

# Fish pluralities: Human-animal relations and sites of engagement in Paulatuq, Arctic Canada

## La pluralité des poissons: relations humains-animaux et sites d'engagement à Paulatuq, Arctique canadien

Zoe Todd

Volume 38, Number 1-2, 2014

Cultures inuit, gouvernance et cosmopolitiques  
Inuit cultures, governance and cosmopolitics

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1028861ar>  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1028861ar>

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### Publisher(s)

Association Inuksiitiit Katimajit Inc.  
Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

### ISSN

0701-1008 (print)  
1708-5268 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Todd, Z. (2014). Fish pluralities: Human-animal relations and sites of engagement in Paulatuq, Arctic Canada. *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 38(1-2), 217–238.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1028861ar>

### Article abstract

This article explores human-fish relations as an under-theorized “active site of engagement” in northern Canada. It examines two case studies that demonstrate how the Inuvialuit of Paulatuq employ “fish pluralities” (multiple ways of knowing and defining fish) to negotiate the complex and dynamic pressures faced by humans, animals, and the environment in contemporary Arctic Canada. I argue that it is instructive for all Canadians to understand the central role of humans and animals, together, as active agents in political and colonial processes in northern Canada. By examining human-fish relationships, as they have unfolded in Paulatuq over the last 50 years, we may develop a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic strategies that northern Indigenous people, including the Paulatuqmiut (people from Paulatuq), use to navigate shifting environmental, political, legal, social, cultural, and economic realities in Canada’s North. This article thus places fish and people, together, as central actors in the political landscape of northern Canada. I also hypothesize a relational framework for Indigenous-State reconciliation discourses in Canada today. This framework expands southern political and philosophical horizons beyond the human and toward a broader societal acknowledgement of complex and dynamic relationships between people, fish, and the land in Paulatuq.

# Fish pluralities: Human-animal relations and sites of engagement in Paulatuuq, Arctic Canada

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Zoe Todd\*

**Résumé:** La pluralité des poissons: relations humains-animaux et sites d'engagement à Paulatuuq, Arctique canadien

Cet article explore les relations humains-poissons comme un «site actif d'engagement» ayant été peu théorisé dans le Nord canadien. À travers deux études de cas, cet article cherche à montrer que les Inuvialuit de Palatuuq mettent en jeu la «pluralité des poissons» (les multiples manières de les connaître et de les définir) pour négocier les pressions qu'eux-mêmes, les animaux et l'environnement subissent dans l'Arctique canadien contemporain. Je soutiens qu'il est pertinent et instructif pour tous les Canadiens de comprendre le rôle central que les humains et les animaux jouent ensemble comme agents des processus coloniaux et politiques dans le nord du Canada. Examiner les relations que les humains entretiennent avec les poissons depuis plus de 50 ans à Paulatuuq nous permet de comprendre de façon plus nuancée les stratégies dynamiques qu'utilisent les Autochtones du Nord, dont les Paulatuuqmiut (les habitants de Palatuuq), pour naviguer dans les réalités environnementales, politiques, juridiques, sociales, culturelles et économiques de leur territoire. Cet article considère donc que les poissons et les gens sont, ensemble, des acteurs centraux du paysage politique du Nord canadien. J'émetts aussi l'hypothèse qu'il existe un cadre relationnel de réconciliation, au niveau du discours, entre les Autochtones et l'État. Ce cadre élargit les horizons politiques et philosophiques du Sud au-delà de l'humain, vers une reconnaissance sociale plus large des relations complexes et dynamiques entre les personnes, les poissons et le territoire à Paulatuuq.

**Abstract:** Fish pluralities: Human-animal relations and sites of engagement in Paulatuuq, Arctic Canada

This article explores human-fish relations as an under-theorized “active site of engagement” in northern Canada. It examines two case studies that demonstrate how the Inuvialuit of Paulatuuq employ “fish pluralities” (multiple ways of knowing and defining fish) to negotiate the complex and dynamic pressures faced by humans, animals, and the environment in contemporary Arctic Canada. I argue that it is instructive for all Canadians to understand the central role of humans and animals, together, as active agents in political and colonial processes in northern Canada. By examining human-fish relationships, as they have unfolded in Paulatuuq over the last 50 years, we may develop a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic strategies that northern Indigenous people, including the Paulatuuqmiut (people from Paulatuuq), use to navigate shifting

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\* School of Social Science, University of Aberdeen, mailing address: 24 Hazel Avenue, Dundee, DD2 1QD, UK. zoe.todd@gmail.com

environmental, political, legal, social, cultural, and economic realities in Canada's North. This article thus places fish and people, together, as central actors in the political landscape of northern Canada. I also hypothesize a relational framework for Indigenous-State reconciliation discourses in Canada today. This framework expands southern political and philosophical horizons beyond the human and toward a broader societal acknowledgement of complex and dynamic relationships between people, fish, and the land in Paulatuq.

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## Introduction

"You never go hungry in the land if you have fish." The late Inuvialuk elder Annie Illasiak repeated this teaching to me several times during my fieldwork in the hamlet of Paulatuq, Northwest Territories, Canada in 2012. At first I understood this to mean that the water around Paulatuq is abundant in fish and that fish ensure survival from a purely utilitarian standpoint. As the year wore on, I began to understand that this statement also highlighted the reciprocal relationships between people and "fish-as-non-human persons" in Paulatuq. Not only do fish ensure human survival as a plentiful food source, they do so because human-fish relationships represent a whole host of social, cultural, and legal-governance principles that underpin life in Paulatuq. Humans and fish, together, share complex and nuanced political and social landscapes that shape life in the community. In Paulatuq, I learned, fish exist in a plurality of ways.

