didn't do much carving, but they sold walrus tusks for \$1 per pound and yielded four to five hundred pounds per year. By the 1960s, Lake Harbour, Pond Inlet, and Cape Dorset had become big carving centers, but much of the Lake Harbour artists' raw material came from Igloolik (present-day Igloolik, Nunavut, on the northwestern shore of Foxe Basin, HBC post open 1938–43, 1948–87), according to HBC clerk George Pitseolak and HBC trader Gordon Rennie (1929–2019). Trader Ralph Knight (1926–2003) explained that Lake Harbour post couldn't get enough ivory locally to keep up with the demand, so ivory would be sent up on a boat each year as late as 1963, when he was there.⁴²

This practice of buying raw materials and redistributing them throughout the region to bolster weak local supplies was typical of the HBC, which also stocked its posts with caribou skins, sealskins, sealskin boots, fish, and marine mammal oil from areas with an abundant supply, as we have seen. Sources of ivory besides walrus tusks, which were the traditional carving material, also became valuable as the demand for carvings and consequently for the material to make them rose. Pitseolak, who worked at Lake Harbour starting in 1948 and again in 1961, explained that the company would send bags of walrus teeth to Lake Harbour. "We would hand them out and debit people's accounts, and then they would pay this off with the carvings they made." Damas notes that narwhal tusks and old whalebone (which is not technically ivory) taken from a Thule site were being used in Repulse Bay (present-day Nauyasat, Nunavut, on the northwestern shore of Hudson Bay, HBC post open 1919–87) when he conducted fieldwork in 1967. Rennie, who was at Lake Harbour from 1953 to 1956, added that the raw ivory was sold at "a very nominal cost, because we wanted people to make carvings and bring them back in. . . . We'd weigh the ivory and note how heavy it was, and then when they brought in the carvings we would deduct the cost

2023, <https://www.hbcheritage.ca/things/art/inuit-art>; and "Our History," La Guilde, accessed October 29, 2023, <https://laguilde.com/en/blogs/a-propos/notre-histoire>.

⁴² L. G. Budgell, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, December 14, 1982, tape 3 of 7, T11-55, HBCA-OHI; "Hudson's Bay Company. Igloolik," record creator, AM-RC; Pitseolak and Rennie, in Pitseolak et al., *Niurritigarniq*, 131, 220; R. Knight, interview by Wendy Owen, August 5, 1981, T11-16, HBCA-OHI; and "Ralph Emery Knight," record creator, AM-RC.

of the ivory. If the ivory was worth two dollars and the carving was worth thirty dollars, it was part of the cost. All the carvings were shipped to . . . Montreal, and then . . . to different locations.” Bert Swaffield recalled that at Pond Inlet, where he worked from 1940 to 1949, the carvings weren’t worth much at all, so people wouldn’t devote much time to making them, but that the industry “went haywire” about ten years later.⁴³

Knight noted that when he worked at Povungnetuk (present-day Puvirnituk, Quebec, on the northeastern shore of Hudson Bay, HBC post open 1921–87) in the late 1940s, his coworker Jim Houston began to buy Inuit carvings with a \$1,000–\$2,000 grant from the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (founded in 1894 as the Montreal branch of the Women’s Art Association of Canada and today known as La Guilde). According to the guild’s website, “Through an agreement with the Hudson’s Bay Company, Houston went back to Puvirnituk and Akulivik (Cape Smith) to begin the project of purchasing Inuit art on behalf of La Guilde. Houston’s mandate also involved creating ports in different areas where handicrafts could be sold through the system already set by the Hudson’s Bay Company. Port officials would accept carvings on the behalf of La Guilde to keep the project going long after Houston left the area.” Houston sold his entire stock of a thousand articles in Montreal in three days and became a full-time Inuit art dealer, purchasing in Povungnetuk, Cape Smith, Port Harrison, and more places along the way. Knight said that Inuit were “quite enthusiastic” about the demand because they “could make extra money to buy more food at the store” during those “pretty lean years on that coast.” The HBC paid the artisans directly but was reimbursed by the guild, according to Knight.⁴⁴

Market actors also adjusted in light of the always-limited supply of ivory, expanding beyond the traditional medium and working in serpentine,

⁴³ Pitseolak and Rennie, in Pitseolak et al., *Niurritigarniq*, 131 (quote), 220, 225 (quote); “Hudson’s Bay Company. Repulse Bay,” record creator, AM-RC; Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*, 170; and A. T. Swaffield, interview by Wendy Owen, July 30, 1981, tape 2 of 3, T11-14, HBCA-OHI.

⁴⁴ Knight interview, August 5, 1981; “Hudson’s Bay Company. Povungnetuk,” record creator, AM-RC; and “Our History.” See also Jon C. Stott, “James Archibald Houston,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, April 7, 2008, last modified December 16, 2013, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/james-archibald-houston>; and “Saumik (James Houston): The Qallunaq Who Changed Inuit Art,” La Guilde, March 20, 2022, <https://laguilde.com/en/blogs/saviez-vous-que/james-houston>.

steatite, and especially soapstone, for which Cape Dorset, Port Harrison, and Sugluk became known. Unlike ivory, soapstone didn't need to be cured before carving, and most communities had a local supply of uniquely colored stone (Arctic Bay soapstone is black with specks of red, Port Harrison soapstone is black or dark green, and Sugluk's is dark gray, for example). Knight also noted that the figurines got bigger over time, because the people quickly learned that the bigger the carving was, the more money they'd get.⁴⁵ Today soapstone carvings are far more common than ivory carvings, perhaps not in small part because the world's governments in 1973 formed what is essentially a cartel, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, which in 1989 banned voluntary international ivory trading, though domestic trading thankfully continues in many countries.⁴⁶

Private Sector Mining in the North

Independent of the HBC's attempts to find new sources of revenue in the North was the development of the mining sector. Prospecting had been going on at least since the early twentieth century, but it surged after World War II. According to Jeanette Carney, there are 584 abandoned mining exploration sites dating between 1940 and 1975 just in northern Quebec, so there was no lack of effort to expand the Arctic economy.⁴⁷ Mining being the capital-intensive venture that it is, the establishment of mines lagged far behind the discovery of ore. Deposits of lead-zinc ore were found near Arctic Bay on Baffin Island in 1910, and Texas Gulf Sulfur opened the Nanisivik Mine there in 1976, producing zinc along with lead, cadmium, and silver as by-products.⁴⁸ Nickel and asbestos were discovered at Deception Bay

⁴⁵ Knight interview, August 5, 1981. Helen Burgess described the Arctic Bay soapstone during her interview of Stevenson, summer 1966. Also "Saumik (James Houston)."

⁴⁶ See Allan Thornton, "Thirty Years Since the International Ivory Ban, Say Goodbye to Ivory Hanks," Environmental Investigation Agency, January 10, 2020, <https://eia.org/blog/20200110-thirty-years-since-international-ivory-ban/>.

⁴⁷ Jeanette Carney, "Asbestos Hill: Inuit Experiences with Nunavik's First Mine" (master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2016), 35–36.

⁴⁸ Annelies Pool, "Nanisivik," in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, July 4, 2006, last modified March 23, 2015, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/nanisivik>; and "Nanisivik Zinc Mine," The Diggings, accessed February 8, 2024, https://thediggings.com/mines/usgs10085062#google_vignette.

(northern Quebec) in 1931–32 and 1957, respectively, but Raglan Mine, jointly operated by Kiewit and the Nuvumiut Development Corporation and owned by Glencore, did not complete phase 1 development until 1997, and Asbestos Hill did not open until 1972.⁴⁹ Although high-grade iron was identified at Mary River on Baffin Island in 1962, the mine did not officially begin operations until 2015.⁵⁰ However, the magnitude of these ventures, which required the construction of all kinds of infrastructure to function, meant that they were employing Inuit long before production began. When Burgess conducted interviews around the eastern Arctic in 1966, all of these mines were already under development.

Gordon Rogers reported that ten to twelve Pond Inlet Inuit were already working at the Mary River iron development, operated by Baffinland, and that the company expected Mary River Mine to employ two hundred Inuit once fully operational. State school administrator Wynne noted that four to six Wakeham Bay Inuit were working at Raglan Mine, which had opened the year before, though only on a very limited, part-time basis. Most of the men of Arctic Bay were employed at the Texas Gulf Sulfur (Nanisivik) lead-zinc development. Inuit workers Bobby and Sandy Gordon said that thirty Inuit were working at the Asbestos Hill development. D. K. Brunner, manager of that project, reported to Burgess that engineering work was already underway and that the mining company would be building a road from Deception Bay to Asbestos Hill. Also planned were processing and storage facilities, a

⁴⁹ “Raglan Mines,” Kiewit, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://www.kiewit.com/projects/raglan-mines/>; and “Asbestos Hill Mine,” The Diggings, accessed February 5, 2023, <https://thediggings.com/mines/usgs10111283>. See also “Sivumut Project,” Glencore Canada, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://www.glencore.ca/en/raglan/what-we-do/sivumut-project>, for information on the Raglan Mine’s ongoing expansion. For more information on Asbestos Hill mine, see Sarah Rogers, “Picking Apart the Sordid Back-Story of Nunavik’s First Mine,” *Nunatsiaq News*, January 15, 2016, https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/65674picking_apart_the_sordid_back-story_of_nunaviks_first_mine/; and Jeanette Carney, *Seeking Closure: Legacies of the Asbestos Hill Mine in Nunavik*, master’s thesis report (Quebec City: Chaire de recherche sur le développement durable de Nord / Northern Sustainable Development Research Chair, 2017).

⁵⁰ “Mary River Mine,” Baffinland, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://www.baffinland.com/operation/mary-river-mine/>. Many of the ore discoveries mentioned above were made by Canadian prospector and mining engineer Murray E. Watts. See “Murray E. Watts,” Canadian Mining Hall of Fame, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://www.mininghalloffame.ca/murray-e-watts>.

power plant, repair and fabricating shops, and a townsite with housing and full recreational facilities for five hundred people (to be completed in two years). Contrary to the popular image of company towns, Brunner twice mentioned that the buildings would have colorful aluminum siding. Inuit were driving three-ton trucks, twelve-yard earth-moving trucks, and even big bulldozers, and they were also working as mechanic's and carpenter's assistants. Bobby Gordon, who was from Sugluk, was involved in building housing. Sandy Gordon, who hailed from Fort Chimo, was driving trucks at the development. He thought the money was "not too bad," though he noted the lack of overtime that season. Ted Chamberlain, who was in charge of the Inuit training program, confirmed that Inuit and white employees received the same pay rate, living accommodations, and food.⁵¹

Central Planning in the North

People's needs are constantly changing, followed by people's jobs, ad infinitum. Transitions characterized by temporary unemployment as people adjust their expectations and behavior are a part of normal economic development. However, the Canadian state, sometimes well intentioned but, like every state, interested in territorial and economic control above all else, largely substituted an arbitrary development regimen for organic economic development in the eastern Arctic. Although the carving and mining industries sprouted up naturally, the Canadian government, anxious to generate jobs for the large unemployed population that its welfare and Canadianization schemes were creating in the Arctic, intervened to force-ripen these industries.⁵²

Jeanette Carney notes that the Canadian federal government aided many of the mines that developed by giving them taxpayer funds directly, offering tax breaks, or becoming directly involved in their operations. She reports that Texas Gulf Sulfur signed an agreement with the Canadian government guaranteeing that 60 percent of the Nanisivik Mine's staff would

⁵¹ Gordon Rogers and Wynne interviews, summer 1966; and D. K. Brunner, Ted Chamberlain, and Bobby and Sandy Gordon, interview by Helen Burgess, summer 1966, T39-8, HBCA-HB.

