

## **“If They Were Important, We Would Have Heard About Them”** **Inuit History Beyond Canadian Mythology**

### **« S'ils étaient importants, nous en aurions entendu parler »** **L'histoire des Inuit au-delà de la mythologie canadienne**

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#### Article abstract

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# “If They Were Important, We Would Have Heard About Them”: Inuit History Beyond Canadian Mythology

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## ABSTRACT

The community of Gjoa Haven/Uqsuqtuuq has recently received national and international attention for its proximity to the lost ships of the nineteenth century Franklin expedition. The locating of Franklin's ships in 2014 and 2016 has been followed by celebrations of the role of Inuit knowledge in finding the wrecks, and thought to hold promise for how Inuit and Western research partnerships are conducted. Yet many people in Gjoa Haven, and particularly its youth, have little knowledge of or interest in the Franklin story. Locally, Franklin stories are associated with Qablunaat (non-Inuit) interests in northern history, but they are not representative of Inuit history. We examine the relationship between Inuit and Qablunaat history in Gjoa Haven, with a focus on what is important to its youth. Although Franklin stories are of limited importance in Inuit history, they continue to influence how Inuit are perceived by non-Inuit and present obstacles to informing Qablunaat about Inuit history and culture. As young Inuit have more opportunities to interact with Qablunaat, the subject of history offers space for these youth to articulate their own views and priorities for learning and sharing northern stories.

## KEYWORDS

Inuit, Youth, History, Arctic, John Franklin

## RÉSUMÉ

«S'ils étaient importants, nous en aurions entendu parler»: L'histoire des Inuit au-delà de la mythologie canadienne

La communauté de Gjoa Haven/Uqsuqtuuq a récemment reçu une attention nationale et internationale pour sa proximité avec les navires perdus de l'expédition Franklin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. La découverte des navires de Franklin en 2014 et 2016 a été suivie par les célébrations du rôle des savoirs inuit dans la découverte des épaves, et on pense qu'elle est prometteuse vu la manière dont les partenariats de recherche inuit et occidentaux seront mis en place. Pourtant, de nombreuses

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personnes à Gjoa Haven, et en particulier les jeunes, ont peu de connaissances ou d'intérêt pour l'histoire de Franklin. Localement, Franklin est associé aux intérêts des Qallunaat pour l'histoire du Nord, mais n'est pas représentatif de l'histoire des Inuit. Nous examinons la relation entre l'histoire inuit et l'histoire qallunaaq à Gjoa Haven en nous concentrant sur ce qui est important pour les jeunes. Bien que les histoires de Franklin aient une importance limitée pour l'histoire inuit, elles continuent d'influencer la façon dont les non-Inuit connaissent les Inuit et constituent des obstacles à l'information des Qablunaat sur l'histoire et la culture inuit. À mesure que les jeunes Inuit ont davantage d'occasions de s'adresser aux Qallunaat, le sujet de l'histoire offre un espace pour que les jeunes puissent articuler leurs propres points de vue et leurs priorités en matière d'apprentissage et de partage des histoires du Nord.

## MOTS-CLÉS

Inuit, jeunesse, histoire, arctique, John Franklin

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The title quote for this article comes from a conversation between Mark and Jennifer in her community of Gjoa Haven, Nunavut. In 2014 and 2016, the wrecks of Sir John Franklin's failed nineteenth century expedition to navigate the Northwest Passage were located on the west side of King William Island. Gjoa Haven, the community nearest to the sites of HMS Erebus and HMS Terror, became the focus of national and international attention from a wider community of Franklin searchers, researchers, and Government of Canada officials. Many celebrated the role of Inuit knowledge in helping Parks Canada researchers locate the wrecks in terms that cemented the relationship of the community to the Franklin story. Yet Franklin stories are still largely unknown to most residents of Gjoa Haven. Among youth with whom we have worked since 2015, most had never heard of Franklin prior to the wreck finds. When asked why Franklin stories were something so new to younger people in the community, Jennifer replied: "If they were important, we would have heard about them."

This article sheds light on how Inuit youth in Gjoa Haven engage with historical research at the intersection of Inuit-Qablunaat relations.<sup>1</sup> Emphasis is placed on identifying what youth deem to be important in learning and sharing Inuit history. The term "important" is understood as holding social significance tied to Inuit cultural identity. Here, it is examined in relation to Inuit history and to how some youth in Gjoa Haven express the link

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1. While the spelling Qallunaat is common in eastern parts of Nunavut, Qablunaat is closer to the Nattiligiut dialect of Inuktitut that is spoken in Gjoa Haven. For this reason, we refer to Qablunaat in this article.

between knowing their history and their identity. What is important is also bound in colonial history, the prevalence of Euro-Canadian mythology in the Arctic, and the desire of Inuit to see these replaced with Inuit stories and history. The prevalence of Franklin stories continues to reflect how Qablunaat versions of history are seen as taking precedence over and even obscuring Inuit history. We also examine the desire of these youth to not only know their history and culture but also use this knowledge to interact and share with non-Inuit. History, in this regard, is a means of cultivating identity both within Inuit culture and in the cross-cultural context of Inuit-Qablunaat relations.