Anthropological work on human-animal relations, and Indigenous epistemologies and scholarship, challenge the accepted anthropocentrism of contemporary Euro-Western political discourses and offer an alternate view of humans and animals engaged in relationships that transcend dualistic notions of nature/culture and human/animal (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 472). Indigenous epistemologies, such as those of the Inuvialuit, are rooted in dynamic relationships between people and their world, relationships that extend temporally to time immemorial (*ingilraani*) (Arnold et al. 2011: 14-18). Given the importance of animals-as-sentient-beings in Indigenous legal orders<sup>1</sup> and cosmologies for many northern peoples (Anderson 2000; Brightman 1993; Fienup-Riordan 1990; Nadasdy 2003, 2007; Napoleon 2007; Tanner 1979), human-fish relationships are a useful lens through which to examine Indigenous-State reconciliation discourses in northern Canada. The slipperiness<sup>2</sup> of fish-as-beings—their ability to exist as simultaneously different entities—and the complex and diverse ways that humans engage with fish in northern Canada challenge existing articulations of human-environmental relationships that have emerged from human attempts to regulate and manage charismatic megafauna (Freeman and Kreuter 1994: 1) like polar bears,

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<sup>1</sup> Napoleon (2007: 2) uses the term "legal order" to "describe law that is embedded in social, political, economic, and spiritual institutions. [...] Indigenous law is a part of and derives from an Indigenous legal order."

<sup>2</sup> Law and Lien (2013) use the same metaphor regarding Atlantic salmon in Norway.

caribou, muskox, wolves, and grizzlies. Human-fish relations, therefore, offer an opportunity to examine the complexities and nuances of how northern Indigenous peoples, in this case Paulatuuqmiut<sup>3</sup> of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in Canada's Western Arctic, contend with historical and contemporary colonialism and social, cultural, political, economic and environmental change.

During my time in Paulatuuq, it became apparent that fishing is a potent, if sometimes controversial and contradictory, “active point of engagement” (Fienup-Riordan 2000: 57) between humans and the environment. What emerged from people's articulations of their fishing lives was the idea of *fish pluralities*—differing understandings and conceptualizations of fish, which were sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory. How actors worked across and through these fish pluralities enabled specific and concrete *in situ* solutions to emerge that accounted for and acknowledged different ways of conceptualizing and engaging with fish. This article builds upon existing literature on northern human-animal relations, and State-Indigenous politics, by using two local case studies from Paulatuuq to demonstrate how a) Fienup-Riordan's (2000: 57) “sites of active engagement”, b) Donald's (2012) “Indigenous métissage,” and c) Kuptana's (2014) “principled pragmatism” can together mediate the tensions and challenges that emerge in human-animal and Indigenous-State relations in northern Canada (e.g., Nadasdy 2003, 2007; White 2006). In turn, I argue that by employing these three concepts in approaching political, social, cultural, and economic conflicts in northern Canada, it is possible to move beyond current anthropocentric policy frameworks of reconciliation and environmental or wildlife regulation in Canada employed by the State.

### **Situating the research: Location and methodologies**

Paulatuuq is an Inuvialuit community of 329 residents (NWT Bureau of Statistics 2012: 1), located on the Arctic Ocean coast, 400 km east of Inuvik. The human movements and occupation of the land around Paulatuuq, which stretches from the Horton River to the west and the Hornaday and Brock Rivers to the east, extend far into the past. The human presence is evident in several ways: ancestral Thule tent rings and camping sites<sup>4</sup> in Tukut Nogait National Park to the east of the community (Parks Canada 2013); oral history and archaeological evidence of the village of Igluuaryngmiut peoples at the base of the Horton River prior to European arrival (Alunik et al. 2003: 17); post-contact trajectories of Inuit who pursued economic opportunities with whaling ships, explorers, scientists, and ethnographers in the early 20th century (Arnold et al. 2011); cabins of families who took up fox-fur trapping along the coast in the 1920s and 1930s (Usher 1971); the abandoned Cold-War-era Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line site at the tip of Cape Parry; and the contemporary hamlet of Paulatuuq, which was established in its current location at the base of Darnley Bay in 1967 (McDonnell 1983: 48). Today the community relies on a diversity

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<sup>3</sup> Paulatuuqmiut means ‘people from Paulatuuq.’

<sup>4</sup> The Thule people spread eastward from Alaska about 800 years ago (Arnold et al. 2011: 20).

of livelihood strategies to meet local household needs. Paulatuuqmiut have strong local involvement in harvesting activity, with 74.7% of households in 2008 reporting that half or more of their food came from harvesting (NWT Bureau of Statistics 2012: 3), alongside wage opportunities in governance, health, education, resource exploration, guiding for sports hunters, and wildlife monitoring for researchers and the private sector.

Research was carried out from January to October 2012. My Ph.D. research on fishing emerged from previous work with the community on harvesting (hunting, fishing, trapping, and procurement of plants), employment structures, and local food security (Todd 2010). The need to understand the historical and contemporary trajectory of human-fish relationships became apparent in light of a heavy regional policy and academic focus on charismatic megafauna (Freeman and Kreuter 1994:1) in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. In 2011, the community approved a licence for me to spend a year investigating the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of fishing in Paulatuuq. I employed a mixture of interviews, participant-observation, and archival work to understand the role that fishing played in the past, and continues to play today, in the community.