⁵² For an example of the government's general economic plans for the Arctic, see J. W. Evans, *A Program of Economic Development: East Coast of Ungava Bay* (Ottawa: Arctic Division, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, November 1958).

be Inuit. Asbestos Hill had a training program to “advance [Inuit] as fast as they [were] able to” and the company hoped to “develop more of these people in other lines,” according to Brunner. The mine was also “cooperating with the provincial government in a training program.” Carney points out that the North Rankin Nickel Mine, which opened in 1957, was also encouraged by the government, whose officials “actively recruited Inuit to relocate to the company-created town of Rankin Inlet” (present-day Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, on the northwestern shore of Hudson Bay).⁵³

Some of these mines ended up being very short-lived. The North Rankin Nickel Mine closed in 1962 because nickel prices had fallen, and the ore had also been depleted. The closure left the many Inuit who had moved to Rankin Inlet to work there—70–80 percent of the population—unemployed, although between 1964 and 1972 ten to twenty of them were recruited by Société Asbestos to work on developing the Asbestos Hill Mine (the rest of that mine’s two hundred workers being locals from nearby Sugluk).⁵⁴ The Rankin Inlet mine had opened during the Korean War (1950–53), when nickel prices were high, but, as shown, had also been encouraged to open by the DNA.⁵⁵ Perhaps without that encouragement, the North Rankin Nickel Mine would have taken a more realistic view of the high prices and of the mine’s long-term potential. Asbestos Hill, one of Société Asbestos’s smaller asbestos mines, closed in 1984, just twelve years after opening, due to falling asbestos prices in the wake of antiasbestos campaigns and ensuing regulations (though the larger asbestos mines in southern Quebec remained

⁵³ Carney, “Asbestos Hill,” 37–38, quote on 38; and Brunner, Chamberlain, B. Gordon, and S. Gordon interview, summer 1966. See also Frank James Tester, Drummond E. J. Lambert, and Tee Wern Lim, “Wistful Thinking: Making Inuit Labour and the Nanisivik Mine near Ikpiarjuk (Arctic Bay), Northern Baffin Island,” in “Développement industriel et impacts miniers / Industrial Development and Mining Impacts,” ed. Sylvie Blangy and Frank James Tester, special issue, *Études/Inuit/Studies* 37, no. 2 (2013); and Jean-Sébastien Boutet, Arn Keeling, and John Sandlos, “Historical Perspectives on Mining and the Aboriginal Social Economy,” in *Northern Communities Working Together: The Social Economy of Canada’s North*, ed. Chris Southcott (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 198–227.

⁵⁴ A. J. Roan, “Nunavut Mine Created Legacy of Partnership,” *North of 60 Mining News*, October 1, 2021, last modified November 18, 2021, <https://www.miningnewsnorth.com/story/2021/10/01/northern-mining-history/nunavut-mine-created-legacy-of-partnership/7013.html>; and Carney, “Asbestos Hill,” 54–55.

⁵⁵ “Rankin Inlet,” Hamlet of Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, accessed February 13, 2024, <https://rankininlet.ca/history/>; and Roan, “Nunavut Mine.”

open). All the local workers were laid off. It's telling that the mine's opening had been delayed by two years due to a development pause from 1967 to 1970 as the company reevaluated costs. Perhaps without government support, it might not have made sense to invest in opening this relatively small asbestos mine in the far North to begin with. The closure of these mines harmed Inuit communities, of course, but the root of this harm lies in malinvestment—the government-prompted bad decisions to take on more risk than normal to open these mines.⁵⁶

Government intervention also artificially expanded the handicrafts industry. Soon after Jim Houston discovered the untapped market for carvings, the federal government began supporting his work through taxpayer-funded grants.⁵⁷ In 1951, Houston also published a book in collaboration with the DNA that encouraged Inuit to carve. The book, which was in Inuktitut, gave examples of designs that had so-called native character and included non-Inuit motifs such as totem poles.⁵⁸ Then, in 1954, Houston became a federal service officer at Cape Dorset; he was one of many artists hired by the state to exhort Inuit to enter the art industry. Houston introduced printmaking in the late fifties, and by the midsixties, Inuit were creating stone-cut, woodblock, and copper prints on a relatively large scale.⁵⁹ Each print fetched \$35–\$40 on average but could net as much as \$100, according to Terrence Ryan, the art director of the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative at Cape Dorset.⁶⁰

The government also pushed Inuit to create co-ops to get them more involved in the region's economic development (which, it should be emphasized, had not been a problem before the government decided to step into

⁵⁶ Carney, "Asbestos Hill," 4, 54.

⁵⁷ Jennifer Alsop, "A History of the WBEC," in coordination with Ian McPherson, West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative, May 1, 2010, <https://www.westbaffin.com/history-wbec>; and "Saumik (James Houston)."

⁵⁸ "Saumik (James Houston)"; and A. James Houston, *Sanajatsarq: Eskimo Handicrafts* [in Inuktitut and English], trans. Sam Ford and Frederica Woodrow (Montreal: Canadian Handicrafts Guild and Department of Resources and Development, January 1951), C10 D1 041 1951, La Guilde Archives, Montreal.

⁵⁹ Alsop, "A History of the WBEC"; and "Saumik (James Houston)."

⁶⁰ Terrence Ryan, interview by Helen Burgess, summer 1966, T39-3, HBCA-HB.

the Arctic and run the show).⁶¹ The first co-ops were established in 1959. Among them were the George River co-op (present-day Kangiqsualujuaq, Quebec, off the eastern shore of Ungava Bay, HBC post open 1838–42, 1876–78, 1883–1952), the Port Burwell co-op (present-day Killiniq Island, Nunavut, just north of the tip of Labrador and depopulated since 1978 by government order⁶²), and the well-known West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative in Cape Dorset.⁶³ By 1962, there were fourteen Inuit-run cooperatives in the eastern Arctic, and by 1968, there were thirty-one co-ops across the Northwest Territories and Arctic Quebec, though this number includes co-ops in Cree, white, and mixed settlements.⁶⁴

The co-ops were sold to Inuit as a way for them to make money that would be better than opening an ordinary business because co-ops “share the money [profits] more equally.”⁶⁵ These co-ops were established largely on the Canadian taxpayer’s dime, and many began as stores run by the RCMP.⁶⁶ Although co-op members could contribute their own money to establish a co-op, most Inuit founders did not have the necessary funds to get one off the ground. Instead, the government more commonly encouraged members to borrow the start-up money from the Eskimo Loan Fund,

⁶¹ Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik, *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, 30–31. Here’s a government publication explaining how cooperatives work and teaching Inuit how to create their own: K. J. Crowe and E. Erkloo, *Introduction to Arctic Co-operatives: Instructor’s Manual* [in Inuktitut and English] ([Ottawa]: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Adult Education, Arctic District, June 1968).

⁶² M. Barret, *Killiniq (Port Burwell): An Environmental Survey* (Kuujuaq, QC: Makivik Corporation, 1994), 1–2.

⁶³ Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik, *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, 30; Alsop, “A History of the WBEC”; “History,” Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau-Québec, accessed August 29, 2024, <http://www.aventuresinuit.ca/en/web/guest/histoire>; and Marybelle Mitchell, “Inuit Co-operatives,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, February 7, 2006, last modified December 16, 2013, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/inuit-co-operatives>. For a list of the thirty-three co-ops in the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, see “Canada’s North,” Member Co-ops, Arctic Co-operatives Limited, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://arctic-coop.com/index.php/member-co-ops/>. For a list of the fourteen co-ops in northern Quebec, see “Cooperatives,” Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau-Québec, accessed August 29, 2024, <http://www.aventuresinuit.ca/en/web/guest/puvirnituk>.

⁶⁴ Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik, *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, 31; and Crowe and Erkloo, *Arctic Co-operatives*, “Co-ops in and near Eskimo Lands” (figure on 20).

⁶⁵ Crowe and Erkloo, *Arctic Co-operatives*, 19.

⁶⁶ Karetak, Tester, and Tagalik, *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*, 30.

from which the government would lend new cooperatives up to \$50,000, to be paid back in ten years (the goal was for co-ops to become entirely self-sustaining). The state also offered up more taxpayer money to help existing co-ops expand.⁶⁷ All people needed to do to form a co-op and access this seed money was “sign papers agreeing to obey certain rules for the co-op” and send them to the government along with a \$10 fee.⁶⁸ The cooperatives could offer any good or service its members chose to focus on. The Port Burwell co-op, which opened in 1959 with a \$6,000 loan (paid off in 1964), for example, bought and sold fish, food, sealskins, foxes, and many other more traditional items in the midsixties, according to Port Burwell acting administrator and projects officer Raymond Buffitt.⁶⁹ The Ivujivik co-op bought and sold fish, sealskins, foxes, and “everything that is killed here,” whereas the West Baffin co-op dealt in carvings and prints.⁷⁰ The example co-ops in the government’s Introduction to Arctic Co-operatives course for Inuit hauled ice and produced carvings.⁷¹

By the 1970s, the federal government deemed many of the co-ops to be in bad economic standing.⁷² For example, the Resolute co-op, founded in 1961, was plagued by high individual debts after Inuit started managing it themselves.⁷³ The co-ops struggled during this recessionary period because, like other bubble industries, they depended on others’ money to stay afloat. As soon as their credit was cut off, their unsustainability came to light. Because the co-ops ultimately depended on government aid rather than on voluntary transactions in the marketplace, their fate was decided by the government, which gradually reduced their funding.⁷⁴

This issue was “fixed” in 1986 with the creation of the Arctic Co-operative Development Fund, a shared funding pool managed by the co-ops that

⁶⁷ Crowe and Erkloo, *Arctic Co-operatives*, 22–23.

⁶⁸ Crowe and Erkloo, *Arctic Co-operatives*, 24.

⁶⁹ Buffitt interview, summer 1966.

⁷⁰ Robichaud and temporary administrator interview, summer 1966; and Alsop, “A History of the WBEC.”

⁷¹ Crowe and Erkloo, *Arctic Co-operatives*, 26–29.

⁷² Alsop, “A History of the WBEC.”

⁷³ Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*, 134–35.

⁷⁴ Alsop, “A History of the WBEC.”

received over \$10 million from the Canadian government (\$5.3 million in new money and \$4.9 million in transfers of existing loans from the Eskimo Loan Fund, which guaranteed those loans, artificially eliminating the new fund's financial risk in taking them on). Now the stronger co-ops could carry the weak ones, rewarding poor management, while Canadian taxpayers continued to foot the bill.⁷⁵

Not only were these co-ops built on a bad foundation—teaching people that it's a great idea to try to start a business without being in a good financial position to do so and implying that nonegalitarian traditional businesses are not as economically beneficial as co-ops because of how the proceeds are managed—but they were also totally unnecessary, as shown by the fact that the HBC continued to buy and sell Inuit art (not to mention furs and all kinds of other products) alongside the co-ops into the 1980s.⁷⁶ One wonders how much more reach Inuit art might have had in a more open market and, more important, what other industries Inuit could have revolutionized had the government not herded them into the arts. Today the cooperatives are involved in many other ventures, including hospitality and property rentals,⁷⁷ but, again, the question is, What more could Inuit have done had the state not poured them into its economic molds?

State Dominance in the North Today

State intervention in the North was supposed to save Inuit from the supposedly horrible conditions they were living under. "Horrible," in the final analysis, because Canadians and Inuit had different ideas about what a good life was—what a good house was, what cleanliness was, what a good diet was, what prosperity was, what order was, what civilization was. Canadian bureaucrats' meddling was supposed to save Inuit from alleged exploitation by fur traders and from the supposedly declining trade. In fact, the state destroyed the healthy social structures and traditional law that had kept order in Inuit societies. The loss of this framework allowed disorder, dysfunction, and listlessness to fester. The state's aggression and overbearing

⁷⁵ Alsop, "A History of the WBEC."

⁷⁶ "HBC's Interest in the Inuit Art Market."

⁷⁷ Alsop, "History of the WBEC."

policies gave rise to drug, alcohol, and suicide problems in societies that had largely lacked them.⁷⁸

Today Inuit are directly and indirectly dependent on government money, whether in the form of personal relief, community grants, or government jobs—a much more precarious state than the interdependence that begins with the household division of labor and has its fullest expression in the complex marketplace. They are landless because they are not truly sovereign, regardless of all the “Inuit Owned Land” demarcated on Google Maps. Instead of being the sovereign individuals they were until the early 1940s, they now face the common injustices inherent to so-called representative government, where political power rather than property rights determines who makes the decisions. This state of affairs is plainly evident, for example, in the numerous recent clashes⁷⁹ over public-private

⁷⁸ On the rising crime in Inuit communities, see Harold W. Finkler, *Inuit and the Administration of Criminal Justice in the Northwest Territories: The Case of Frobisher Bay* (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs, 1976), chap. 3; Finkler, “Community Participation in Socio-legal Control: The Northern Context” (paper presented at Knowing the North: Integrating Tradition, Technology and Science conference, sponsored by the Boreal Institute, University of Alberta, Edmonton, November 20–22, 1986), 1–2; and Finkler, *Inuit and the Criminal Justice System: Future Strategies for Socio-legal Control and Prevention* (Ottawa: Office of the Northern Research and Science Advisor, Indian and Northern Affairs, 1984), 1–9. On suicide in Inuit communities, see Hugh Brody, “The Deepest Silences: What Lies behind the Arctic’s Indigenous Suicide Crisis,” *Guardian*, July 21, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/jul/21/the-deepest-silences-what-lies-behind-the-indigenous-suicide-crisis>; and “Pangnirtung Pleads with Nunavut Gov’t, RCMP to Step in amid Suicide, Violence ‘Crisis,’” CBC, May 8, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/pangnirtung-crisis-suicide-violence-plea-nunavut-government-council-1.4652466>.