A brief literature review and methods section provide context for where this work situates within the growing body of academic research involving Inuit youth, as well as how findings and insights presented here have been drawn. Subsequent sections examine the relationship between Franklin research and Gjoa Haven, including the colonial dynamics of Qablunaat histories of Arctic spaces, and how Inuit resist and repudiate these dynamics. A final discussion section draws together some broader lessons taken from public presentations over recent years.

Two comments should be made before going forward. First, although we use the term *important* to focus on Inuit ways of knowing, we do not mean to suggest that other kinds of knowledge are not important or not valuable. With respect to the Franklin stories, some Inuit who have played key roles in helping to find the wrecks have drawn from Inuit oral testimony and history to help in the search. This work—which we discuss further below—has been very significant in helping to bring Inuit stories to the foreground. Second, while the observations in this article are based on collaborations and projects with many people over several years, it is not our intent to speak for others. We believe what we have written here to be true based on our work with Elders, youth, and a number of people in Gjoa Haven as well as our interactions with people in the South who have taken an interest in the Franklin stories. This article shares our experiences and points of view, and we know and respect that other people may have experiences that are different.

## Youth and History: Some Theoretical Considerations

Inuit youth—young adults or adolescents between the ages of 16 and 25, and sometimes up to 30—frequently appear in northern scholarship as barometers of social and cultural change. Measured by their ability to retain ties and connection with their traditional ways of life, youth have often been viewed by researchers as being emblematic of the challenges of contemporary Inuit society (see Dorais 1997, 2011; Newell, Dion, and Doubleday 2020). Social challenges experienced by youth, which scholars commonly tie

directly to settler-colonialism and the enduring effects of coerced social change imposed by the Canadian government, include language loss, declining engagement in subsistence activities, and an ensuing sense of cultural disconnect resulting in social alienation and high rates of suicide among youth (Gray, Richer, and Harper 2016; Kral 2013; Schwan and Lightman 2015; Wexler 2006). As such, there have been calls from Inuit leaders, advocates, scholars, and researchers to place greater attention on youth engagement in Inuit culture. In scholarship, there have been efforts to “bridge” Inuit and Western ways of knowing and to tailor research outputs to the needs of northerners in ways that are inclusive of youth. Advocacy for the implementation of Inuit knowledge or Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (see Wenzel 2004) in areas of education curriculum development (Crooks et al. 2017; McGregor 2012), mental health and social programming (Johnston 2014) and, more recently, Arctic environmental science research (Wilson et al. 2020) exemplify the perceived need to engage youth in the development of northern services and social programs.

Our examination of history comes from a similar interest in bringing popular and scholarly focus to issues that are important to Inuit youth. As we suggest here, engaging with history can also be an effective way of cultivating interest among Inuit youth in learning about their culture while attending to influences of Qablunaat society and culture. We are not the first to make this argument. Frédéric Laugrand and Jarich Oosten’s discussion of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit—knowledge that has proven to be useful in the past and is still useful today—addresses Inuit efforts to revitalize knowledge of previous generations for the benefit of youth. Roxane de la Sablonnière and her colleagues (2011) have shown that cultural identity clarity—expressed as the knowledge of history through cultural narrative—is directly associated with youth well-being and self-esteem. More recently, Heather McGregor has suggested that cultivating historical consciousness in youth can be an effective way to confront colonial legacies (McGregor, 2018). Yet what constitutes “history” and what is determined to be important in learning it is rarely straightforward. As we show here, questions of history are also closely associated with northern colonial history and the harmful and enduring impacts of Qablunaat disruptions of Inuit society. It is necessary to distinguish Inuit from Qablunaat ways of sharing stories to illustrate the contested nature of history and the implications of this for young Inuit seeking to strengthen their knowledge of and connection with Inuit culture.

The question of what counts as important works toward this end two ways: First, the question helps to distinguish Inuit from Western ways of sharing stories and the different social and cultural contexts in which stories are exchanged. Doing so helps to better understand both the situation of youth with respect to their efforts to learn the culture and some of the obstacles of doing so. As it relates to the Franklin finds, Western or Qablunaat

versions of Arctic history tend toward broad narratives that often center on Qablunaat actors. As we have seen with the Franklin research, popular interest is largely focused on resolving the mystery of the Franklin expedition—of answering the question of “what happened?”—and in doing so, further cultivating the mythology of the Arctic through a southern lens. This contrasts with Inuit ways of sharing stories and with the kinds of questions that youth in Gjoa Haven are interested in, namely, “who we are” and what it means to be Inuit. This, too, influences how importance in history is evaluated. Rather than think of history as a commodity to be packaged and sold to tourists, Inuit history is deeply bound in social relations centered in the family and passed on as lessons based on lived experience.<sup>2</sup> As we show here, subjects of popular interest around the Franklin research do not resonate with local Inuit because they provide little practical information for living a good life or connecting with Inuit culture. Second, the question of importance restores agency to Inuit youth themselves by reinforcing their strong desire to strengthen connections with their Elders and their culture. It is not only Elders and adults who wish to see youth more engaged in knowing Inuit culture; young people themselves have expressed this. As we further discuss, what is important is also a matter of prioritizing Inuit stories and Inuit ways of learning and sharing these, over Qablunaat ways. That Inuit youth must contend with these southern ways hinders them from getting to know their culture.