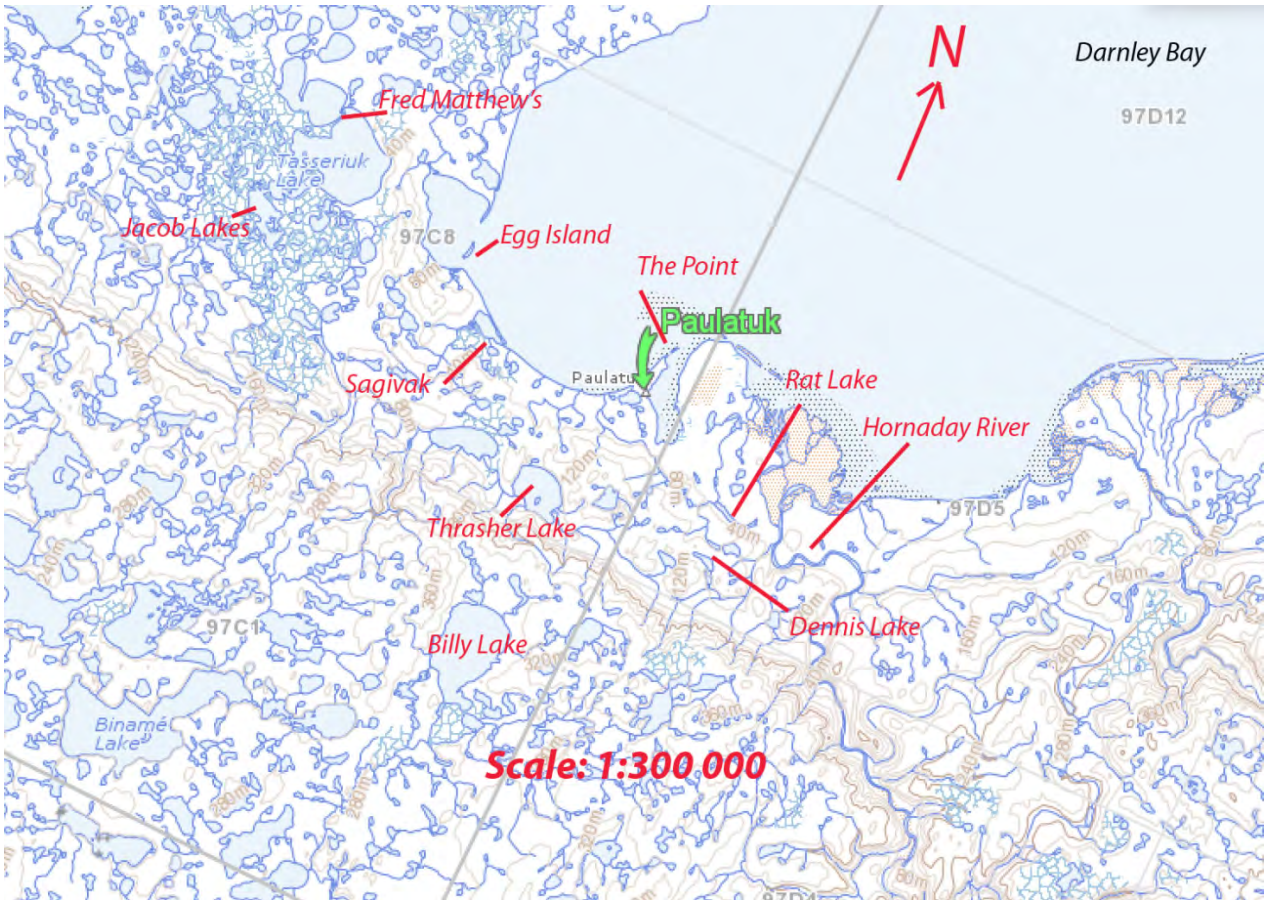


Figure 1. Fishing sites visited over the course of the research project. Source: Natural Resources Canada (2012).

Paulatuuqmiut participate in a variety of fishing activities on the lakes, rivers, and coastal areas that surround the community. Throughout the course of the spring, summer, and fall I travelled to a number of fishing sites (Figure 1) to participate in ice fishing (locally termed “jiggling,” similar to “jigging” in other parts of Arctic Canada), fishing with rod and reel, and setting of nets. I conducted 22 formal interviews with individuals ranging in age from six to 95, including men and women, Inuvialuit and non-Inuvialuit individuals, and those who are active in fishing and those who are not. I also travelled to the Hudson’s Bay Archives in Winnipeg, Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate Archives housed in the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton in order to contextualize both Inuvialuit and non-Inuvialuit relationships to fish and the role that fish played in day-to-day life within the community from the 1920s to the 1970s.

### **Theoretical considerations**

Stewart (2005) illustrates how inland (i.e. non-coastal) human-fish relationships in northern Canada were overlooked in many classic Arctic ethnographies in Canada. However, Fienup-Riordan (1990; 1995), Kafarowski (2009), Robinson et al. (2009), Shannon (2006), Stewart (2005), and Tyrell (2009) have recently illustrated the foundational importance of historical and ongoing human-fish relationships in both Nunavut and Alaska in their respective works. Tough (1984; 1996) and Piper (2009) have also outlined the historical importance of non-coastal Indigenous fisheries in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories respectively. Cruikshank (2005) has demonstrated the imaginative horizons that appear in Tlingit narratives about human-environmental relationships to sentient and knowing landscapes in the Yukon Territory, and illustrates the active role that landscapes and non-human persons play in colonial encounters. Anderson (2000) has detailed Evenki reindeer herders’ relationships to lands in Siberia, which are occupied and inhabited by human actors through competence and skill. Much like the examples detailed by Cruikshank (2005) and Anderson (2000), Paulatuuqmiut occupy the land in dynamic and strategic ways: a landscape that is shaped and populated by a complex Inuvialuit cosmology, and which requires an extensive knowledge and skill-set to engage with. In Paulatuuq, human-fish relationships are one manner in which human-animal relationships are articulated, imagined, and enacted between people, animals, and the land.