⁷⁹ Consider the multiyear clash over the phase 2 expansion of the Baffinland Mary River Mine: Beth Brown, “Baffinland Cuts Contracts, Leaves 96 Inuit without Work,” CBC, November 15, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/baffinland-contracts-cut-mary-river-inuit-jobs-1.5361604>; Brown, “Baffinland Faces Millions in Liens over Stalled Expansion,” CBC, January 27, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/baffinland-contractors-file-liens-mary-river-expansion-1.5439042>; Brown, “New Inuit Benefit Agreement Worth \$1B over Life of Mary River Mine,” CBC, July 7, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/baffinland-signs-environmental-agreement-qikiqtani-inuit-association-1.5639858>; Brown, “Mary River Agreement between QIA and Baffinland Leaves Mayors, Hunters Uneasy,” CBC, September 1, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/mary-river-agreement-between-qia-and-baffinland-leaves-hamlets-hunters-uneasy-1.5706594>; Brown, “Marine Life, Mineral Disputes Remain as Nunavut Mine Hearings Resume,” CBC, September 14, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/inuit-baffinland-in-conflict-mary-river-hearings-resume-1.5720957>; Brown, “Seven Inuit Communities Create Non-profit to Lobby Mining Industry in Baffin Region,” CBC, January 11, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/seven-inuit-communities-create-non-profit-lobby-mining-industry-baffin-region-1.5866990>;

mining development between Inuit individuals (who tend to be antiexpansion for environmental reasons) and the Inuit corporations and regional development organizations that represent their interests and manage the development of the land⁸⁰ (which tend to be proexpansion because it will create jobs and increase tax revenues).

Inuit have ended up subject to a punitive foreign legal order that creates dysfunction in their societies to this day. One in six Nunavik adults is brought before the legal system each year, and Inuit are still fighting to gain control of their affairs. The state is marking so many people as criminals that they can't get jobs, exacerbating the problems of crime, drug abuse, suicide,

Brown, "Pond Inlet Protesters Say Mine Expansion Ignores Nunavut Agreement," CBC, February 6, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/pond-inlet-protests-nunavut-agreement-1.5904305>; Brown, "Mine Blockade Sparks Solidarity Protests across Nunavut," CBC, February 8, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/mine-blockade-sparks-solidarity-protests-across-nunavut-1.5906285>; Jane George, "Pond Inlet Woman's Barrage of Criticism Shakes Up Baffinland Hearings," CBC, November 4, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/pond-inlet-baffinland-mine-impact-review-board-hearing-1.6236723>; Jorge Antunes, "Fewer Crossings, Less Noise, Less Disturbances: Baffinland Makes Ship Upgrade," *Nunatsiaq News*, November 14, 2023, <https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/fewer-crossings-less-noise-less-disturbances-baffinland-makes-ship-upgrade/>; and "So Long Milne Inlet: After Expansion Rejection, Baffinland Turns to Steensby Rail," CBC, February 17, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/baffinland-steensby-inlet-railway-1.6752613>.

⁸⁰ See the diagram showing the main Canadian Inuit organizations in "Who We Are," Qikiqtani Inuit Association (part of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated), accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.qia.ca/who-we-are/>. The four major Inuit corporations are the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, the Nunatsiavut Government, the Makivvik Corporation, and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, which were created by land claims agreements with Inuit across Canada signed between 1975 and 2007. The organizations work together under the organization Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, which was founded by Inuit community leaders and is controlled by the leaders of the land claims organizations. See also "About," Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://irc.inuvialuit.com/about-irc/>; "About NTI," Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.tunngavik.com/about/>; "NTI Organizational Chart," Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.tunngavik.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/nti-org-chart-english.pdf>; "Makivvik," History, Makivvik Corporation, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.makivvik.ca/corporate/history/makivvik-corporation/>; "The Path to Self-Government," Government, Nunatsiavut Government, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://nunatsiavut.com/path-to-self-government/>; "Our History," Who We Are, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.itk.ca/national-voice-for-communities-in-the-canadian-arctic/>; and "Representation," What We Do, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.itk.ca/what-we-do/>. For a summary of the Northern land claims agreements, see Keith Crowe, "Northern Canada Claims," in "Comprehensive Land Claims: Modern Treaties," in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, March 2, 2015, last modified November 10, 2023, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/comprehensive-land-claims-modern-treaties>.

and unemployment that already torment Inuit communities. Pita Aatami (since 2021 president of the Makivvik Corporation, whose mandate is to “protect the rights, interests and financial compensation provided by the 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, the first comprehensive Inuit land claim agreement in Canada, and the more recent offshore Nunavik Inuit Land Claim Agreement that came into effect in 2008”) said, “The best option would be for us to take control over the whole justice system. We feel that we’re being babysat by another culture that came in after the fact and decided that ‘We’re going to run your affairs, run your life,’ as if we couldn’t do it ourselves.” George Kauki, an Inuk who is fighting to reform the system, had this to say: “The system was created by white people, people from the south, so it’s not made for Inuit people. People don’t even know what the law is. We’re not taught law . . . in our schools. We just stumble upon it.”⁸¹

It’s impossible to say exactly what would have happened in the absence of government intervention in the Canadian North, but the voluntary and peaceful white-Inuit relations and trade that preceded government presence in the Arctic give us a clue. It seems fairly likely that the traditional fur trade and traditional Inuit life on the land would have continued a good while longer absent the state’s attempts to regulate trade, police the North, and establish sovereignty over the Arctic and its true proprietors. Given the advances in technology that occurred in the twentieth century, the Northern economy would likely have diversified organically. As private industry developed better innovations for Northern life (such as snowmobiles and Arctic Oven tents), Inuit life would have continued to change as it did with previous infusions of new products and technologies, the changes paced by the people themselves, with no shoving from bullies. And all without the trauma and massive societal disruption caused by Canadian government bureaucrats.

⁸¹ “Our Mandate,” Makivvik Corporation, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.makivvik.ca/>; Aatami, quoted in Daniel Leblanc, “Nunavik’s Courts Are Struggling to Deliver Justice to Inuit Populations,” CBC, February 24, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/nunavik-justice-system-inuit-1.6340656>; and Kauki, quoted in Leblanc, “An Inuk’s Fight for a New Justice System in Northern Quebec,” CBC, February 24, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/george-kauki-justice-system-nunavik-1.6357649>.

Certainly, the traditional vicissitudes of Northern life would have persisted for some time—bad fur years, bad game years, epidemics, conflict, accidental deaths, periods of starvation, murder—and new ones would have materialized too. But Inuit would have continued to overcome these problems through their own experience, planning, innovation, and existing sociolegal mechanisms, just as other peoples have and do. In short, life would have been imperfect but voluntary, and thus capable of being rapidly improved through unrestricted market activity and full legal accountability for wrongdoers. Instead, life in the North and around the world remains imperfect but is characterized by strong state power, and therefore by economic and legal inflexibility. People continue to overcome, but progress is hampered by the extensive limitations they face in implementing solutions to their problems and defending themselves from aggression.

EPILOGUE

Duncan Pryde, a Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) man who worked in the central Arctic for eight years (1958–66) and then sat on the Legislative Council of the Northwest Territories (1966–75) while electing to live a traditional life on the land, had this to say about the Canadian government's conquest of the Arctic: "Every Eskimo I have met has been glad that the RCMP came into the north country and put an end to blood feud killings." Blood feuds, infanticide, assisted suicide for feeble elders, murder, and executions of insane and violent persons, Pryde claimed, were widespread in Inuit society. He believed that the killing of elders and female babies was "a regular feature of Eskimo life until 1949, when the federal government introduced both family allowances and old-age pension for the Canadian Eskimos. I doubt whether the politicians of the south had any idea . . . just how much benefit they were bringing into the polar country."¹

Pryde made these comments while discussing his stint at the very isolated and very unusual community of Perry River, which he described as a community of criminal exiles: "Not only were they supposed to be a tough bunch and drink a lot, but primarily they were known as killers. A large number were believed to have murdered, and many had been involved in blood feuds in other parts of the Arctic and had come to Perry for refuge. As soon as I arrived, I could easily detect people with the Garry Lake [present-day central Nunavut] dialect, people from the Nattilik country around Gjoa Haven and Spence Bay [both in present-day central Nunavut], and people with the Copper Eskimo dialect of the western Arctic."²

But killing was in fact not the accepted scourge that Pryde thought it was. After all, the Perry River Inuit were people who'd had to flee—that is,

¹ Duncan Pryde, *Nunaga: Ten Years of Eskimo Life* (New York: Walker, 1971), chap. 6, quotes on 46, 49.

² Pryde, *Nunaga*, 46.

had been exiled by their own Inuit communities—for their crimes. Although he shared the opinion that the Family Allowance helped stop the killing of female babies and called the legislation a “godsend” for the natives and for the HBC trade (meaning “a lot of revenue”), HBC man Bert Swaffield reported that there was not much crime in the North when he was there (1917–60) except for “the occasional murder.”³ Communities like Perry River were clearly outliers.

The sentiment that the government ultimately saved Inuit from violent and difficult lives was common among the HBC people who witnessed their transition to settlement life. HBC man Peter Nichols thought the government had no choice but to reengineer Inuit life and the Northern economy for the good of Inuit: “Camp life had to cease. Dependency on country food had to cease. Trapping of white fox was no longer a valid economy for the Arctic. Other sources had to be *created*” (emphasis mine). However, he regretted what he saw as the loss of Inuit’s “pride” in their ability to make a living in that “inhospitable country” and maintained that the changes imposed on Inuit societies had simply occurred too rapidly: “In some of the more distant Eskimo communities, they could have lived happily for a number of years before it was really necessary to make these changes.”⁴ Trader Robert Chesshire thought that if the HBC hadn’t been in the Arctic, the government would have had to step in and do something (sooner, that is).⁵

Nurse and schoolteacher Barbara Heslop, the wife of HBC trader William Heslop (b. 1908, m. 1940), was conflicted as well. She admitted to feeling occasional guilt for changing the outlook of young Inuit as a Northern schoolteacher and also disagreed with the then-dominant idea that Inuit should learn English: “We move into their country. Shouldn’t we learn as much as we expect the Eskimo to learn? But we don’t. The Eskimo must learn English. Why? Because you can’t employ . . . an Eskimo who doesn’t speak English. Why? Because we can’t speak Eskimo and don’t learn it.” She admired Inuit and thought Canadians could “learn a lot from them.” But

³ A. T. Swaffield, interview by Wendy Owen, July 30, 1981, tape 2 of 3, T11-14, HBCA-OHI.

⁴ P. A. C. Nichols, interview by Shirley Ann Smith, September 5, 1983, tape 7 of 8, T11-60, HBCA-OHI.

⁵ R. H. Chesshire, interview by Jocelyn McKillop, September 10, 1981, tape 2 of 2, T11-29, HBCA-OHI.

at the end of the day, Heslop was proud of her work as an educator in the service of the Canadian state. Though she described the first generation to be Canadianized as a “destroyed generation” that little could be expected of, she thought the grandchildren of the first generation would benefit from the changes occurring in the Arctic. She reasoned that Inuit couldn’t be expected to leap to where white people were because white people themselves had not done this. In the final analysis, her judgment was unequivocal: the modern Arctic was “not as romantic,” but living conditions were “greatly improved,” the houses were “lovely,” and people had everything they needed for “modern housekeeping”—it was like “living in a small town anywhere,” and that was obviously an advancement.⁶

Wally Buhr and Len Budgell are two of the few HBC people on the record who held a different view. As Buhr put it, the government discovered that Eskimo people existed, said they couldn’t live as they did, and turned them into welfare people. He thought the schools didn’t have much to teach the children except for English and even declared this a sign of teachers’ unwillingness to put in the work to learn Inuktitut. Buhr unambiguously stated that whites didn’t do any natives any good and that the differences in Inuit living weren’t a sign of their being hard up, just differences—an economy that worked well for them.⁷ Budgell bemoaned the squalor, loveless promiscuity, and alcoholism that plagued modern Inuit in the 1980s “because it was too much trouble to let them range their own land.” He criticized the results of Canadianization and settlement life at length:

Tell me, is an old woman better off crouched on a bare plywood floor smoking a cigarette, with a wine bottle at her feet? Is she better off in a filthy sty because there is a nurse and teacher in tidy clean houses with a fence, clean people in clean surroundings who change their underwear every day?