The research presented here draws upon our experiences working together and with youth in Gjoa Haven on a variety of projects related to Inuit oral history. The three of us first began working together in 2015, when we took part in the Nanivara Oral History Project run out of the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia. At the time, Mark, a Qablunaaq from Toronto, was a doctoral student at UBC and facilitator of the project and a newcomer to Gjoa Haven. Jennifer and Barbara, who are both youth from Gjoa Haven, were involved in the Nanivara Project first as students and subsequently as organizers and facilitators. The project, which employed participatory action research methods and popular education techniques, was developed to work with area youth to document local history and share this with the community. To do this, we conducted filmed interviews with Elders, most of whom grew up on the land and moved into town during the postwar settlement period. These Elders shared personal biographical history as well as their thoughts on the challenges faced by youth today and their wish to see their culture

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2. An anonymous reviewer of this paper emphasized this point and encouraged us to articulate it more clearly. We are grateful for the recommendations.

retained by the younger generations.<sup>3</sup> The Nanivara Project, which in 2015 included twelve youth in the community, also presented opportunities for youth to gather together and speak about many issues related to Inuit youth today (Stoller, Knowles, and Johnston 2017; Johnston, Stoller, and Tester 2018). In Gjoa Haven, our efforts went toward creating a digital archive of filmed interviews with Elders, which was made available through the local Nattilik Heritage Centre.

A significant part of our work together has also been shaped by opportunities to engage Qablunaat audiences in Gjoa Haven. While this does not entail a specific method per se, it is guided by an ethic similar to that of participatory action research, namely, by speaking with outsiders, youth assert agency over stories told in the South about their lands. Since the conclusion of the Nanivara Project, our work has included outreach beyond the community. In 2017, Mark and Barbara, along with Shaunya Ullulaq, Dawn Konana, and Curtis Konek of Arviat (Konek Productions), produced a short film related to Franklin research in the community. Jennifer and Mark have made conference presentations in Vancouver and Montréal, and the three of us have presented together at public events in Toronto. These activities have led to some of the reflections shared here on the desire of youth in Gjoa Haven to speak about their community and their culture to non-Inuit in other areas of the country. Much of this work has been made possible by funding from Parks Canada designated for community-based activities, and both Jennifer and Barbara have been closely involved with planning and coordinating activities related to Franklin research within the community, which has led to some very good opportunities to learn about and share Inuit history.

The following discussion is not intended as a criticism of people who have been involved in the Franklin research. Having said that, the opportunities presented have also reinforced the importance of learning Inuit history and the desire to see more Inuit history reflected not only in the telling of Franklin stories, but also in Canada's history in general. The experience of working on projects related to Franklin has generated stronger interest in developing a greater awareness regarding Inuit history. Observations in this article reflect this experience and this belief.

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3. The Nanivara Oral History Project was licensed through the Nunavut Research Institute and the Behavioural Ethics Research Board at the University of British Columbia. All Elders consented to being interviewed and were offered honoraria and gifts. Information about the Nanivara Project in Gjoa Haven, including all participants and Elders interviewed, can be found online at <https://nanivara.net>.



## Franklin and Gjoa Haven

Gjoa Haven, Nunavut, is an Inuit community located at the southeastern side of King William Island. Much of the history we have learned comes from stories of Elders we interviewed. In its present form, Gjoa Haven can be traced to postwar settlement that drew Inuit families to the Hudson's Bay post and the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line from the 1950s through the 1970s. The trading post, in particular, initially drew families on a seasonal basis; some to trade during the winter months, others to prepare furs during the summer. Rarely did these early postwar visits translate to permanent stays. By the 1960s and 1970s, however, this pattern began to change. The construction of schools and churches and the push by the Canadian government toward settlement saw a greater number of Inuit moving into town on a permanent basis. Some families came to the community for their children, and for parents whose children were taken away from them for schooling or medical treatment, the settlement was a place where they could learn information about where their children had gone, and when they might return.

One aspect of this legacy of settlement is the pronounced language disparity between generations. A majority of the population is below the age of 18 and generational differences are compounded by a low rate of language retention.<sup>4</sup> Elders are typically Inuktitut speakers, while younger generations speak English almost exclusively. Many adults raised in the community in the 1970s and 1980s are bilingual and able to communicate directly with both older and younger generations, but English is most commonly spoken to children. The transition to English occurred through the 1980s, aided in part by the introduction of television and various southern cultural media. One Elder we spoke with also cited the construction of the high school around the same period as a main cause for the generational division; the creation of the high school replaced traditional educational practices in the home and on the land and created spaces for youth to socialize away from their immediate families. Being the language of Qablunaat institutions (schools, healthcare, travel, construction), knowledge of English was also associated with Qablunaat education and employment opportunities within the community.