The literature demonstrates that it can be difficult for non-Indigenous actors to understand the full breadth and complexity of northern people’s cosmologies and human-animal and human-environmental relations. Nadasdy (2003: 124-125) and White (2006) have elsewhere highlighted the challenges of incorporating complex and dynamic Indigenous human-animal relationships into State-driven wildlife co-management frameworks that delimit the possibilities of what Indigenous knowledge can describe, whereby Indigenous “traditional ecological knowledge” (TEK) is presumed to be an interchangeable analog for science or ecology, and is deconstructed and massaged to fit into existing scientific-legal discourses employed by the processes of the State. I argue, however, that through human-fish relationships Paulatuuqmiut



utilize what former Inuit Tapirisat of Canada President Rosemarie Kuptana (2014) recently defined as the Inuit practice of “principled pragmatism” to navigate the complex political, legal, social, cultural, and economic pressures that northern communities face.

This “principled pragmatism” is an integral part of what Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows (2014) and Cree legal scholar Val Napoleon (2007) each define as dynamic and rooted “Indigenous legal orders” that encompass knowledge that is simultaneously legal, religious, philosophical, social, and scientific. Following this framing, I argue that Paulatuuqmiut use a *dynamic Indigenous legal order* (Borrows 2014) to negotiate and overcome the dualities presently described in the literature on northern human-animal relations and northern political relations. In this article, I use existing ethnographic and theoretical work on Indigenous-State and human-animal relations to examine their political and legal dimensions in an era of contentious power and “reconciliation” discourses in Canada (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Coulthard 2011; Irlbacher-Fox 2009). I take up Nadasdy’s (2007: 26) call for anthropologists to treat Indigenous people’s human-animal engagements and ontological assumptions as *literal* rather than only *symbolic* matters. It is thus necessary to acknowledge Indigenous relationships to “other-than-humans” as concrete sites of political and legal exchange that can inform a narrative that de-anthropocentrizes current Indigenous-State discourses.

I use the terms “relating” and “engaging” with fish throughout this article. To clarify their use, I employ these terms to capture the host of human-fish relationships that manifest in day-to-day life in Paulatuuq. Engaging with or relating to fish includes the catching, preparation, storage, consumption, storytelling, philosophizing, sharing, theorizing, songs, ways of respecting, and linguistic definitions of, about, for, or with fish and fishy beings within the community of Paulatuuq. These definitions are informed by the work of anthropologists such as Brightman (1993), Fienup-Riordan (2000), Nadasdy (2003; 2007) and Tanner (1979) who convincingly demonstrate that for Rock Cree, Yup’ik, Southern Tutchone and Mistassini Cree peoples respectively, human-animal relationships extend far beyond the utilitarian procurement of food, and encompass cosmologies that place humans and animals in ongoing and reciprocal relationships that are central components of northern Indigenous people’s worlds in northern Canada and Alaska. In Paulatuuq, fish are also ubiquitous and mediate relationships between various actors. Fish, both singular and plural, are present in every household in some manner: whether it is in a freezer, a story, or a lingering desire for fresh char long after the fall’s catch has been shared and eaten. Fish are not the only animal pursued and consumed within the community by any means, but their presence remains subtle, persistent, and somewhat elusive.

## **What is a fish?**

Before I begin discussing human-fish relationships in Paulatuuq, I will try to answer a very fundamental question upon which this work is built: what is a fish? As

eminent fish biologist Joe Nelson (2006: 2) explains, “we do not give the term “fishes” taxonomic rank. We use it as a matter of convenience, essentially to describe those vertebrates studied by ichthyologists and covered in ichthyology courses. Despite their diversity, fishes can be simply, but artificially, defined as aquatic vertebrates that have gills throughout life and limbs, if any, in the shape of fins.” Thus, scientists have come to a tentative and flexible working understanding of what a fish is.

Ethno-scientific understandings of animals in Alaska reveal that scientific notions of categories of animals can fail to capture the relationships that people share with specific animals in daily life (Feldman and Norton 1995). Therefore, categories employed in Western scientific practice may not capture the depth and nuance of a particular animal’s meaning to Paulatuuqmiut. During my fieldwork, fish were loosely characterized in different ways depending on the situation, were treated variously as both individual fish and plural entities depending on the situation, and could fit into many categories, specifically as *specimens* of scientific study, as food, as trophies in sport fishing or fishing derbies, as non-human persons with agency, as metaphors for people’s relationships to the land and to one another, and as nodes of engagement between various actors.

In my research project, I explored people’s relationships to bony fishes that inhabit the freshwater and saltwater environs of Paulatuuq (i.e. not rays or sharks). I was especially interested in the freshwater and anadromous fish species that Paulatuuqmiut catch in the lakes, rivers, and coastal areas. Paulatuuqmiut do not regularly fish in the open ocean, although in the past large numbers of tomcod were caught at Tom Cod Bay on the west side of Cape Parry to feed dog teams. Numerous fish are available at these sites, but a handful of fish types are particularly present in people’s day-to-day lives. The Inuvialuit Harvest Study (Inuvialuit Joint Council 2003) lists 10 species that Paulatuuqmiut regularly harvested, six of which emerged as particularly important in contemporary fishing activities during my fieldwork: arctic char (*iqalukpik*), landlocked char, lake trout (*singayuriaq*), white fish (*anaakliq*), herring, grayling, and burbot. Arctic char was often elevated as the “most valuable” fish in the community and is the species that sets Paulatuuq fisheries apart from surrounding communities. Many Paulatuuqmiut express pride in local char for being the best char in the region, and share stories about how friends and family in other communities look forward to gifts of Paulatuuq char because of its taste, size, and quality of meat. In the fall, freezers abound with large char wrapped in plastic, waiting to be plucked from the cold and sent along on the next flight out of town to friends throughout the region.