Would that old lady be worse off out on the land in a clean tent, with her family around her, where her daughter and grand daughter will be betrothed in the ancient manner and wander alone on the land with

⁶ Barbara Heslop, interview by Barbara Kilvert, tape 2 of 2, T6-36, HBCA-JWA.

⁷ W. A. Buhr, interview by Wendy Owen, July 21, 1981, tape 2 of 4, T11-11, HBCA-OHI.

her mate to possibly conceive a child in beauty and love, a child that will be wanted and protected?

Ask the missionaries. They'll tell you that "The People" are promiscuous. They are promiscuous now in an ugly way. A girl's body will earn so much liquor, so many cigarettes, cheap ankle socks, tin jewellery. If the people were promiscuous, they were so in an open, loving, natural way. . . .

. . . What is the reason those people were snatched from their land, to live in settlements, where the land cannot support a concentrated population, where it cannot absorb their waste?

Is it better to have near children drunk, women subject to the most frightful degradation? Think of all the clean uninhabited land. I've seen them on the land, and I've seen them in the settlements. The government says they needed health facilities; they could have had radios, wind-generated radios to ask for help. Is it better to have the chance [of] an illness out on the land? To go to school in a settlement atmosphere than learn to be Inuit on the land?⁸

Forty years later, the best-informed people still hold the view that ultimately what happened to the Inuit homeland was good. In summer 2022, commenting on an early draft of chapter 1, a colleague wrote to me, "You do realize that every society has bullies who can get away literally with murder? So did the Inuit, and no doubt they were quite relieved when the RCMP could step in."

Most people's first instinct is to count every unregulated and unpredictable aspect of traditional Inuit society as a problem and look to government as the solution. Ultimately even the most radical scholars stand behind the government's intervention in Inuit societies, seeing this as the only solution for an allegedly declining trade, for a situation created by European capitalism. Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski in their 1994 book stated that

⁸ Leonard Budgell to Claudia Coutu Radmore, August 18, 1983, in Budgell, *Arctic Twilight: Leonard Budgell and Canada's Changing North*, ed. Claudia Coutu Radmore (Toronto: Blue Butterfly Books, 2009), loc. 2578–654 of 7497, quote at 2609–37, Kindle.

“family allowances and relief, given the collapse in the price of Arctic fox, were the only means by which Inuit could survive” and that “the [HBC] and its involvement in the Arctic economy” had created this situation.⁹

But Inuit’s stateless voluntary order did offer solutions. People kept their distance from violent bullies as much as possible, and eventually such individuals were expelled by their own community, as the Perry River exiles were, or executed by its members in the community’s self-defense. Not only is such killing not criminal, but there is no good reason why the people of a community—those related to the victims and the aggressors—can’t make the decision to carry it out. Those who condone the RCMP’s presence in the North as a source of peace simply support a monopoly of justice, in which only the privileged political class has the right to decide right and wrong. And, unsurprisingly, the political class almost always decides that they—the state—are right about everything. But it seems that Inuit society is not much more perfect than it was before the advent of conquest, arbitrary legislation, and the curtailment of the natural rights to full autonomy and self-defense. To the contrary, Inuit communities are plagued by substance abuse, suicide, crime, and latent despair. Individual bullies have been traded for an enormous bully that is nearly impossible to avoid, kill, or run off: the government.

Neither did the state have to step in to create industries for Inuit. Not only was the fur trade not in the dire straits that scholars have alleged, but the land and the marketplace had always challenged Inuit with their variability. People moved. They hunted less-desirable animals for food when the mainstays failed to materialize. They trapped different creatures as fur prices swayed. They had learned to supplement their original subsistence livelihood in various ways over time—whaling, hunting, trapping, making clothes, guiding people, keeping house, unloading ships, making carvings, acting in films, mining, and even becoming traders and clerks themselves. Inuit would no doubt have found a new trade to replace their fur income.

Because of government intervention in the fur trade and in Inuit communities, Inuit struggled to find work, to retain their culture, and to hold

⁹ Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 91, 31.

their families together. They've had to fight to regain some say over the rules they live by. They've had to rebuild their societies in the wake of conquest. Today, they still struggle sociologically and economically. Leftist academics call for more government money and more-tailored school curricula. They peddle socialist and communist doctrine. None of this will help Inuit. With state aid comes state control. The only way for Inuit to flourish is to be creative in making their own living—to liberate themselves as much as possible from the institution of the state, as peoples the world over must. But whether, when, and how to stand up to the biggest bully is for each individual and each community to determine for themselves.

The early twentieth-century Arctic fur trade and the traditional Inuit order within which it was set are a good indication of the kind of world that a fully stateless order with unabrogated natural rights for all—and with the rules that these rights entail—can yield: mutual respect, cross-cultural collaboration, economic interdependence, shared economic progress, universal legal accountability, and a shared interest in conflict resolution and peacekeeping. More important, this historical moment also sheds light on the ultimate villains in the global saga of conquest and colonialism: not private actors, not white people, not capitalism, but states, which sovereign individuals around the world have allowed to wield illegitimate power for far too long.

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INDEX

Note: The letter *f* following a page number denotes a figure.

- Abenakis, 48
- Adamie, Jacopie, 208
- Aklavik, 227
- Akpaliapik, Simon, 176
- Akpatok Island, 72
- Akulivik. *See* Cape Smith (HBC post)
- Alaskan border dispute (US and Canada), 57
- Alayco, Salomonie, 95n17
- Alberta, 4, 44, 50, 201
- Aleutian Islands, 160
- Alexandra Fiord, 175
- Alikomiak and Tatamigana, case of (Inuit tried for murder and hanged)
 - Alikomiak (defendant, executed for murders of Pugnana, Doak, and Binder), 62–63
 - Anagvik (shot and wounded by Hanak), 64n47
 - Binder, Otto (HBC clerk killed by Alikomiak), 63, 64n47
 - Doak, William (RCMP officer killed by Alikomiak), 63, 64n47
 - Hanak (killed by Alikomiak and Tatamigana), 63, 64n47
 - Alikomiak and Tatamigana, case of (Inuit tried for murder and hanged) (*continued*)
 - Hanak's wife and daughter (killed by Pugnana), 63
 - Ikialgina (killed by Pugnana), 63
 - Ikpakuak (Ikialgina's father, killed by Tatamigana and Pugnana), 63, 64n47
 - Pugnana (killed by Alikomiak and Tatamigana), 63, 64n47
 - Tatamigana (uncle of Alikomiak; defendant, acquitted for Ikpakuak, executed for Pugnana), 62–63, 64n47
- Allen, J. G., 108
- Amadjuak (HBC post), 140, 186–87
- American government. *See* US government
- America's Great Depression* (Rothbard), 141, 149
- anarchy. *See* statelessness
- Angulalik (trader for Canalaska Trading Company), 1
- animal oil, 103n43, 230
 - marine mammal oil, 233
 - oil lamps, oil stoves, 176, 228–29
 - seal oil, 14, 95n17, 103n43
 - whale oil, 14, 71, 73, 95n17, 103–4
- See also* petroleum

- animal skins, skinning
 clothing, bedding, and boots
 from, 18, 70, 104, 104n47
 commons, skin harvesting in
 definition of, 189n61
 income from trade in, 82n44,
 107
 See also bears; Canadian Inuit
 housing; qarmat; caribou;
 seals
- Annales school (French historical
 school), 8. *See also* Marxist theory
- annexation of Canada by US, 53–54
- Arctic Archipelago (*also known as*
 Arctic Islands), 5, 52–53, 174, 185,
 189
 High Arctic, 174, 176–78, 185
- Arctic Bay (HBC post)
 established and shuttered by the
 state, 140, 169–70
 fox trade prospects at (1966), 220
 housing and income at, 223n11,
 230
 mining employment at, 236
 soapstone from, 235
- Arctic Co-operative Development
 Fund, 241. *See also* Canadian Inuit
 co-ops
- arctic foxes
 blue, 1, 91
 bubble and crash, 135, 139–40,
 146, 164
 clothing and fashion accessories,
 manufacture into, 1, 69
 conservation and fur farming
 of, 190–91, 193 (*see also* fox
 farming)
 origins of trade in, 14, 86
 population cycles, 101, 151, 213,
 220
- arctic foxes (*continued*)
 prices (*see* fox prices)
 silver, 191–92
 trapping and preparation of, 89,
 96, 103
- arctic fox prices. *See under* fox prices
- arctic fox trade. *See under* fox trade
- Arctic fur trade. *See fur trade*,
 Canadian fur trade
- Arctic Islands Act, 53
- Arctic Islands Preserve, 169, 171f
- Arctic Justice* (Grant), 18, 61, 72
- Arctic land management, 166
- Arctic Migrants/Arctic Villagers*
 (Damas), 216, 219, 222, 227
- Arctic Quebec. *See northern Quebec*
 (Arctic Quebec)
- Arctic traders, Arctic trading posts,
 1, 11, 44
- Arctic trappers, 96
- Arctic Twilight* (Budgell), 249–50
- Arctic whaling industry. *See whaling*
- Arnakallak, Samuel, 177–78
- asbestos, 220, 235, 238–39. *See also*
 mining
- Asbestos Hill mine, 236, 238
- Attangalaaq, Norman, 29–30
- Audlaluk, Larry, 174–78
 Audlaluk, Elijah (brother of
 Larry), 176
 Audlaluk, Samwillie (brother of
 Larry), 178
- Austrian school of economics, 9, 68
 subjective theory of value, 68,
 82, 141
 theory of supply and demand,
 139, 141
 See also Great Depression;
 Hoppe, Hans-Hermann;
 Rothbard, Murray N.

- Awa, Apphia Agalakti, 211, 214–16, 229
 Arvaarluk (great-aunt of Apphia, adopted her as infant), 211
 Ilupaalik (great-uncle of Apphia), 211
 Kublu (father of Apphia), 211
 Suula (mother of Apphia), 216
 Awa, Arvaluk, 214
 Awa, Awa Mathias, 214–16
 Awa, Oopah, 216
 Awa, Solomon, 214
- Bache Peninsula. *See* Bache Peninsula (RCMP detachment)
 Bache Peninsula (RCMP detachment), 58
 Baffin Island
 cash economy and welfare payments, 211, 227
 fox trade and trading posts, 96, 101, 115, 170
 Inuit dwellings and settlement patterns, 18, 92
 mining ventures, 235–36
 reindeer-farming experiment, 187
 sovereignty claims and RCMP detachments, 4, 53, 57–58
 whalers and HBC supply ships, 13, 71
 Baffin Trading Company (BTC), 88, 115, 123–24, 197n13, 201, 209
 Cape Dorset post, 115, 123
 Diana Bay post, 115
 Port Harrison post, 115, 123
 Sugluk Bay post, 115
 Bailey, S. J., 207
 Baillie Island, 60n40
 Baker Lake, 66, 104
- Bank of Canada, 143, 144n23
 Bank of England. *See under* British government, British state, British crown
 Barr, William, 14n3
 Bathurst Inlet, 34, 66
 bears, 160
 brown and black bears, 70, 221
 polar bears, 1, 17, 70, 95n17, 106, 151, 160, 221
 beaver, 70, 78–79, 188
 beaver preserves, 186–88, 190
 made beaver price schedule, 78–79
Beaver, The (Hudson's Bay Company employee magazine), 112
 Beechey Island, 56
 benign neglect, 5
 big game, 17, 73, 180. *See also* bears; caribou; musk ox
 Big Island, 93, 97–98
 Bird's Hill Fur Farm (silver foxes and mink), 191–92
 Blacklead Island (HBC post), 140
 blue foxes. *See* arctic foxes
 Bradbury, Cecil E., 186
 breakup (of sea ice), 17, 19, 226
 British Columbia, 4
 British government, British state, British crown
 Bank of England, 140, 143
 British Board of Trade, 137
 British credit expansion, British inflation, British purchasing power, 140, 142
 British exports, 142
 British House of Commons, 50
 British jurisdiction, rule, state authority, sovereignty, 4, 43–44, 53