More recently, Gjoa Haven has become known for a different sort of history altogether. Gjoa Haven is the community nearest to where the lost wrecks of Sir John Franklin's nineteenth century expedition to navigate a

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4. Inuktitut (as opposed to Inuinnaqtun) is most commonly spoken among Elders in Gjoa Haven in a number of different dialects. Although Gjoa Haven is historically home to Nattilingmiut, settlement throughout the postwar period brought a variety of different dialects into the community. Some interviewed Elders characterized the dialect in Gjoa Haven as being quite unique; others commented on similarities with Inuktitut spoken in Baker Lake and Arviat.



Northwest Passage route were located. HMS Erebus and HMS Terror were found in 2014 and 2016, respectively. The location of Erebus—which capped one of the longest nautical searches in history—made headlines internationally to communities of Franklin watchers and set in motion a series of events aimed at bringing the finds to the public. Early agreements were reached with the British government that sent recovered artifacts to museums in the UK, while artifacts removed from the ships were displayed in elaborate museum exhibits in Canada and the United States. A dramatized version of the Franklin expedition was the subject of AMC’s *The Terror*, which ran for two seasons.

The location of the wrecks has also been celebrated for the role of Inuit knowledge in locating the ships. For many Inuit, and for close observers of the search for the Franklin ships, the finds confirmed the validity and importance of Inuit oral history to the Franklin mystery (Allen 2014; Eber 2008; Potter 2016; Woodman 1991; Weber 2017). In the late nineteenth century, waves of European and American explorers who traveled to what is now Arctic Canada to learn about the disappearance of the expedition (1845-1848) regularly consulted Inuit for information as to the whereabouts of the ships or the crew. Accounts of Frederick Schwatka and Charles Hall both relied upon and attested to the value of consulting Inuit in their efforts. Yet Inuit accounts have typically been held on the outer margins of “official” records of the Franklin story. Indeed, Inuit are represented as part of the backdrop, and their accounts have historically been met with doubt and derision. When Scottish explorer John Rae relayed Inuit accounts of cannibalism among Franklin’s crew, an enraged Charles Dickens dismissed the reports as “the vague babble of savages” (Harper, 2008). The reports have subsequently been substantiated. This sense of doubt, as discussed below, is understood among local Inuit as extending beyond the specific details of Franklin; it is interpreted as a form of doubt of the validity of Inuit knowledge and oral tradition.

The placement of Inuit in relation to Franklin stories also reflects the broader dynamics of Arctic narratives as constructions of white, Anglo-Canadian imagination (Atwood 1995; Gopnik 2011). As literary scholar Sherrill Grace once noted, Franklin stories constitute a topos of Canadian art and literature; a medium through which non-Indigenous Canadians explore, debate, and pronounce their own “nordicity” (Grace 1995). This national northern mythology has assumed literary and artistic significance well outside the archaeological investigations to find Franklin’s ships and comprise a canon of northern arts and literature that depict “the North” as accessible and palatable to southerners. As Jen Hill (2008) has noted in her study of the Arctic in Victorian literature, these define the Arctic as being white, masculine spaces. In a similar vein, Franklin stories have mostly offered depictions of the Arctic from the vantage point of Victorian and

Euro-Canadian observers. Some dynamics of this (discussed below) extend to how claims to ownership and belonging are made and address the power of metaphor and symbolism in the construction of northern imaginaries (Cameron 2015).

The recent public celebration of Inuit knowledge thus marks a shift in Canada's Arctic mythology with respect to how Inuit are included in these stories. While this shift is closely related to finding Franklin's ships, it also reflects wider public sentiment towards Canada's historical maltreatment of Indigenous peoples. The celebration of Inuit informants as partners in the search and the transformation of Arctic mythology appears tuned to an emerging national discourse toward reconciliation. Franklin stories, historically projections of whiteness and the cultivation of white spaces, now attest to the possibilities of reconciliation and to the complementary nature of Inuit and Western ways of knowing. This spirit of partnership is also evident in Gjoa Haven, where the finds of the ships were celebrated by Parks Canada as the basis of a new relationship between the federal government and the community. In 2015, nearly \$18 million was earmarked for development related to promoting local tourism, which included funds for cultural programming and infrastructure, such as expanding the local Nattilik Heritage Centre to accommodate artifacts from the wreck sites. The sites of the shipwrecks have since been incorporated as National Heritage Sites and are jointly managed by the Government of Nunavut and Parks Canada; the first such arrangement between Indigenous partners and Parks Canada. The latter has also funded a number of community initiatives through work with the Nattilik Heritage Centre, including a Guardians program to monitor access to the wreck sites. In 2017, the inaugural Umiyaqtutt Festival ("Shipwreck Festival") was held to commemorate the contribution of Inuit knowledge in locating the ships and included the dedication of a plaque by the head of Parks Canada, and later a visit by then Environment Minister, Catherine McKenna. Articles about the community have been featured in numerous national media outlets, and the community was profiled on the popular Rick Mercer Report, produced by the CBC.