### **What is fishing and how do people fish?**

What fishing is—and how people engage in it—in Paulatuuq is varied. The local fishery is non-commercial. The descriptive term I choose to use here is “artisanal.” Small-scale fishing occurs mostly in inland lakes and rivers or along the coast at the mouths of the Brock and Hornaday Rivers during the August char run. There are those who catch large numbers of fish (600 or so) with nets on the coast east of the



community during the char run in August, whereas others may only catch three or four fish with a rod and reel (and/or a net) on a day trip to a lake near the community.

On a good day in the spring during ice breakup or in the fall during freeze-up, one may catch fish both through “jiggling” or setting nets under the ice. In other words, fishing is the constellation of activities that go into a fishing trip, including the following: preparation (packing, cooking, inviting people and spreading the word about a trip); thinking about fish and determining where the best place to try and get fish will be (based on time of year, who one is travelling with, available resources, preferred fishing locales); travelling in and navigating sentient landscapes (Anderson 2000; Ingold 1993); skills required to get *at* fish (using an auger to drill a hole through the ice, preparing and setting a net, knowing how to select the right rod and line and lure); and skills and jobs that are employed to support fishing *at* a fishing site (starting a fire to make tea and lunch, making sure children and “greenhorns” [unskilled beginners, both Inuvialuit and non-Inuvialuit] are looked after). When fishing, one is thus not focused only on the “catch,” but also on entering into a series of relationships with fish, the environment, and other people in order to *try* to get a fish. This is not unlike hunting relationships and practices elsewhere in the Arctic described by Bodenhorn (1990), Brightman (1993), and Tanner (1979), which encompass rituals and practices that extend far beyond the catch itself.

### **Human-fish relations as an active site of engagement**

I will now explore how human-fish relationships act as a site of active engagement in Paulatuq. Fienup-Riordan (2000: 57), in reflecting on her work with Yup’ik communities in Alaska, reveals that: “Yup’ik live their lives in interaction with the wider society—its schools, courts, museums, shopping malls—and it is important to understand both the communication and miscommunication that occurs in these diverse cross-cultural contexts. These are the active points of engagement where old meanings will be tested and new meanings will emerge.” This notion of active points of engagement weaves nicely into work that Donald (2009: 2) has developed in his research on Indigenous and non-Indigenous pedagogies and the “frontier logics” that separate contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors along lines that once kept European settlers inside the proverbial fur trading fort and the Indigenous Other camped outside. Rather than accept the incommensurability of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge, Donald (2009, 2012) develops a methodology, which he calls “Indigenous métissage,” for working across difference where possible. This approach requires all parties to acknowledge different cosmologies, worldviews, legal orders, and experiences while also contending with the colonial logics and power relations of the Canadian State.

Expanding this sensibility of working across difference beyond the Canadian context, we can incorporate Viveiros de Castro’s (1998) argument that, rather than draw sharp distinctions between human and animal, a more relational perspective may be employed. “Humans are those who continue as they have always been: animals are

ex-humans, not humans ex-animals. In sum, ‘the common point of reference for all beings of nature is not humans as a species but rather humanity as a condition’ (Descola 1986: 120)” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 472). The sharp dualities that informed previous Euro-Western philosophical and scientific understandings of humans and animals, or the familiar and the “Other,” are being firmly challenged by Indigenous epistemologies. As Donald notes:

We need more complex understandings of human relationality that traverse deeply learned divides of the past and present by demonstrating that perceived civilizational frontiers are actually permeable and that perspectives on history, memory, and experience are connected and interreferential. The key challenge is to find a way to hold these understandings in tension without the need to resolve, assimilate, or incorporate (Donald 2012: 534).

Though not easy by any means, it is possible to hold different understandings in addressing northern human-animal relations across cosmologies, legal orders, and political frameworks. In her work on northern governance, Irlbacher-Fox (2009) explores moose-hide tanning as a metaphor for engagement and as a context for better understanding of Dene ways of knowing, which enable the reader to engage more readily with discussions of Dene self-governance and northern political autonomy. She explains that *dahshaa*—the Gwich’in term for a hard-to-find form of rotted spruce wood—is required to complete the tanning process (ibid.: 42). Just as one requires this rare material to properly tan a hide and to render it as useful and beautiful as possible, Irlbacher-Fox illustrates one must learn to respect the elusive and complex set of social, cultural, and political relationships, actions, and knowledge that are mobilized in finding *dahshaa* and applying it in moose-hide tanning processes. Through her ethnographic work, she undergoes an enskilment process (Pálsson 1994), learning the physical skills required for tanning alongside its mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects. It sensitizes her to the embodied facets of tanning and also provides different ways of engaging with Dene worldviews. Irlbacher-Fox’s work sets the stage for the possibility of investigating forms of cross-cultural learning and respect—Indigenous *métissage*—on the land.

This same sensibility can be applied to studying human-animal relations in wildlife management contexts in Canada. Drawing on Donald (2012), Fienup-Riordan (2000), Kuptana (2014), and Viveiros de Castro (1998), I argue that human-fish relationships in Paulatuuq are characterized by a relational, pragmatic approach at various “active sites of engagement.” Rather than treat fish as separate from humans or humans as separate from fish, fish are intimately woven into every aspect of community life. Fish have agency, as evidenced by the fact that they can choose when to be caught. To be a successful fisherman in Paulatuuq, one must understand the behaviour and agency of fish, and must be cognizant of their ability to “know” when someone acts with or without respect. For example, for some of my Inuvialuit fishing friends, it was important not to brag about being a good fisherman or fisherwoman. Fish could respond by refusing to bite a lure or enter a net. Paulatuuqmiut apply a pragmatic, dynamic, and strategic set of tools, which incorporate multiple ways of knowing fish, “principled pragmatism” and “Indigenous *métissage*” to navigate the complexity of

contemporary human-fish relationships as they exist across Indigenous and non-Indigenous logics and cosmologies.