- British government, British state
(*continued*)
 British land claims, 44, 52
 British Parliament, United
 Kingdom Parliament, 50,
 136, 153
 British pound, 51n10
British North America Act (Canada's
 constitution), 52
Brown, Jennifer S. H., 44n1
Bruce, W. V., 38
Brunner, D. K., 236–38
Budgell, Leonard “Len,” 34
 carving and walrus ivory at
 Wolstenholme, 233
 fur preparation at Hebron and
 Wolstenholme, 91n9
 Inuit trading journeys to
 Labrador, 95
 reindeer farming, on failure of,
 187
 sealskins and sealskin boots at
 Hebron, 105
 settlement life, criticism of, 249
 summer occupation, on absence
 of, 232
Buffitt, Raymond, 222, 241
Buhr, Margaret “Marge,” 114
Buhr, W. A. “Wally,” 103
 Family Allowance credits with-
 held, 208
 fox prices and fur farming,
 191–92, 221
 government's transformation of
 Inuit, views on, 249
 HBC ventures and post duties,
 125n43, 232
 independent traders' prices, on,
 123
Buhr, W. A. “Wally” (*continued*)
 RCMP constables, relations with,
 125n44
 relief and welfare bills, 197, 199,
 202
 subsistence and country food,
 103n43
 welfare economy displacing fur,
 223
Burgess, Helen, 220, 227n25, 229, 236
business cycles, 143, 147
 boom, bubble economies, 11, 53,
 157
 credit-induced growth, gov-
 ernment-project-induced
 opportunities, 108, 133, 140,
 143–45, 147–48, 155, 163,
 219, 221, 223
 deficit war spending, wartime
 economic interventions,
 148, 164
 postwar currency manipulation,
 164 (*see also* inflation: mon-
 etary inflation)
 recession, 143, 146, 148, 241 (*see*
 also Great Depression)
 See also inflation
cadmium, 235. *See also* mining
Caldwell, Mr. (killed by Inuit), 66
Calgary, 147
Cambridge Bay, 164
Campbell, “Big Bill,” 78
Campbell, Bruce, 106, 112, 114,
 123–24
Canada East, 52n11
Canada West, 52n11

- Canadian Confederation, 52–53.
See also annexation of Canada by US; British North America Act; Canada East; Canada West
- Canadian conservation policy, 164, 166, 186
- Canadian constitution, 52
- Canadian dollar, 51n10, 52, 140, 143
- Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age, The* (Ray), 9, 75, 147
- Canadian government, 43, 135–36, 158–60, 197
 arrival in Inuit homeland, 6–7
 Canadian jurisdiction, rule, state authority, sovereignty, 5, 43, 48, 55–56, 58–59, 165, 185
 conservation and game-law policy (*see* Canadian conservation policy)
 Family Allowance policy (*see* Family Allowances)
 housing policy (*see* Canadian Inuit housing: state-provided housing)
 Inuit relief policies, 11, 196, 199, 204
 Inuit relocations (*see* Canadian Inuit relocations)
 justice, imposition of state (*see* justice, injustice: political justice, state justice)
 language suppression (*see under* Inuktitut (Inuit language))
 schooling requirements (*see under* Family Allowances)
 wartime economic controls (*see* economic restrictions)
- Canadian government (*continued*)
See also benign neglect; Canadianization of Inuit; Defence of Canada Regulations; Emergencies Act (Canada); Royal Canadian Air Force; Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP); War Measures Act; weather stations
- Canadian Handicrafts Guild (*now known as* La Guilde), 234
- Canadian Inuit co-ops, 239–42
See also Arctic Co-operative Development Fund; Eskimo Loan Fund; and *individual co-op names*
- Canadian Inuit diet
 country food, seasonal hunting, 17
 dry foodstuffs, 2, 69
 fishing and fish in, 17, 102, 161, 176, 179–81
 food as property, food sharing, food stealing, 28–29, 31, 111, 114, 180–81
 government regulation, Family Allowance, food relief, 173, 205, 209, 251
 hunger, food shortages, starvation, 161, 176–77
 store-bought food, settlement diet, 226, 248
 trade, credit, food provisioning, 72, 101–4, 118, 126, 151
- Canadian Inuit housing
 igloos, 17–18, 25, 64, 95n17, 111, 129, 176, 179, 181–82, 185, 229

- Canadian Inuit housing (*continued*)
 matchboxes (plywood shacks), 228
 qarmat (small dugouts with skin roof), 18
 sod houses, 17–18, 18n2, 25, 25n21, 176
 state-provided housing, 7, 228–31, 237
 tupiks (tents of sealskin or caribou skin), 18
- Canadian Inuit relocations, 11, 174
 Alexandra Fiord, 175
 Craig Harbour, 175, 177
 Eskimo Point, 185
 Grise Fiord, 176–78
 Henik Lake, 179–80, 185
 Mounik (Caribou Inuk imprisoned for instigating mining camp robbery), 180
 Ohootuk (Caribou Inuk imprisoned for instigating mining camp robbery), 180
 Nueltin Lake, 179
 Resolute Bay, 175, 178
 Whale Cove, 185
- Canadian Inuit sociolegal order
 arranged marriages and marital rape, 36, 40, 76
 assisted suicide for feeble elders, 247
 barter, cashless society, 2, 79, 226
 blood feuds, 39, 247
 communal property, 25 (*see also* private property)
- Canadian Inuit sociolegal order (*continued*)
 de facto Inuit jurisdiction, stateless natural law, 14–15, 19, 36, 43 (*see also under* natural law)
 economic interdependence and shared economic progress, 3, 72–73, 120, 122, 210, 240, 243, 246, 252
 executions of insane and violent people, 247
 free trade and mutual self-interest, 1, 3, 10, 41, 64, 109, 122, 133, 139
 infanticide and female infant abandonment, 36–40, 247
 intermarriage, 1n1, 3, 112
 kin, kinship, 2, 6, 19, 27–29, 35, 41n57, 81, 166, 184
 landholding, land claim, title, tenure, freehold, usufruct, 4, 22–24, 27–28, 55, 190
 murder, 6–7, 32, 34–37, 62n45, 63, 64n47, 65–66, 72, 181–82, 246–47 (*see also* Alikomiak and Tatamigana, case of; Nuqallaq, Ululijarnaat, and Aatitaaq, case of; *Regina v. Kikkik*; Sinnisiak and Uluksuk, cases of)
 mutual respect and cross-cultural collaboration, 6, 9–10, 15, 19, 43, 67, 113, 204n38, 252

Canadian Inuit sociolegal order
(*continued*)

- peaceful, nonintrusive coexistence; shared conflict resolution and peacekeeping, 1n1, 2, 6, 10, 15, 41, 66–67, 72–73, 76, 111, 127–28, 130–31, 245, 252
- seminomadic hunter-gatherers, 2, 17
- sovereignty, 13–41, 125
- statelessness, near statelessness, nominal state rule, 10–11, 14–15, 43 (*see also* benign neglect)
- universal legal accountability, 6, 10, 32, 202, 246, 252
- wife-sharing arrangements, 40n57

Canadian Inuit transportation

- Canadian Eskimo dogs, 19
- kayaks, 17
- komatik (wooden sled pulled by Canadian Eskimo dogs), 18–19, 30, 181
- snowmobiles, 245
- umiaks (larger, canoe-like boats), 17

Canadianization of Inuit, 125, 204, 237, 249

Canadian land claims, 43, 54–56, 165, 244n80, 245

Canadian North, Canadian Arctic.
See Arctic Islands Act; eastern Arctic; western Arctic

Canadian Parliament, 166, 183, 203

Canadian police. *See* Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)

Canadian South, 15, 147

Canalaska Trading Company, 1

Cantillon effect, 145

Cantley, James, 115, 209

Cape Dorset (HBC post)

- carving and cooperative trade, 233, 235, 239–40
- competition at, 115, 123
- housing and infrastructure, 226n21, 229–30
- post trade at, 103
- prices at, 221, 222n8
- relief at, 198–99

Cape Fullerton, 57, 66, 71, 74. *See also* Fullerton Harbour (RCMP detachment)

Cape Smith (HBC post)

- carving purchases at, Houston's, 234
- established (1922), 140
- fox boom and credit at (1941–42), 155
- hardship reported at (1924), 128
- provisioning and subsistence at, 105
- relief at, 198

Cape Wolstenholme, 96

caribou, 17–18

- caribou skins, 18, 70, 72, 151, 169, 180, 182, 187, 210, 215, 233

conservation policy and hunting

- licenses, 166, 172–73, 176
- as food staple, 17, 29, 161, 176, 180–81

- reindeer as substitute for, 186, 186n54, 187

- seasonal hunts, 17, 91, 104, 211
- trade in pelts of, 1

See also Canadian Inuit diet

Caribou Inuit, 179n40

- Carlos, Ann M., 9
- Carney, Jeanette, 235, 237–38
- carving industry
- co-ops dealing in, 241
 - government promotion of, 237, 239
 - income from, 161, 227, 251
 - narwhal tusks (ivory), 233
 - old whalebone, 233
 - origins and growth of, 231–32, 232n41, 233–35
 - serpentine steatite, 234–35
 - soapstone, Arctic Bay soapstone, 95n17, 235
 - walrus teeth, 233
- See also* walrus: ivory
- Catholic Church, 54
- CGS *C. D. Howe* (Canadian Coast Guard ship), 175, 178
- Chamberlain, Ted, 237
- Chapman, Michael, 39
- Charles II (king), 44
- Cheshire, Robert, 137
- career and HBC offices, 222–23
 - fur farming ventures, 191–92
 - government's role in the Arctic, views on, 248
 - Ottawa trips on Northern development, 212–13
 - posts' conversion to department stores, 224
 - preserves for beaver and muskrat, 187
 - relief and Family Allowance, correspondence on, 206, 208–9
- Chesterfield Inlet (HBC post; RCMP detachment), 61, 66
- white fox farm at, 191
- Churchill (HBC post; NWMP detachment from 1905), 60n40, 74, 227
- Claudia (Labrador Inuk executed by her community), 34–35
- Clyde River (HBC post), 140
- Cold War, 6, 158–60, 162. *See also* business cycles
- Comanche Empire, The* (Hämäläinen), 24
- conservation
- fur farming as private answer to depletion, 190–93
 - HBC preserves and reindeer venture, 186–90
 - private property as basis of, 166, 189–91, 193
 - state policy and game legislation, 164, 166–74, 186
- See also* musk ox; wildlife preserves, game preserves, sanctuaries
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, 235
- Copland, A. Dudley, 79n31, 113
- copper, 5, 239. *See also* mining
- Copper Inuit (Coronation Gulf Inuit), 38–39, 61–62, 62n45, 63–64, 64n47, 65. *See also* Coronation Gulf
- Coppermine (*present-day* Kugluktuk), 62, 164
- Cormack, J. G., 108
- Coronation Gulf, 34, 61–63. *See also* Copper Inuit
- Craig Harbour (RCMP detachment), 57–59

- credit expansion, 144–45. *See also under* British government, British state, British crown; US government
 Crees, 48, 75, 77n25, 78–79, 207
- Dakotas (*also known as* Sioux), 77n25
 Damas, David, 216, 219n1
 d'Anglure, Bernard Saladin, 28
 Danish government, 58
 Davis, John, 52
 Davis Strait, 70–71
 Deception Bay, 235–36
 Defence of Canada Regulations, 153
 Defence of the Realm Act, 136
 Denmark, 56
 Dennis, Matthew, 22
 Department of Indian Affairs, 188, 204–5
 Department of Justice, 65
 Department of Mines and Resources, 208. *See also* mining
 Department of National Health and Welfare, 206–7
 Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNA), 19, 180, 206, 220
 Department of Resources and Development, 177
 Department of the Interior, 168, 196
 Department of Transport, Department of Transportation, 158, 177, 221
 depression, 201. *See also* Great Depression
 diamonds, 5. *See also* mining
 Diana Bay (HBC post), 115, 116
 Digges Islands, 13, 72–73
 Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, 160, 160n74, 161–63
- DNA. *See* Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNA)
 Dominion of Canada, 52–53
 Douglas, William, 191–92
 Duffy, R. Quinn, 168
Dum diversas (1452), 54n20
 Dundas Harbour. *See* Dundas Harbour (RCMP detachment)
 Dundas Harbour (RCMP detachment), 58
- eastern Arctic
 boundaries and definition of, 10–11
 economic destabilization of, wartime and Depression, 133, 139–40, 149–52, 156–57
 economic transformation of, postwar, 220, 222–23, 227n25, 232, 236–37, 240
 fox trade in, establishment and conduct of, 86, 88–91, 101, 104, 107–8, 110–12, 115–16
 relief and welfare policy in, 196–99, 209
 state authority in, limited extent of, 5, 7, 14–15, 41, 57–60, 65n48, 66–67, 128
 whaling and early fur trade in, 44, 70–71, 74
 See also Arctic Archipelago; northern Quebec (Arctic Quebec); subarctic
- Eastern Arctic Patrol, 58–59
 Eastmain (HBC post; *initially called* East Main House), 79
 Eber, Dorothy Harley, 71
 economic restrictions, 135–40, 152–55