Yet the enthusiasm shown for the Franklin discoveries outside of the North—and efforts to brand the community as such—is not matched in the community itself. Though Gjoa Haven is known to Franklin researchers as a place where Elders have knowledge of the ships, this knowledge is of secondary importance to the social and oral history of the region. As we learned during the Nanivara Project, which coincided with the Franklin research efforts, Franklin stories occupy only a small portion of Inuit history. While several Elders with whom we spoke have knowledge of stories and details of the Franklin expedition, this knowledge did not make its way into stories of the community. Youth in the community had little knowledge of Franklin prior to the location of the ships, and beyond occasional seasonal work opportunities provided through the research and the promotion of

tourism, appeared to have little interest in it. In the following section, we look more closely at the disparity between the celebration of Franklin in the South and its reception within Gjoa Haven. We do this by examining what it means to be “important,” with emphasis on youth and the relationship between oral history and Inuit cultural identity.

## **Franklin Stories as White-People Stories**

Gjoa Haven is marked by Qablunaat history, and not just that of Franklin. The community features many traces of European exploration, most notably that by Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, who overwintered twice in the small bay where the community is now located. He named the site “Gjoahavn” for his skiff, Gjoa, and “havn” (haven) to the safe harbour that the bay provided from winter sea ice that, in open waters, might otherwise crush the vessel. Amundsen and his crew of seven, the first to successfully transit the Northwest Passage by boat, are known locally for having lived with and learned from Nattilingmiut; lessons that enabled the crew to complete the voyage. Posters displayed in the community hall depict the photographic and textual history of Amundsen’s stay. There is also a cairn overlooking the bay, and a large bronze bust of Amundsen can be found in the lobby of the hamlet offices. In recent years, a number of artifacts from Amundsen’s collection have been returned to Gjoa Haven (Wang 2018). Some members of the community even claim a familial lineage from members of the crew.

Qablunaat histories cannot simply be ignored, and Amundsen’s presence is a reminder that history, and its commemoration, takes up space. There are similarities here with Franklin stories and recent efforts to brand the community as central to the Franklin finds to interest outsiders, to whom Amundsen and Franklin are likely best known for their role in “discovering” the Northwest Passage. Among local Inuit, however, associations with Franklin carry meanings quite different from those that inspire tourists. Franklin stories are what one person in town described as “white-people stories,” a term that variously reflects Inuit relations with and perceptions of Qablunaat. These include stories of initial encounters with Qablunaat and reflect early impressions of Qablunaat society, some of which depict pale-skinned outsiders as something to be feared and avoided (Watson 2017; Eber 2008). The term can also be understood to have a contemporary meaning: a reference to how Franklin stories have for years drawn the interest of white people and attracted them to King William Island. This dynamic may also explain an underlying resistance among locals to Franklin research. Concerns that visitors drawn by the search for Franklin might disrupt harvesting areas has been cited by local Inuit among reasons for reluctance to share knowledge about the ships. Similar sentiments are reflected in attitudes

toward the excavation work around the ships, and in the removal of artifacts from the island.<sup>5</sup>

Geographer Emilie Cameron, who has written on the relationship between northern mythology and the creation of settler spaces, argues that stories are integral to the history of colonialism in the North (Cameron 2015). In her description of Samuel Hearne's eighteenth century tale (the so-called Bloody Fall massacre), Cameron outlines how Qablunaat narratives assist in transforming Inuit lands, in this case lands in and around Kugluktuk, in service of settler claims. This "making" of the North grounds the relationship between stories and the ongoing history of northern colonialism. Inuit are not only affected by material developments (settlement, mining, construction of a cairn); their stories are enveloped within Qablunaat mythology, helping to render these developments more acceptable to the Canadian public, government, and industry. Similar dynamics can be seen in the Franklin stories. Inuit are cast within this mythology and Inuit knowledge is valued for its contributions to Qablunaat stories. A heading on a section of Parks Canada's website—"Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit at its best"—appears to suggest that Inuit knowledge is most valuable when employed in the service of Qablunaat stories.<sup>6</sup>

That Franklin stories are white-people stories can also be understood as a version of history in which Qablunaat narratives are privileged over Inuit accounts. However, Inuit experience these stories and narratives differently. Qablunaat tend to fixate on the details of the Franklin expedition itself, whereas Inuit who have been involved in the research on Franklin stories are valued for what they teach about Inuit oral tradition. An example from our work highlights this difference. In 2017, in the course of preparing a short video on the influence of Franklin research in the community, we asked those who had been involved in the research efforts to discuss how they felt upon learning of the discovery of what turned out to be Erebus. One member of the Parks Canada archaeology team recalled the following:

We'd been searching for years and years. [...] When I saw the [sonar] image, and I saw how big the remains were and how well preserved they were, my mind went to the mind of the archaeologist and it was basically, 'Okay, there's a lot there, we are going to learn so much.' [...]