### **Human-fish relations as a site of negotiation and conflict**

I illustrate now how “multiple ways of knowing fish” or fish pluralities operate in day-to-day life in Paulatuuq. First, however, it is important to acknowledge that, unlike communities on Canada’s West and East coasts, or in parts of Alaska where Yup’ik and Inupiat human-fish relationships are sometimes at odds with Aleut fishing identities and practices (Reedy-Maschner 2010: 178-187), there are not currently large-scale conflicts over commercial or coastal fishing in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. Thus, my research speaks about very local and specific forms of human-fish engagement that may not translate directly to other parts of the North or Canada. However, there is anticipation of future conflicts. In 2011, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation implemented a pre-emptive ban on commercial fishing in areas of the Beaufort Sea that fall under the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (CBC 2011). Further, Darnley Bay Resources Ltd (2013) continues to explore a potential nickel deposit in the Hornaday River watershed, with future implications for human-fish engagements in Paulatuuq. Though not part of large-scale conflicts like the collapse of the cod fishery in Eastern Canada in the 1990s (McCay and Finlayson 1995) or the current struggles of the salmon fishery along Canada’s West Coast (Beamish et al. 2005), there are a handful of local smaller-scale conflicts over management of fisheries in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region that can inform future responses to increasing interest in, and pressure on, fish in the region.

#### ***Case study 1: The commercialization and collapse of the Hornaday River char fishery***

Northern researchers have juxtaposed science and Indigenous knowledge, pointing out the power relations that render current co-management and wildlife management policy frameworks problematic (Cruikshank 1998; Nadasdy 2003; White 2006). What is interesting about Paulatuuq is that Paulatuuqmiut use “principled pragmatism” and fish pluralities to negotiate the complexities of human-animal relations. In other words, they employ science to protect and honour longstanding Inuvialuit relationships with fish while simultaneously shutting down a federally mandated commercial fishery. I turn now to an example of human-fish relationships as a “site of active engagement” along the Hornaday River that runs east of the community.

The Hornaday River drains into Darnley Bay, at the base of Cape Parry. Its source today lies deep within the boundaries of Tukturnogait National Park, and it travels some 190 miles overland before draining into the Beaufort Sea (Fraser 1952: 224). The river is accessible from Paulatuuq via the Rat Lake Road east of the community. Before the advent of four-wheelers (all-terrain vehicles) and skidoos, Paulatuuqmiut visited the river on foot with pack dogs, by dog-team, or by boat. Contemporary Paulatuuqmiut fishing on the Hornaday began in the 1940s. Elder Marcus Ruben described how,

shortly after fall freeze-up, his older brother serendipitously found char on the Hornaday River when stopping for water on a trip to the Catholic Mission at the base of Darnley Bay and saw the fish swimming under the ice (Inuvialuit Communications Society 2008; McDonnell 1983: 84). Ruben remembered that, prior to this discovery, char had been caught elsewhere, such as in the Brock River (Inuvialuit Communications Society 2008). From that time onward, Paulatuuqmiut accessed the Hornaday char regularly, with a commercial fishery emerging in the 1960s at the behest of government actors hoping to promote local economic development (Abrahamson 1963: 85).

The commercial fishery on the Hornaday ran from 1968 to 1986 (Paulatuk Charr Working Group 1999: 2) and fish were sold to regional buyers (McDonnell 1983: 101). A small sport fishery also existed on the Hornaday in the 1970s, although it consisted of “less than 0.01% of the take in the last three decades” (DFO 1999: 3). Both of these industries—commercial fishing and sport fishing—were implemented following socio-economic surveys of the region in the 1960s, which urged the government to foster local economic projects (Abrahamson 1963). These studies often placed economic development of resources ahead of scientific knowledge. For example, Abrahamson (*ibid.*: 85) concluded after four months of work at Tuktoyaktuk and Cape Parry that “too little is known about the fish potential in this area,” but he still recommended a commercial fishery on the Hornaday.

With priority given to commercial exploitation, before scientific knowledge was fully gathered (DFO 1999; Inuvialuit Communications Society 1998), it is perhaps not surprising that the pressure to harvest the Hornaday River char for regional markets led to over-fishing. According to management documents and local narratives, in the 1980s local concerns were raised over the impact of this commercial fishery on the health and size of the Hornaday char (DFO 1999; Harwood 2009). These concerns had begun to emerge from Paulatuuqmiut and government actors in the 1970s. Indeed, while community members were alarmed about the health of Hornaday River char as a result of the poorly planned commercial fishery, government officials in turn claimed that the problem was not the commercial fishery *per se* but rather that local fishermen were overfishing and violating existing quotas (McDonnell 1983: 102-113).

It is here that an interesting local strategy emerged. With the signing of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (comprehensive land claim) in 1984, a host of wildlife co-management bodies were established. Paulatuuqmiut turned to the co-management bodies of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement to mobilize scientific responses as one prong of a dynamic and pragmatic local strategy to shut down the commercial fishery on the Hornaday River. As a result, commercial fishing was stopped on the Hornaday in 1986, although subsistence harvesting continued. However, in 1995 a peak of 3,851 char were harvested for subsistence (versus the 1,700 allowed under current quotas), and renewed local concerns emerged about the number and size of char in the river and lasting damage from the government’s commercial enterprise (Ayles et al. 2007: 134). Given their mandates to address wildlife and fisheries management issues, the Fisheries and Joint Management Committee (FJMC) (a co-management body that interfaces between

the Inuvialuit Game Council [self-government body] and the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans) and the Hunters and Trappers Committee (HTC) (a local body that represents the concerns of Paulatuuq harvesters) responded to concerns about the numbers and size of Hornaday River char by creating the Hornaday River Char Management Project (Paulatuk Char Management Working Group 1999).