- Edmonton, 137, 147
 Ellesmere Island, 56–58, 174–76
 Emergencies Act (Canada), 136n2
 Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, 153
 English crown, British crown, 4, 44–46, 48–49, 51, 69
 HBC royal charter, 44, 49
 Ennadai Lake, 179–80, 185
 “Enough to Keep Them Alive” (Shewell), 204
 ermine, 1, 70
 Eskimo Loan Fund, 240, 242. *See also* Canadian Inuit co-ops
 Eskimos (outdated term). *See Canadian Inuit entries*
Ethics of Liberty, The (Rothbard), 20–21, 38
 European Union, 222

 Family Allowance Act, 7, 203, 213–14
 Family Allowances (FA), 203
 fur trade, effect on, 7, 134, 206, 210–11, 213, 221, 223, 251
 HBC administration and abuse of, 204, 206–9, 212
 infanticide, end of, 247–48
 Inuit adoption and sharing of, 211
 means testing of a universal benefit, 209–10
 payment in kind and later by check, 204–6, 226–27
 schooling and settlement required by, 214, 216
 Faulkner, G. N., 25n21, 220, 229, 231
 Finnie, O. S., 168–69
 Fisher, David, 229, 231
 Fisheries Act, 59
 fishers, 70

 Flamborough House (HBC post; *initially called* Cumberland Fort), 75
 Ford, Henry (brother of Solomon), 123–24
 Ford, Solomon, 115, 122–24, 151
 Fort Chimo (HBC post; *initially called* Fort Good Hope), 74
 HBC post trade and interpreters, 97, 124
 population and wage labor, 156, 237
 relief rations to Naskapis, 195
 Revillon Frères competition at, 89–90
 Fort Constantine. *See* Fort Constantine (NWMP detachment)
 Fort Constantine (NWMP detachment), 56
 Fort Herchmer. *See* Fort Herchmer (NWMP detachment)
 Fort Herchmer (NWMP detachment), 56
 Fort McPherson. *See* Fort McPherson (RCMP detachment)
 Fort McPherson (RCMP detachment), 57
 Fossett, Renée, 28, 36n47, 37n50
 Foxe Basin, 233
 fox farming
 Bird’s Hill Fur Farm (silver foxes and mink), 191–92
 Chesterfield Inlet (white foxes), 191
 McLure and MacKinnon Fox Farm (silver foxes), 191
 Mingan Fur Farm (silver foxes), 191–92
 Muddy Bay Farm (silver foxes and mink), 191

- fox farming (*continued*)
 - Pangnirtung (white foxes), 191
 - Port Harrison (white foxes), 191
 - Stupart's Bay Fox Farm (white foxes), 191
 - See also* under fur trade, Canadian fur trade
- fox prices
 - competition and bidding wars over, 90, 116, 120–24
 - crash of 1929 and Depression-era decline, 146–47, 149
 - credit system as buffer against low, 101, 109, 149–50, 152
 - fur farming and ranching, effect of, 192–93
 - postwar decline, claims of, versus continued fluctuation, 219–21, 223, 248, 251
 - recorded levels, 1917–71, 146–47, 154, 193, 220–21
 - relief and Family Allowance justified by falling, 209
 - World War I inflation and 1920s boom, 140, 146
 - See also* arctic foxes; fox prices; fur trade, Canadian fur trade
- fox trade
 - bubble and crash, 135, 139–40, 146, 164
 - establishment in the eastern Arctic, 88–89, 91, 94
 - origins and functioning of, 11, 14–15, 86
 - participation in, Inuit, 92, 96, 101
 - welfare economy, displacement by, 7, 210, 220
- fox trade (*continued*)
 - See also* arctic foxes; fox prices; fur trade, Canadian fur trade
 - Francis, Daniel, 9, 75
 - Freeman, Milton M. R., 37n50
 - freeze-up (of sea ice), 17, 19, 91, 226
 - Friedman, Milton, 149n37
 - Frobisher, Martin, 4
 - Frobisher Bay (HBC post)
 - ivory purchases at, 232n41
 - post trade at, 96, 108
 - prices at, 222n8
 - relief at, 198–200
 - wartime base and boom, 156, 163
 - Fullerton Harbour, 57, 66, 71, 74. *See also* Fullerton Harbour (RCMP detachment)
 - Fullerton Harbour (RCMP detachment), 57, 60n40, 66
 - fur trade, Canadian fur trade
 - British fur trade, 154
 - fur auction houses, 137, 139
 - Fur Trade Department (HBC), 224–25
 - Genuine Mackenzie Valley Fur Program, 228n31
 - grubstaking, 11, 70, 76, 84, 92, 101–2, 105–7, 109, 207
 - historiography of, 8, 107
 - origins and expansion into the Arctic, 70, 74, 93
 - practices adapted to Inuit culture, 15, 92, 111
 - prices, market-wide, 82–83, 87, 137
 - purgatory ledgers (*also known as* vest pocket ledgers), 109

- fur trade, Canadian fur trade
 (continued)
 semifree fur trade era, 2, 6,
 10–11, 67, 133, 252
 state intervention in, 152, 203
 subarctic fur trade, western sub-
 arctic fur trade, 2, 10, 48, 70,
 76, 79–80, 85n52, 92, 101,
 111, 139
 See also fox farming; fox trade
- Gallagher, William, 182
 Garry Lake, 247
 George River, 95
 George River co-op, 240
 Gibson, Roy A., 206, 208–9, 212
 Gjoa Haven, 164, 247
 Godsell, Philip H., 77–78, 82n44
 gold, 5, 57, 140–42. *See also* mining
 gold standard, 140, 142
 pseudo-gold standard, 142
 Gordon, Bobby, 236–37
 Gordon, Sandy, 236–37
 Grant, Shelagh D., 72, 219
 Great Depression, 146, 148–49
 Austrian explanation of cause,
 149
 Keynesian and monetarist expla-
 nation of cause, 149n37
 Greenland Inuit, 58
 Gresham's law, 141–42
 Grise Fiord, 176–78
 grubstaking
 credit-and-relief system support-
 ing trappers, 11, 70, 76, 84,
 92, 101–2
 Family Allowance supplies
 fraudulently used for, 207
 leniency toward Inuit debtors,
 105–7, 109
- Grumet, Robert S., 23
 Gulf of Boothia, 37
- Hall, Herbert, 122–24
 Hall Beach, 161
 Hämäläinen, Pekka, 24n18
 Hardin, Garrett, 189n61
 harpoons, 17, 30, 35
 Haring, Sidney L., 39–40, 64n47, 65
 HBC. *See* Hudson's Bay Company
 (HBC)
 Hebron (HBC post), 34, 34n39, 91n9,
 105
 Herschel Island. *See* Herschel Island
 (RCMP detachment)
 Herschel Island (RCMP detachment),
 57, 60n40
 Heslop, Barbara, 2, 248–49
 Heslop, William, 248
 High Arctic, 174, 176–78, 185
 Inuit relocations (*see under*
 Canadian Inuit relocations)
- Hippler, Arthur E., 37n50
 Holmes, Bob, 230
 Hoppe, Hans-Hermann, 21
 Houston, James "Jim," 232n41, 234,
 239
- Hudson, Henry, 4
 Hudson's Bay Company (HBC)
 charter (1670) and Rupert's Land
 grant, 4, 44–47, 49
 department stores, expansion
 into, 147, 223–25
 Family Allowance, adminis-
 tration and abuse of, 204,
 206–9, 212
 farming and preserve ventures
 (reindeer, beaver, foxes),
 186–92
 fur sales, end of (1991), 227

- Hudson's Bay Company (HBC)
(continued)
 fur trade commissioner, office of,
 96–97, 112n1
 Fur Trade Department, 224–25
 monopoly, 44–45, 49–50, 88
 New York headquarters, wartime
 move to, 154
 Northern Stores Department,
 formation and 1987 sale of,
 225, 227
 North West Company, competi-
 tion and 1821 merger with,
 44, 50, 79, 81, 88
 relief, distribution on state's
 behalf, 195–97, 201–2, 212
See also individual post names
 Hudson's Bay Northern Stores, 227
 Hudson Strait
 exploration and first contact,
 13, 73
 HBC supply ships in, 44
 post sites scouted along, 93, 97,
 99
 trade rivalry along (HBC and
 Revillon Frères), 90
 whalers in, 71
- Idjuadjuk (Inuit murderer spared by
 his community), 35
 I. G. Baker Company, 200–201
 Igloodik (HBC post), 233
 Imaruittuq, Émile, 30–31, 35, 40n55
 Inca Empire, 24n18
 inflation, 140, 142–44, 147
 deflation, 141, 146, 147n28, 148
 hyperinflation, 146
 monetary inflation, 7, 94, 143,
 148
 inflation (*continued*)
 price inflation, 141, 144–46, 148,
 223
 Ingram, Victor, 221
 Innu (*also known as* Montagnais), 48,
 75, 195
 Naskapis (northern Innu), 195
In Order to Live Untroubled (Fossett),
 26, 28, 36–37
Inter caetera (1456, 1493), 54n20
 Interdepartmental Committee
 on Relief and Tuberculosis
 Rehabilitation Rations, 205
 Interior Stores Division (HBC retail
 department stores), 224–25
Introduction to Arctic Co-operatives
 (Crowe and Erkloo), 241. *See also*
 Canadian Inuit co-ops; carving
 industry
 Inuit. *See Canadian Inuit entries*
 Inuit-Metis. *See Settlers*
 Inuit Owned Land, 243
 Inukjuak, 97, 102, 174–76, 178, 185
 Inuktitut (Inuit language)
 government publications in, 205,
 239
 government suppression and
 English imposition, 214–15,
 228, 249
 traders' fluency and cultural
 integration, 60, 78, 79n31,
 111–14, 123–24
 Iqaluit, 3n4, 96, 156
 iron, 5, 109, 236. *See also* mining
 Ivujivik, 220
 Ivujivik co-op, 241
 James Bay, 13, 75, 79, 188, 245
 James Bay and Northern Quebec
 Agreement, 245

- Janes, Robert. *See under* Nuqallaq, Ululijarnaat, and Aatitaaq, case of
- Jenness, Diamond, 61
- Jevons, William Stanley, 68n1
- Jones, H. M., 204
- Julius II (pope), 54n20
- justice, injustice, 3
- frontier justice, 72 (*see also* Canadian Inuit sociolegal order: peaceful, nonintrusive coexistence)
 - HBC charter powers of, 46
 - Inuit justice, Inuit injustice, 7, 10, 36, 41, 184
 - market justice, private justice, 142, 184
 - natural law as basis of, 6, 20
 - political justice, state justice, 4, 182–85, 217, 243, 245
 - restorative justice, 2, 6, 31–33
 - retributive justice, 32
 - social justice, 33
 - territorial monopoly of justice (*also known as* legal realm), 5, 14, 43, 63, 127, 251
- Kalluak, Mark, 26, 29
- kamiks. *See under* seals
- Katcho (Inuk tried for murder and ruled insane), 65
- Katsak, Rhoda Kaukjak, 161, 214
- Katsak, Sandra Pikujak, 215
- Kauki, George, 245
- Keewatin District, Keewatin Region, 147, 169, 179
- Kent Peninsula, 63, 64n47
- Kikkik (Caribou Inuk tried for child neglect). *See Regina v. Kikkik*
- Kinnewakan (Sioux), 77
- Kiumajut (Talking Back)* (Kulchyski and Tester), 172–73, 193, 203
- Kivalliq Region, 179
- Knight, Ralph, 233–35
- Korean War, 238
- Kulchyski, Peter
- framework, Marxist interpretation, 8, 250
 - fur prices, dispute over decline of, 193n71, 219
 - welfare and policy prescriptions, 189, 202–3, 216
- Labrador
- fox farm (Muddy Bay Farm), 191
 - Hebron post, 34, 91n9
 - Inuit subsistence patterns and dwellings, 18, 231
 - traders and interpreters from, 1, 112–13, 124
 - trading journeys to, 95
- Labrador Inuit-Metis. *See* Settlers
- La Guilde. *See* Canadian Handicrafts Guild
- Lake Harbour (HBC post)
- carving industry at, 232–33
 - founding of, 11, 93, 98
 - housing conditions in, 229
 - killing at (1926), 129
 - operations at, 103–4, 108, 114, 198, 221
 - RCMP detachment at, 58
- Lake Harbour (RCMP detachment), 58
- Lamson and Hubbard (LH), 1, 88, 115
- Lands, Parks, and Forest (branch of Department of Mines and Resources), 208