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5. The removal of the artifacts has been a source of frustration locally because it removes from the community a potential source of income (through tourism) and because the extraction is thought by some to be a disturbance to both the wreck sites and the spirits of Franklin's crew. The search for and discovery of the wrecks has also raised longer-standing conflicts between the Government of Nunavut and the federal government of Canada with respect to the Nunavut Agreement. The Nunavut Agreement, made in 1993, denies Inuit control over coastal waterways, despite these having been historically significant hunting grounds for Inuit.

6. See <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/lhn-nhs/nu/epaveswrecks/culture/inuit/qaujimagatuqangit>.

But that first moment was really indescribable. It was so strong, and so filled with the history of the six years before.

Similar sentiments are commonly expressed by followers of the Franklin search, which includes a large community of online amateur researchers. Many are intrigued by the story and follow closely for news that might help piece together the expedition's fateful end. They are also keen to learn the whereabouts of Franklin's grave, which is thought to be somewhere on King William Island. In these efforts, they have often been joined by guides from Gjoa Haven, some of whom share a deep interest in the Franklin research and in some cases have been instrumental in locating the wrecks.

When asked the same question, Louie Kamookak, the local Inuk historian who for decades was intimately involved in the search for the Franklin ships, gave an answer that while not contradictory is notably different from that mentioned above. On the finding of *Erebus*, he said:

It was kind of emotional but happy, but kind of sad in a way that the Elders that were involved were not around. And we found the ship and they'd been true all the time, talking the truth, so it's almost like you wanted them to be there for the find.

Kamookak's role in the search for *Erebus* and *Terror* is now widely known among Franklin watchers (Watson 2017). Indeed, his story recounts his intrigue with Franklin stories at a young age after first hearing them from his great-grandmother. Later on, as a teenager having been taken away to government schools, Kamookak learned of histories that closely resembled his great-grandmother's stories. He subsequently devoted much of his adult life to gathering local history, place names, and genealogy in an attempt to know who might have acted as informants to European and American explorers who came looking for Franklin clues. His research, which includes volumes of notes from interviews with Elders throughout the region, constituted a comprehensive theory based on Inuit knowledge, with details vital to solving the location of *Erebus*. Although Kamookak was happy at the location of *Erebus* in 2014, there is a clear disparity in the meaning of the finds. For him, the location of the wrecks was a validation of knowledge that had been shared with him and by extension a validation of the Inuit systems of recording stories and oral history over time. The difference is also relational, heightened against a backdrop in which Inuit knowledge has for so long been doubted. In the commemoration of Qablunaat history, there is a parallel to how Inuit have been treated; the subject of history is often experienced by Inuit as not only favouring Qablunaat but as doing so at the expense of Inuit ways. Qablunaat stories take up space where Inuit stories

ought to be. Kamookak's account echoes sentiments of other local Inuit, as many feel the focus of the celebrations should be on Inuit history and oral tradition beyond that associated with Franklin.

### **“It's in us... It's part of who we are”**

If the colonial dynamics of northern mythology can be illustrated by how stories matter, what is thought to be important can be seen as a way of speaking back. The fact that Franklin stories are not widely known does not mean that they do not matter, in the way Cameron uses the term, or that they do not have meaning, in the way Kamookak finds meaning in oral history. It does suggest, however, that compared to Inuit history, Franklin stories carry little cultural currency. By contrast, Inuit history and learning this history is valued highly among youth. As Barbara says of oral history, “It's our history; it's in us. Inuit have been here for four thousand years. We need to know it because it's part of who we are.”

Knowledge of history can be thought of as important in several ways. As a component of Inuit culture, knowledge of history helps youth to situate themselves in present-day circumstances and distinguish between Inuit and Qablunaat ways. As Tester and Irniq (2008) have argued regarding Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit, Inuit knowledge does not merely preserve Inuit traits and values; by distinguishing them from Qablunaat influences, it protects Inuit ways from colonial encroachment. Yet knowledge of history has as much to do with the process of acquiring it as it does with the details of a particular event or story. It is not simply a matter of knowing history but of engaging with stories in a particular way—often as a way to make sense of the present (Lyons et al. 2010). As Bennett and Rowley (2004) point out, Inuit history reflects a fundamentally different understanding of the relationship between the past and the present than does Western history. In the Western conception, the pursuit of history produces knowledge in ways that undermine other forms of knowledge, as efforts to verify or substantiate something as “true” typically means cross-referencing, questioning, or testing information. These actions may insult those who share knowledge by appearing to challenge their validity. By contrast, Inuit history—and oral tradition, broadly—is grounded in the process of sharing between speaker and listener; a relationship bound by trust in one another and ethics of care. Differences between written and oral history also underscore what is understood by history itself. Inuit history more closely resembles what anthropologist Susanne Dybbroe writes of as tradition: “[M]emory does not just come naturally, as simply a storing of material or knowledge of the past... [W]hat we talk about as tradition is a cultural selection in terms of which the present is understood” (Dybbroe 1996, 43).