John Max Muffa Kudlak has worked with the Hornaday River Char Management project since its inception. He explains how the monitoring proceeded:

In 1986 they started—they cut off the commercial fishing, the sale of char, because the char were getting small. From 1986 on to 1996, we started working on a char working group. 1997 we came up with a plan for the community to decide if they [Paulatuuqmiut] can live with 1,700 char for the winter, which will be monitored by the harvest study coordinator (the numbers). They found out that they could live with it, 1,700—so in 1998 we signed the first char management plan for Paulatuuq (John Max Muffa Kudlak, Paulatuk Community Corporation Office, Paulatuuq, April 2012).<sup>5</sup>

Muffa demonstrates that in advocating a dynamic recovery strategy, local actors mobilized a variety of concepts of fish—fish as food, fish as “active site of engagement” between different actors, fish as numbers or scientific specimens—in order to resolve the decline in the fish stock. This required local harvesters to negotiate and define their relationships to fish alongside scientific-bureaucratic understandings and concepts of fish.

Although the community’s pragmatic approach required local harvesters to invite scientific study and co-management, it also paradoxically enabled local actors to challenge colonial impulses to turn local fish into economic outputs. Today, as a result of Paulatuuqmiut mobilization of fish pluralities and Indigenous *métissage*, a different approach to human-fish engagements is employed than the one the government encouraged in the 1960s-1970s. There remain, however, tensions between local fishermen and non-local actors seeking to engage with fish. These tensions will be explored next.

### ***Case study 2: Local fishing rules today and fishing as a milieu for Indigenous métissage***

The second case study I provide illustrates how Paulatuuqmiut pragmatically and strategically employ bureaucratic rules and bodies, as well as kinship relationships and local legal orders, to strictly enforce access of non-Inuvialuit people to fish. Local actors are thus using contemporary tools to reinforce Inuvialuit concepts of human-fish relationships that extend to *ingilraani*. As a result of the conflict over fishing on the Hornaday River in the 1960s-1980s, opportunities for outsiders (non-Paulatuuqmiut) to engage with fish within the community tend to be restricted to a) scientific studies (i.e. fish biologists counting or monitoring various fish stocks near the community), b) sport

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<sup>5</sup> All interviews were in English and recorded. Transcriptions are available from the author.

fishing, or c) recreational trips with community members. In all of these cases, non-Inuvialuit must engage within the rubrics set out by the Northwest Territories Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), the Fisheries Joint Management Council, and the Paulatuk Hunters and Trappers Committee. To fish recreationally, a fishing licence must first be obtained for a small fee from the local ENR officer. Then, one must obtain written permission from the Hunters and Trappers Committee (HTC) to fish on Inuvialuit Private Lands (lands designated as 7.1a under the Inuvialuit Final Agreement). For example, before I went on my first fishing trip in April 2012, I purchased my fishing licence from the local Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) Officer, Bobby Ruben Sr. I then sat down with Muffa at the HTC office, he explained the HTC and FJMC rules I had to follow while fishing, and I signed a permission form granting me access to private lands as long as I adhered to the HTC fishing rules. As a non-beneficiary of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement, one must carry both this fishing licence and written approval from the HTC on one's person at all times when travelling on the land. Limits and restrictions are imposed on a) how many fish a non-Inuvialuk person can catch per day, b) tools to be employed (e.g., barbless hooks), c) locations that may be visited, d) manner of treating the fish (no "snagging" of fish bodies with hooks), and e) kinds of fish that may be caught. Non-beneficiaries are also urged to record their catches and submit this information to FJMC in Inuvik. Non-Paulatuuqmiut, therefore, are imbued with a series of scientific and bureaucratic/political notions of fish before they even set foot on a four-wheeler or a boat.

These bureaucratic rules, somewhat paradoxically, enable Paulatuuqmiut to assert local views of fish-as-persons whom non-local people must treat with respect and reciprocity, as it enables local bodies like the HTC to intervene and enforce local rules before a non-Inuvialuk person sets foot on the land. Further, respect for and knowledge of local human-fish relationships and rules of conduct are fundamental. During June fishing trips, non-Inuvialuit individuals expressed fear of breaking the rules and damaging kinship relations with Paulatuuqmiut. Kinship relations and social sanctions, as well as fear of strict enforcement by ENR Officers, means that fish are always a number, on some level, for non-beneficiaries. One or two fish is a celebration—six fish are a potential criminal sentence.

Successful fishing in the landscape that surrounds Paulatuuq requires specific knowledge, which is generated from *dwelling* (Ingold 2000) in the environment in an embodied and skillful way, and by living in the community. Outsiders must rely on the knowledge of Paulatuuqmiut in order to be able to fish, and it is indeed expected that one will only fish if invited out by someone from the community. The emotional and embodied aspects of Paulatuuq fishing, and moving through the landscape, are an important way for non-local people to learn, understand, and respect local legal orders and social relations. A visiting police officer explained that to be invited out to fish was a turning point in his understanding of local life, geographies, and engagements with people and the land. In 2009, the school principal at Moose Kerr School in Aklavik, Velma Illasiak, explained during a workshop on caribou population health held in Inuvik that the school paired teachers with local families in order to give teachers the

opportunity to learn how Inuvialuit and Gwich'in live on the land. She felt that this helped create more trust within the community and a space for teachers to better understand their students' day-to-day experiences.