- Laplanders, 187. *See also* reindeer farming
- lead, 235–36. *See also* mining
- Learmonth, Lorenz, 108, 198
- Legislative Council of the Northwest Territories, 247
- Lewis, Frank D., 9
- liberal democracy, 8
- Lipman, Andrew, 24
- Lockean theory, 21
- Lofthouse, Susan, 13n2, 122
- London, 52, 97n22, 107, 137–38, 154
- Low, A. P., 33, 56
- Lower Canada, 48, 52n11
- Lower Fort Garry (*present-day* Winnipeg), 77
- lynx, 70
- Mackenzie Delta, Mackenzie River, 187n55, 207, 226–27
- Mackenzie Valley, 116, 157. *See also* fur trade, Canadian fur trade: Genuine Mackenzie Valley Fur Program
- Mackinnon, C. S., 59
- Manitoba
- boundaries, 1912 extension of, 166, 167f, 168
 - muskrat preserves in and near, 188, 188n57
 - relief-distribution contracts covering, 201
 - trappers' protest over fur buying (2019), 228
- Mansel Island (HBC post), 95n17, 129n51, 140
- market activity, 9–11, 246
- marten, 70
- Marxist theory
- capitalism as ultimate cause of colonization and indigenous suffering, 8–9
 - private property as departure from common ownership and statelessness, 8n11
 - state's role in atrocities against colonized peoples, 8
- Mary River Mine (high-grade iron), 236, 243n79
- May, Bob, 114
- McLure and MacKinnon Fox Farm (silver foxes), 191
- Melton, Frank, 89, 123–24, 187, 221, 222n8
- Menger, Carl, 68n1
- migration, seasonal migration, 2, 4, 25, 231
- migratory birds, 17
- Migratory Birds Convention Act (1917), 166, 171
 - Migratory Bird Treaty (US and Canada), 166
 - Migratory Bird Treaty Act (US), 166n3
- Mingan Fur Farm (silver foxes), 191–92
- mining
- closures and malinvestment, 238–39
 - development disputes, Inuit-corporate, 243–44
 - employment and training of Inuit in, 220, 236–38
 - exploration and early claims, 53, 55, 57
 - private-sector development, 235–37

mining (*continued*)

wartime labor shortages in, 157

See also individual mine and mineral names

mink, 70, 186, 192

monetary policy. *See under* inflation

Montreal, 137, 227n28, 232n41, 234

Moodie, J. D., 60

Moore, Percy, 209

Morantz, Toby, 9, 75, 207

Moravian missionary, 10n14, 34n39

Morrison, William R., 34, 57, 60n40, 66

Muddy Bay Farm (silver foxes and mink), 191

musk ox

Canada-Denmark sovereignty dispute over, 58

conservation legislation and preserves, 166, 169, 172, 174, 177

fur trade, early importance in, 70

Inuit subsistence hunting of, 17

muskrat, 70, 188

muskrat farming, 188n57

muskrat preserves, 186–87, 188n57, 190

Nanisivik Mine (lead-zinc), 235–37

narwhals, 17, 233

Naskapis (northern Innu), 195. *See also* Innu

natural law

definition and universality, 9, 20, 41

fur trade, as framework for Inuit-trader relations, 15, 109

natural law (*continued*)

versus institutional law, legislation, manmade law, political law, 14, 20–21, 41, 54, 60, 182, 184, 217, 251

Inuit customary law as expression of, 6, 24

versus lawlessness, 20, 127 (*see also* statelessness)

Rothbard and Hoppe on property and conflict resolution, 21–22

violations of (female infanticide, arranged marriage), 36–37, 38n51

natural rights

children and infanticide, debates over, 36, 38n51

self-defense and vengeance, 6, 251

state curtailment of, 3, 251

statelessness and, 6, 252

See also natural law; private property

Nelson River, 75, 197

Newfoundland, 1, 64, 222

New France, 48

Newman, Peter C., 71, 74

New York City, 137–38, 142, 154

Nichols, Peter, 96

credit, dog food, and skin clothing, 102–4, 108

fur prices and fox cycles, 155, 193, 220

government's role, views on, 248

HBC's role, views on, 126

Inuktitut and interpreters, 113

military bases and wartime posts, 125n43, 157–58

- Nichols, Peter (*continued*)
 Ottawa trips on Northern development, 212–13
 postings and life in the North, 102n39, 108, 155, 220
 nickel, 5, 235, 238. *See also* mining
 noble savage (concept), 24
 Norman Wells (petroleum), 168
 North Bay (Ontario), 137
 northern Quebec (Arctic Quebec)
 art (carving) trade in, 234
 contact and whaling in, early, 13, 71
 cooperatives in, 240
 credit and relief practices in, 101–2, 106, 150
 fox trade, establishment of, 74, 89–91, 93–100, 116
 jurisdiction and sovereignty over, 4, 197, 245
 mining in, 235–36
 Northern Stores Department (HBC division), 223, 225, 227. *See also* Hudson's Bay Northern Stores; North West Company (1990)
 North Rankin Nickel Mine, 238
 North Warning System, 160n74. *See also* Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line
 North West Company (1779)
 competition with HBC, 79, 81, 88
 founding (1779) as a partnership of independent traders, 44n1, 48
 gift giving and the captain system, 81
 HBC merger with (1821), 44, 50, 88
 North West Company (1779) (*continued*)
 name reused by the modern company, 227n28
 post site at Upper Fort Garry, 77n25
 North West Company (1990), 227, 227n28
 Northwestern European expeditioners, 13
 North-Western Territory, 4, 44, 50. *See also* North-West Territory
 Northwest Game Act, 166, 171–72
 North-West Mounted Police (NWMP), 56, 200
 Northwest Territories
 cooperatives, Inuit, 240
 council and governing acts, 168
 fur harvests and trapper subsidies, 213, 228n31
 game laws and hunting ordinances, 166, 170, 172
 white trappers, exclusion of, 189
 Northwest Territories Act, 168
 Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch of Department of Interior, 168
 Northwest Territories Council (NWT Council), 168
 Northwest Territories game ordinance, 172–73
 North-West Territory, 5. *See also* North-Western Territory
 Norway House (HBC post), 197
 Nunaga (Pryde), 41, 247–48
 Nunavik. *See* northern Quebec (Arctic Quebec)
 Nunavik Inuit Land Claim Agreement, 245. *See also* Canadian Inuit entries

- Nunavut, 44, 166, 189
- Nuqallaq, Ululijarnaat, and Aatitaaq, case of (Inuit tried for the killing of Robert Janes)
- Aatitaaq (defendant, coplanner of the execution, acquitted), 64
 - Janes, Robert (trader executed by Inuit community), 64, 65n48, 109
 - Nuqallaq (defendant, killer of Janes, convicted of manslaughter), 64
 - Ululijarnaat (defendant, assisted Nuqallaq with execution, sentenced to hard labor), 64
- Nutaraaluk, Lucassie, 30–31, 35
- Ogdensburg Declaration, 155
- Ojibwes, 48, 77n25
- Ostrom, Elinor, 190n61
- Ottawa
- legal authority over Inuit, 217
 - Northwest Territories administration, 168
 - records, registration of vital, 125n43
 - relief administration and cost cutting, 197, 202, 212
 - sovereignty, assertions of, 57–58
- Ouangwak (Inuk arrested for murder, perished at large), 66
- ownership. *See* private property
- Padley (HBC post; *also known as* Padlei), 181
- Palliser, John, 50
- Pangnirtung (HBC post), 71, 140
- white fox farm at, 191
- Pangnirtung (RCMP detachment), 58, 129
- Parsons, Ralph
- competition from rival traders, 97, 116
 - fishery proposed at Wolstenholme, 231
 - fur trade commissioner, appointment and policy as, 96–97, 97n22, 112n1
 - interpreters, recommendation to hire, 112
 - post siting and Inuit reports, 97–99, 99n32, 100
 - white trappers, support for exclusion of, 189
 - Wolstenholme post, founding of, 25n21, 93–94
- Partners in Furs* (Francis and Morantz), 9, 75
- Payne Bay (HBC post), 116, 116n13
- Peary, Robert E., 56
- Permanent Joint Board on Defence, 155
- Perry River (HBC post; *later called* Perry Island), 222, 247–48, 251
- petroleum, 5, 73, 168. *See also* mining
- Phillips, R. A. J., 213
- Pitseolak, George, 208, 233
- polar bears. *See under* bears
- Pond Inlet (HBC post)
- carving industry at, 233–34
 - High Arctic relocation of families from, 174–78
 - housing conditions in, 229–30
 - murder trials at, 64–65
 - RCMP detachment at, 57–58, 128, 130

- Pond Inlet (HBC post) (*continued*)
 settlement of, 19, 25n21, 216, 236
 trading post at, 71, 108–9, 140, 198
- Pond Inlet (RCMP detachment), 57–58, 64, 128, 130
- porpoise, 98
- Port Burwell co-op, 222, 240–41
- Port Harrison (HBC post)
 carving and soapstone at, 234–35
 competition from Baffin Trading Company at, 115, 123
 credit and debt at, 108
 food and clothing trade at, 102, 104
 fur prices at, 220
 relief at, 197n13, 198, 201
 relocation of families from, 174
 white fox farm at, 191
- Port Leopold (HBC post), 169–70. *See also* Somerset Island
- Portugal, Portuguese crown, 54n20. *See also* *Dum diversas* (1452); *Inter caetera* (1456, 1493); *Romanus pontifex* (1455); Treaty of Tordesillas
- Povungnetuk (HBC post), 140, 234
- preserves. *See* wildlife preserves, game preserves, sanctuaries
- prices. *See* *entries for individual commodities*. *See also* inflation: price inflation
- private property, 9, 20–22
 conservation and tragedy of the commons, 166, 189–91, 193
 justice and law rooted in, 6, 30–31, 33, 36, 41
 land, in, 22–28
 private property (*continued*)
 Marxist critiques of, 8
 movable goods and food, in, 29–30
 state claims and seizures, 4, 43–44, 54–55, 136, 165, 217
 trespass and violation of, 36–37, 40, 73
See also natural law
 Province of Canada, 52n11
 Pryde, Duncan, 41n57, 247
 Pujjunaq. *See* Mansel Island (HBC post)
- Qallunaat (non-Inuit), 161, 214, 216
- Radford, H. V., 34, 65–66
- radical liberal, libertarian, 3, 20
 perspective on colonialism, 8
 theory of natural law, 3, 8–9
See also rights; Rothbard, Murray N.; state, the (institution): radical liberal definition of
- Raglan Mine (nickel), 236
- Rankin Inlet, 227, 238
- Rasmussen, Knud, 61
- Ray, Arthur J., 9, 75, 138, 188
- RCMP. *See* Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
- red foxes, 70
- red squirrels, 70
- Regina v. Kikkik*, 38
 Hallow (husband of Kikkik, killed by Ootuk), 181
 Howmik (sister of Hallow), 181
 Kikkik (defendant, acquitted), 131n53, 181–84

Regina v. Kikkik (continued)

- Ootuk (brother-in-law of Kikkik, killed by Kikkik), 181, 183
- Yahah (brother of Howmik), 181
- reindeer farming, 186–87
- Rennie, Gordon, 3n4, 163, 233
- Repulse Bay (HBC post), 233
- Resolute Bay (Cornwallis Island), 175, 177
- Resolute co-op, 241
- Revillon Frères (RF), 1
 - Cape Dufferin, 97
 - Diana Bay, 115
 - expansion into Canada, 88–90
 - Fort Chimo, 89
 - generosity with food and credit, 118–21
 - HBC acquisition of (1926–36), 115, 122
 - as HBC's main competitor, 88–89, 95, 99–100, 115–16
 - Payne Bay, 116n13
 - Wakeham Bay, 90, 100, 117n20, 118–21
- Rex v. Alikomiak and Tatamigana*. See Alikomiak and Tatamigana, case of
- Rex v. Nookudlah, Oorooeungnak and Ahteetah*. See Nuqallaq, Ululijarnaat, and Aatitaq, case of
- Rex v. Sinnisiak*. See Sinnisiak and Uluksuk, cases of
- Rex v. Sinnisiak and Uluksuk*. See Sinnisiak and Uluksuk, cases of “Rich Men of the Country” (Harring), 39–40, 61–62, 64–65
- rights, 22
 - of animals, 68
 - to defend territory, 47

rights (*continued*)