As it relates to youth, engaging with history is not merely about knowing history so much as it is a form of cultural immersion and revitalization. Sharing history is not limited to recalling specific details or events, but centers on the sharing of values and lessons, much of which are cultivated through family and kin relations. In turn, listeners are able to adapt lessons of history to their own circumstances. For example, many of the interviews we did with Elders revealed stark differences between how they grew up on the land and how young people today live in the community. Elders typically described their lives on the land in ways of which young Inuit today have no direct experience. Among other accounts were stories of life before any encounters with Qablunaat stories of giving birth on the land, and traditional customs of birthing and naming. Yet these differences did not diminish the desire among the community's youth to know their history; quite the opposite, they expressed feeling closer to their culture because of having worked with their Elders. The value of the interviews was in the process of conducting them. The interviews were typically far more revealing than were the stories shared by Elders; they offered both space for Elders to express their hopes for youth, and for youth to reflect on what they felt was important. While Elders told stories of their childhood that were quite different from how youth today have grown up, the stories often conveyed lessons of endurance and overcoming hard times—something to which the youth of today can relate.

Barbara's comment that youth "need to know" Inuit history speaks to how youth view their place within their community and to the role and obligations that come with being an adolescent. In our conversations, Jennifer and Barbara use "we" to refer to youth generally, and speak of a sense of connection with people of similar ages. "Youth" thus refers not merely to a demographic category but as a social group identified by its relation to others. The notion that youth fulfill a particular social role by engaging with their history, by engaging with their culture, is complemented by the way this work is received by others. Just as youth expressed a "need to know," Elders expressed their need to share.<sup>7</sup> Several Elders noted that such opportunities are less common than they were when they were young, and spoke of visiting Elders in their youth. Having tea together was often a place for storytelling, as it was for establishing familiarity in the local dialect (several Elders interviewed were raised speaking Inuinnaqtun dialect). For others, the process of sharing history allowed for a reconnection to

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7. Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit: What Inuit Have Always Known to Be True, edited by Joe Katetak, Frank Tester, and Shirley Tagalak (2017), features writings of several Elders on how stories and lessons enact social cohesion and balance within Inuit society. Chapters by Rhoda Karetak, Atuat Akittiq, and Louis Angalik are particularly enlightening, and we are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing attention to them.



memories thought to be lost and the joy of recalling them. Many spoke to how changes they saw in the culture were directly attributable to the arrival of Qablunaat. Moreover, several Elders expressed gratitude for the opportunity to speak about Inuit culture and to share their thoughts and often concerns for young people. Some of the Elders we spoke with expressed a view that youth today face greater challenges than those they faced growing up.

There is a final dynamic to be observed from the interview process: The transmission of knowledge and history does not end with the passing of knowledge and stories from Elders to youth. That youth occupy a particular role within their families and in the community is also linked to their ability to share what they have learned with others. Oral tradition is sustained in the passing of stories from one generation to the next; it occurs not only within the relation between listener and speaker but also with the wider understanding that those who listen will themselves also speak and share this knowledge with others. Therefore, central to knowing and learning one's history is the ability to speak and share history with others—which in many cases are their own children, as well as their friends and families. Increasingly, however, and for Inuit youth in particular, this also means sharing their history and culture with Qablunaat.

## **Sharing Stories in the South**

In the late weeks of summer, if the sea ice allows, waves of tourists come ashore at the southeastern point of Gjoa Haven. Cruise ships bring visitors from places like Germany, Scotland, Norway, Italy, France, the United States, and Canada. They arrive in clusters wearing identical oversized and colourful parkas provided by the cruise companies, telephoto lenses and tripods hanging from their shoulders. After a guided tour, they explore the town and purchase art and sculptures from the Heritage Centre before reconvening at the community hall, where they sample local foods and watch Inuit drum dancing, singing, and square dancing. Most of these performances are done by youth. When it's over, the visitors make their way back to the ship and on to the next community. In all, tourists will spend roughly two hours in the community.

Youth in Gjoa Haven rarely get the opportunity to speak directly to non-Inuit about their culture and history, even when Qablunaat wash up on their shores. But the ability to speak to Qablunaat about Inuit culture is an important part of building relations with non-Inuit while cultivating and maintaining a strong Inuit identity. With social media and more youth traveling south for education, work, or a variety of other reasons, there are more opportunities for youth to engage with non-Inuit and share their

history. Because history is an entry point for Qablunaat interest in the North, history is a way to start these conversations. As Louie Kamookak said in our interview with him:

It's very important to know your heritage and your history. It keeps you being happy for who you are. Being able to tell somebody from the south, 'I'm a Inuk and I know my history' is one way to be proud of yourself.

History is one way of speaking—or speaking back—to colonial narratives that place Inuit at the margins of Western stories. But the ability to speak back is not only a matter of subverting colonial discourse; speaking and sharing stories across cultures is also a means by which young Inuit can cultivate and preserve identity as being distinct from Qablunaat. As Edmund Searles notes, Inuit identity is not maintained passively but is rather actively pursued. This pursuit is simultaneously a repudiation of Qablunaat culture (Searles, 2008). Yet this repudiation should not be viewed as a retreat into “Inuitness” or a form of cultural isolation. Speaking or expressing aspects of Inuit culture also contributes to the sense of connectedness to that culture. This is not limited to cross-cultural interactions. Stéphanie Vaudry, for instance, shows how Inuit youth in Ottawa cultivate comfort levels through interactions with fellow Inuit in spaces far removed from their home communities (Vaudry 2016).