Although non-Inuvialuit fishing is highly bureaucratically regulated, local control over non-Indigenous access to fish means that non-Inuvialuit are apprenticed in the appropriate ways of engaging with fish and the environment before setting out on the land. When non-Inuvialuit are invited out to fish, it is an opportunity to learn more about the environment and how people move through it, and also to understand, on a certain level, the knowing and sentient landscape that is inhabited through competence and skill (Anderson 2000: 116-147) when fishing. It is also an opportunity for non-locals to engage with fish beyond scientific definitions—challenging nature/culture dualities inherent in naturalistic understandings of fish-as-specimen (Viveiros de Castro 1998). Paulatuq human-fish relations, therefore, operate in many simultaneous and complex ways. In this second case study, local bureaucratic regulation of human-fish relations can be used to teach non-Inuvialuit proper Inuvialuit rules of behaviour, thus enforcing an Indigenous legal order and embodied ways of respecting the environment. Fishing can thus be, when mobilized with trust and respect, a form of local Indigenous *métissage* in action.

## **Human-fish relations and reconciliation**

So how do these local engagements between people and fish in Paulatuq inform Indigenous-State political discourses in Canada? Reconciliation, a term that has gained prominence recently in Canada, as Indigenous issues and conflicts over resource use intensify across the country, carries significant weight and baggage, including in the North. Tony Penikett (2006: 11) defines reconciliation as the resolution of Aboriginal legal rights with regard to the sovereignty of the Canadian Crown. Federal Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart (1998) offered a "Statement of Reconciliation" in 1998 that defined reconciliation as "an ongoing process" and a way "to learn from our past and to find ways to deal with the negative impacts that certain historical decisions continue to have in our society today."

Indigenous scholarship and discussions of decolonization emphasize the importance of resurgence (e.g., Alfred and Corntassel 2005), and some academics argue reconciliation is co-optive and itself a colonized notion (Coulthard 2011). To respond to these co-optive dimensions of legal reconciliation, Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard offers the alternative notion of "resentment" to challenge current Indigenous reconciliation or recognition processes in Canada. Doug White III of the Snuneymuxw First Nation, however, offered a different perspective during Vancouver's Reconciliation Week in 2013: "Reconciliation is not merely an event, a process, or taking certain actions. At its core, reconciliation demands a new mindset and orientation to ourselves, each other, and the relationships we forge between us" (Snuneymuxw First Nation 2013). These divergent narratives all raise questions about Indigenous people's current relationships to the State and to non-Indigenous actors.



Further, critiques of reconciliation raise doubts about the motivations of State actors and highlight the imposition of State logics on human-environmental relations and Indigenous actors (Coulthard 2011, 2014). There is still work to be done, therefore, in decolonizing and reconciling Indigenous-State relations in Canada. But how can one mobilize human-animal relations, along the lines of Nadasdy's (2007: 26) call to treat Indigenous ontologies as *literal*, as a foundational component of the "reconciliation" discourse? To date, Euro-Western academic and policy reconciliation narratives have been anthropocentric (Penikett 2006; Stewart 1998), and it is important to acknowledge the operational role of relations between humans and other-than-humans in Indigenous epistemologies, legal orders, and cosmologies as an "active site of engagement" in any reconciliation framework.

I insert a caution here, however. While the metaphor of human-fish relations as a site of engagement is an attractive heuristic to explain different understandings and experiences of human-animal relations as encountered by different actors in Paulatuuq, I also acknowledge that each person's experience is unique and that to over-generalize local human-fish relations is a great disservice to the nuance and complexity of these personal stories. While some individuals in the community actively invited non-Paulatuuqmiut out to fish, others chose not to and a few individuals actively disapproved of non-local people travelling through the landscape. The act of fishing, then, is inherently complex and the politics of engaging with fish, people, and the environment are not uniformly agreed upon by all members of the community. For other individuals, fishing was *not* contentious. Human-fish relations thus mediate and provoke conversations about broader political issues, but can exist simultaneously as apolitical for other actors within the community. These complex relationships to fish epitomize the slipperiness of fish-as-beings. The expression of conflict through human-fish relationships is itself another form of Indigenous *métissage*, as it facilitates discussions about history, governance, cosmologies, and legal orders that community members actively seek to address in a variety of ways. In this manner, fish and the act of fishing may initiate difficult conversations that may be avoided in other contexts. Paradoxically, fish may also enable some actors to find common ground. These pluralities are important. Ultimately, it is imperative to expand political notions mobilized by the State, such as reconciliation, beyond concepts of *human* redress. Instead, we must acknowledge that people and fish, together, are important agents in both a) experiencing colonialism and b) dismantling colonialism.

## Conclusion

Paulatuuqmiut employ dynamic, pragmatic strategies to honour Inuvialuit philosophies of human-animal relations that extend to time immemorial. Although the tools, language, and technologies through which these relationships are mobilized may change over time, the underlying legal orders and cosmologies that they represent are rooted in long-term, reciprocal engagement between humans and a sentient, storied landscape. In conceptualizing and mobilizing reconciliation aims in Canada, it is important not to limit these discussions to anthropocentric Euro-Western legal

formalities, but to remember that human-animal engagements are themselves intimately shaped by the processes of colonialism and the Nation State. Thus, a view that incorporates activities like fishing as an “active site of engagement” (Fienup-Riordan 2000: 57) reflects the broader impacts that hegemonic State and industrial activities have on both human and animal actors. Such an approach—which recognizes the pluralities of animals and the embeddedness of humans and animals in shared social, cultural, political, and economic relationships—can inform a different set of discussions about what reconciliation actually means to those involved.

## Acknowledgments

This research was made possible by funding from the Aurora Research Institute, the University of Aberdeen’s Angus Pelham Burn awards, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. Special thanks go to Andy and Millie Thrasher and their family for all of their support during my time in Paulatuq.

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