- to enslavement and conquest, 54n20
- to fish, hunt, and travel, 26–27
- to mine minerals, 53
- to person and property (*see private property*)
- to regulate fur trade, 49
- See also natural rights
- RMS *Nascopie* (transport ship), 156
- Robertson, Gordon, 213
- Rogers, Gordon, 19, 25n21, 229–30, 236
- Rogers, Grace, 230
- Roman Catholic Church, 54
- Romanus pontifex* (1455), 54n20
- Rothbard, Murray N., 20–21, 37, 38n51, 141, 149n37
- Royal Canadian Air Force, 125n43
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
 - census taking and intelligence gathering, use of traders for, 59, 125
 - detachments and patrols, as sovereignty assertions, 5–6, 56–59, 129
 - fur traders, relations with, 60, 125, 128–30
 - game laws, enforcement of, 171
 - Kikkik, arrest and trial of, 182, 184
 - killings by Inuit, leniency toward, 5–6, 60–66, 247
 - legislation, weak enforcement of, 59–60, 66
 - relocations, role in, 175
 - See also individual detachment names

- Royal North-West Mounted Police, 56–57, 60, 168
- Rupert, Prince, 44. *See also* Rupert's Land
- Rupert House (HBC post; *initially called* Charles Fort), 75
- Rupert's Land
 boundaries and extent, 4, 51f, 53
 charter of 1670 granting to HBC, 44–47
 jurisdiction, imperial, 4–5, 49
 monopoly enforcement, 45
 remoteness shielding native peoples, 48
 settlement schemes, 50
 transfer to Dominion of Canada, 5, 51–53, 212
- Ryan, Terrence, 239
- Sabellum Trading Company, 88, 115, 198
 Cumberland Sound post, 115
 Frobisher Bay post, 198
- Saint Louis, 137
- Saskatchewan, 4, 44, 50, 188, 201
- Saskatchewan River, 188n57, 201
- Saskatoon, 147
- Schwartz, Anna Jacobson, 149n37
- Scotland, Scottish crown, 1, 4n6, 93
- sealing, 91, 96, 167, 199, 222. *See also* seals
- seals
 broth, 35
 fat, 103
 kamiks (sealskin boots), 72, 105, 233
 meat, 69, 98, 102, 161, 176, 186n54
 prices, 151, 221–22
- seals (*continued*)
 sealskins, 1, 19, 70, 104n47, 105, 106, 187, 220, 233, 241
 tupiks (tents of sealskin or caribou skin), 18
 See also animal oil: seal oil; sealing
- Settlers (Labrador Inuit-Metis), 1, 1n1
- Seven Years' War, 48
- Shewell, Hugh, 196, 202, 204
- Short History of Man, A* (Hoppe), 21–22
- silver, 5, 235. *See also* mining
- silver foxes. *See* arctic foxes
- Sinnisiak and Uluksuk, cases of (first Inuit tried in Canadian court), 62, 62n45
 Kormik (leader, alleged coplan-ner of the killings), 62n45
- Le Roux, Guillaume (Oblate mis-sionary killed by Sinnisiak and Uluksuk), 62
- Rouvière, Jean-Baptiste (Oblate missionary killed by Sinnisiak and Uluksuk), 62
- Sinnisiak (defendant, acquitted of killing of Rouvière, con-victed of killing Le Roux), 62, 62n45
- Uluksak (shaman, alleged coplanner of the killings), 62n45
- Uluksuk (defendant, convicted of killing Le Roux), 62, 62n45
- Sissons, John, 174, 183
- Skeleton Island, 94, 94n14
- skunks, 70
- Smith, Denis, 135

- Smith, Gordon W., 56
- Société Asbestos, 238. *See also*
Asbestos Hill mine
- Somerset Island, 56, 170
- Southampton Island (HBC post)
debt and credit at, 108
established (1924), 140
prices at, 221
relief at, 198, 200
wartime base and boom, 156–58,
163
- sovereignty. *See under* British
government, British state, British
crown; Canadian government;
Canadian Inuit sociolegal order.
See also Danish government
- Sovereignty or Security?* (Grant), 219
- Soviet Union, 160
- Spain, Spanish crown, 54n20. *See*
also Inter caetera (1456, 1493);
Treaty of Tordesillas
- Special Joint Parliamentary
Committee on the Indian Act, 209
- Spence Bay, 247
- SS *Active* (Scottish whaling ship), 93
- SS *Pelican* (supply ship), 97
- Starna, William A., 22
- state, the (institution), xxv, 4
arrival in Inuit homeland, 6–7
essential similarity between
colonized subjects of empire
and subjects of state, 8
fundamentally based on force
and inequality, 4, 7–8
leviathan state, 11, 185
radical liberal definition of, 3
restricting rights and ending
political autonomy, 7
state intervention, 10, 210, 242
state legal monopoly, 43
- state, the (institution) (*continued*)
state police power, 6–7, 43, 136
taxation, tribute, 3, 19, 185
totalization (absorption and
assimilation of social
groups), 8 (*see also*
Canadianization of Inuit)
underwriter of native oppres-
sion, xxv
See also benign neglect; Marxist
theory; statelessness
- statelessness
definition and near statelessness
of the Inuit homeland, 3,
5–6, 10–11, 14–15, 43
peace and prosperity under,
66–67, 251–52
police and legislation, weakness
of, 59–60, 128–30
See also natural law; natural
rights; private property;
state, the (institution)
- Stefansson, Vilhjalmur, 39
- Stevenson, Jim, 220, 223n11, 230
- Stony Mountain Penitentiary, 64
- Street, George, 34, 66
- Stupart's Bay (HBC post)
competition with Revillon
Frères, 119, 121
Inuit trappers wintering at, 94
post, HBC, siting and opening
of, 97, 99–100
rations and gratuities, 117, 118,
198
See also under fox farming
- Stupart's Bay Fox Farm (white foxes),
191
- subarctic, 174
credit and grubstaking practices
in, 101

- subarctic (*continued*)
 - cultural accommodation in
 - fur trade of, 15, 70, 74–75, 96n21, 151
 - hardship as part of life in, 179
 - HBC market share in, 140
 - relief issued across, 196
 - subarctic trading posts, traders, 13, 111
 - western subarctic, 85, 87
 - See also under* fur trade, Canadian fur trade
- Sugluk Bay
 - competition from independent traders, 115, 122–23, 151
 - Inuit trappers recruited by HBC, 93–94
 - starvation and trapping failure (1914), 101
 - trading journeys to Labrador, 95
 - See also* Sugluk East (HBC post); Sugluk West (HBC post)
- Sugluk East (HBC post), 100, 103, 123, 140
- Sugluk West (HBC post; *later known as* Sugluk)
 - competition from independent traders at, 123, 198–99
 - established (1929), 140
 - hunting and trapping income at (1966), 220
 - provisioning at, 103
 - relief at, 199
 - vital records registered at, 125n43
- Supreme Court of Canada, 197
- Sverdrup, Otto, 55
- Sverdrup Islands, 56
- Swaffield, Bert, 104n47
- Tammarniit (Mistakes)* (Tester and Kulchyski), 8, 193, 202–3, 216, 250
- Tester, Frank James
 - framework, Marxist interpretive, 8, 250
 - fur prices, dispute over decline of, 193n71, 219
 - welfare and policy prescriptions, 189, 202–3, 216
- Texas Gulf Sulfur (lead, zinc), 235–37
- Thelon Game Sanctuary (*today* Thelon Wildlife Sanctuary), 169, 171f
- Thelon River, 169
- Tikivik, Martha, 206n48, 229
- Treaty of Tordesillas, 54n20
- Tree River (RCMP detachment), 63
- Tuktoyaktuk (HBC post), 207
- Turcotte, Gilbert, 221
- Ungava Bay
 - emigration from, due to scarcity of foxes, 94
 - George River cooperative on shore of, 240
 - Revillon Frères, competing post on (1903), 89
 - trade journeys to Labrador from, 95
 - Ungava Trading Company, post on coast of, 116
- Ungava Trading Company, 115–16
 - Diana Bay post, 116
 - Payne Bay post, 116
- Upper Canada, 48, 52n11
- uranium, 5. *See also* mining
- US-Canadian defense agreement, 155
- US-Canadian military operations, 158–64

- US government, 50, 88, 155–56, 158
 - US Air Force, 156, 158
 - US credit expansion, 140, 142
 - US Department of War (*later* Department of Defense), 156
 - US dollar, 51n10, 140, 143
 - US Federal Reserve System, 143, 144n23
- Usher, Peter J., 25–27
- US stock market crash, 148. *See also* Great Depression
- Ugaqsiuvik (Inuit camp), 175
- Vancouver, 137, 147
- Venema, Janny, 22
- Victoria, 147
- Victoria Island, 164
- Voisey, Lewis, 180
- Wakeham Bay (HBC post), 150–51. *See also* Revillon Frères (RF): Wakeham Bay
- Walras, Léon, 68n1
- walrus
 - game laws exempting, 167
 - hunting of, 17, 91, 93, 103, 114, 161
 - ivory, 14, 35, 69, 71, 73, 232, 232n41, 233–35
 - meat and dog food, 69, 98, 103, 176, 199–200
- War Measures Act, 135, 136n2, 153
- Wartime Prices and Trade Board, 153
- weather stations, 156, 158, 159f
 - Arctic Bay, 156
 - Fort Ross, 156
 - Resolute Bay, 177
- weirs, 17
- welfare
 - corporate welfare, 150, 213
 - dependence concerns and restrictive policy, 152, 173, 202–3
 - fur trade displaced by, 74, 134, 193, 224, 237, 249
 - in Labrador (1890s), 10n14
 - state administration of, 7, 124, 206
 - as state paternalism, 211, 215
 - welfare economy, 219–24
 - welfare state, 7, 203
- West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative, 239–41
- western Arctic
 - customs and material culture in, 18, 37
 - fur trade and HBC posts in, 113, 140, 147
 - police and state presence in, 5–6, 14, 57, 59
 - relief and government income in, 197, 199, 212
 - violence and killings in, 34, 61–63, 65–66, 247
 - wartime and postwar military presence in, 156, 161
 - whaling in, 57, 59–60
- Weyer, E. M., 39
- whales, 17–18, 167, 176
 - blubber, 71–72
 - muktuk (beluga whale meat and blubber), 113, 114n6
 - prices for whale products, 73
 - whalebone, 73, 233
 - whale hides, 103n43
 - whale meat, 102–3, 106, 114n6, 151
- See also* whaling

- whaling
 - era of (1820–1915), 14–15, 70–74
 - fur trade, transition to, 2, 10, 75, 91–94, 231, 251
 - sovereignty concerns over
 - American whalers, 53, 55, 57–58, 59–60, 212
 - See also* whales; whaling and fishing posts
- whaling and fishing posts, 15, 70, 74, 115
 - Cumberland Sound, 115
 - Fort Chimo, 74
 - Fullerton Harbour, 74
 - Great Whale River, 74
 - Little Whale River, 74
- What I Remember, What I Know* (Audlaluk), 174–78
- Where the High Winds Blow* (Campbell), 114
- white foxes. *See* arctic foxes
- wildlife preserves, game preserves, sanctuaries
 - Arctic Islands Preserve, 169, 171f
 - HBC private preserves, 166, 186–88, 188n57, 190, 224
 - state-created preserves, 133, 168–71, 192, 212
 - Thelon Game Sanctuary, 169, 171f
- Winnipeg
 - auction houses, wartime fur, 137
 - department stores, HBC, 147, 232
 - fur farm, HBC's move to (1934), 191
 - HBC committees in, 97n22
 - trader interviews conducted in, 3
- Wolstenholme (HBC post)
 - carving and ivory trade at, 232n41, 233
 - fishery venture at, 231
 - founding and siting of, 11, 25n21, 89–90, 96–97
 - market fluctuations and debt at, 150–51, 155
 - relief at, 198
 - trade and trapping at, 91, 93–94
 - See also* Cape Wolstenholme
- wolverines, 1, 70
- wolves, 70, 187
- Women's Art Association of Canada. *See* Canadian Handicrafts Guild
- World War I
 - auction houses, rise of North American, 137
 - credit expansion and synthetic booms, 133, 141n17
 - government intervention, wartime, 135–36, 153
 - HBC, end of fur-trade dominance, 138–40
 - See also* business cycles; credit expansion; inflation
- World War II
 - air bases, and later DEW Line posts, 160
 - economic restrictions on the fur trade, 152–54
 - Inuit employment, forced limits on, 162
 - military boom in the Canadian Arctic, 133, 155–56, 158, 164
 - relief policy through the war, 196
 - state presence, minimal before the war, 3, 14, 43, 59

INDEX

- World War II (*continued*)
 trading posts, Royal Canadian
 Air Force fuel caches at,
 125n43
 See also business cycles; credit
 expansion; inflation
- Wright, J. W. G., 129, 209
- Wynne, A. C., 220, 236
- York Factory (HBC post), 75
- Yukon, Yukon Territory, 4, 50, 56–57,
 166. *See also* Northwest Territories
 and Yukon Branch of Department
 of Interior
- zinc, 235–36. *See also* mining