In the course of our work together, there have been opportunities to speak to and share with non-Inuit about our research. In 2017, we produced a short video on the relationship between the community and the Franklin research. There have also been academic conferences in Vancouver and Montréal and other public-facing events, and in 2018 the three of us were invited to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto to present our work together at a one-day symposium on the Franklin expedition. In our presentation to an almost all non-Inuit audience of more than 300 people, Jennifer and Barbara spoke about their community, the connection to the Franklin expedition, as well as some of the priorities for Inuit youth today. The following draws together insights gathered from work in Gjoa Haven and from the various presentations we have given in the South.

One of the main lessons is to see a positive conception of youth and Inuit culture reflected in conversations about the North. The word “positive” can be used two ways. First, to contrast negative images of Inuit youth as the victims of social challenges or as distanced from their culture. It is true that there are many challenges to be met; we are not suggesting that this research should not be done or that these issues should not be taken seriously. But these challenges do not define who Inuit are, and this is not how many Inuit wish to be known. When Inuit are seen mainly as victims

of colonialism, it becomes difficult for non-Inuit to recognize the many positive aspects of Inuit culture or to understand why young Inuit are drawn to these. While we wish to see more people learning about colonial history—and we include Inuit in this—this history should not be confused for who Inuit are. Focusing too much on colonial history takes attention away from the strengths and uniqueness of Inuit culture and Inuit history. We hope that people will take the time to learn the difference.

Positive also refers to the desire of Inuit youth to actively learn about their history and their culture. As aforementioned, these youth are deeply interested in knowing more about Inuit history, but for a variety of reasons they often do not receive guidance or instruction. The desire to know and to learn does not come from a sense of nostalgia for the past. The value of the lessons, which include stories of courage and resilience from hard times living on the land, continue to apply today. Even though the circumstances in which Inuit live today appear very different from how Elders lived in the past, their lessons and stories remain invaluable to youth. Many young people are working hard to deepen their understanding of and ties to their culture, and they should be supported in this. This is not always easy for outsiders to see. Many non-Inuit continue to have ideas that being Inuit is somehow associated with being part of the past. They view such things as the use of cell phones, social media, or even speaking English as being Western, as though that is the natural or default way to be. Because southerners are unfamiliar with Inuit culture, they do not understand that Inuit can live in both worlds simultaneously. Because southerners are unaware of Inuit history, they do not see how Inuit today continue to draw guidance from the lessons passed on by their Elders.

Youth are important in how Inuit knowledge is shared, but too often youth are excluded from research that takes place in their communities. There are many examples of this with the Franklin research. Visitors and researchers are keen to work with Elders and learn about traditional knowledge, but in the process, youth are often passed over. But it is the young people who should have access to this knowledge. The exclusion of youth from these places not only cuts them off from valuable learning opportunities and experiences, it also undermines the process of knowledge sharing. Elders will often speak to youth in ways that differ from how they speak to researchers. When Elders speak with researchers from the South, they will often answer questions and share information that they think will be of interest to the researcher. When speaking to youth, Elders share information differently: they will share stories and information which they feel is important for youth to know. This sharing of knowledge between generations is an important part of how knowledge is passed on. Traditional Inuit knowledge can only be considered traditional if it is passed on between generations of Inuit.

Finally, southerners have difficulty making connections between their own history and how this influences Inuit in the present day. In the case of finding the Franklin wrecks, it is tempting to view Inuit and Qablunaat histories as complementary or even as the same. But this view overlooks how Inuit have struggled to have their histories heard and understood by non-Inuit. Inuit have made valuable contributions to finding the wrecks, though as we have outlined above, many of these contributions were made by Inuit who recognized that the information they were sharing was important to Qablunaat. Inuit have shared this information in a spirit of partnership. But for local Inuit, the finding of the Franklin wrecks is only the tip of the iceberg. There are many more stories of Inuit history to tell. Our hope is that non-Inuit will be interested in learning about them.

## Conclusion

Inuit knowledge, which was important in locating the wrecks of *Erebus* and *Terror*, has been celebrated by many people who have followed the Franklin searches over the years. This knowledge reflects how Inuit have shared stories for generations, and the location of the ships is proof that Inuit ways of knowing and sharing history remain strong and continue to have value today. We hope to see the interest generated around the Franklin research create more space to learn and share Inuit history. As we have outlined here, the ability to learn and share this history is particularly important for young Inuit not only as a means for them to strengthen their connection with Inuit culture but also as a way for them to be heard. Being heard is important, especially as more young Inuit travel outside of their home communities for work and schooling in the South. As Louie Kamookak says, knowing Inuit history and culture and knowing Inuit identity is a good way to help youth feel proud of who they are. We hope to see more Qablunaat take an interest in Inuit history and create more spaces where this history can be shared.

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