



WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HERE

**Rebuttal to the 2021 Nunatsiavut Government report entitled
“Examining the NunatuKavut Community Council’s Land Claim”**

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Nothing About Us, Without Us.

*Knowledge and the power to define what counts as real knowledge
lie at the epistemic core of colonialism*

~ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, p.xii

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1. Flawed, False and Fraudulent

We Have Always Been Here is a rebuttal to the report entitled “Examining the NunatuKavut Community Council’s Land Claim” commissioned by the Nunatsiavut Government and written by Darryl Leroux, an associate professor in the Faculty of Arts at Saint Mary’s University (herein, referred to as the Leroux report). The overarching assertion in the Leroux report is that NunatuKavut’s claim as a distinct Southern Inuit people is baseless. This argument and the research conducted by Leroux was later used in a letter sent by the President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), Natan Obed, to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on October 7, 2021, claiming that NunatuKavut’s claims are based on ‘fraudulent’ information.

This rebuttal asserts that the report offered by Leroux and the research contained within it, fails to critically interrogate the historical and contemporary research available regarding Inuit history throughout Labrador, and the overarching provincial and national context in which Inuit in Labrador find themselves. As a result, the narrative offered by Leroux not only fails NunatuKavut Inuit, but also serves to move us away from any strategic, collective efforts to address self-determination and rights recognition for all Indigenous peoples in Labrador.

Indeed, this is why the Leroux Report should be immediately retracted; its author should apologize to NunatuKavut Community Council and its members for his inaccurate, misleading and offensive portrayal of NCC’s land claim; and the letter written by ITK’s President, Natan Obed, should be retracted as well because it was based on Leroux’s inaccurate information.

The historical evidence that is required to assert longstanding relationships to the land, sea and ice, to our customs, and to our own kin, are often written from the perspective of people who are *not us*. In fact, they are, more often than not – white, non-Indigenous, with a passing curiosity about who we are, enough to want to claim knowledge and some expertise about us, who serve to gain something by asserting that expertise (prestige, contracts, etc.), and who are able to position their assertion as objective ‘facts’ because they can approach their research through the lens of it being simply an academic exercise. But who are *not us*.

We Have Always Been Here has been written to offer a counter-point to the false narrative portrayed in the Leroux Report.

2. Relational Accountability in Research

Indigenous peoples often use the phrase ‘nothing about us, without us’ in reference to ensuring research that happens in our communities involves us. I would argue that this sets the bar too low. Our *involvement* in research is just the beginning.

We need to be the ones to define what research questions get asked about us, to lead research throughout all of its various stages, and to be the ones to decide how that research gets uptaken and used. This is relational accountability in research.

In the case of the report that I am critiquing herein, Leroux does not reach the very first bar – not only did the research happen ‘without us’, his role to “investigate” NunatuKavut identity was hidden from NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC). As a result, he did not request resources or build the relationships necessary that would have helped him answer many of the questions that he poses in his report. Therefore he is not in a position to impose

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parameters around the identity of NunatuKavut Inuit. Thus, it is unsurprising and quite evident why glaring gaps in his research persist. Now, one might argue that he was contracted for a very specific purpose – to question NunatuKavut’s land claim and therefore why should he have attempted to connect with NunatuKavut when clearly his motives go against the very efforts that NCC is attempting to advance? And to that I would argue that it would have made him more knowledgeable about the subject matter and therefore better able to engage with it in a robust way. Leroux’s conclusions are drawn with only a sliver of the available resources at his disposal, and for that reason alone, his conclusions are irrevocably inaccurate.

It is important to note at the outset that although I hold full membership with NunatuKavut, I’m not writing this report on their behalf or for NCC. I’m not getting paid to write this report. It is entirely of my own doing, as a concerned academic who is in a position to refute the illegitimate and incorrect claims that paint a false narrative of the NunatuKavut Inuit. I did, however, request

documents from NCC, particularly around some of the historical elements of this report for which I was unfamiliar, and I hired a data analyst to re-run the Census data that Leroux presented in his report as a means to have a third-party attempt to verify those data. In keeping with the spirit of relational research, I have shared this report with NCC, and they have endorsed its contents.

Both Indigenous, critical, feminist and other theorists have noted that we, as human beings, are not atheoretical, because we cannot simply present unbiased, objective facts about the human experience (Johnston et al., 2018; McClaren, 2017). We are not blank slates that can simply present information as it appears, since we all have a lens through which we see the world. This is as true today as it was historically. This rebuttal argues that by presenting ‘facts’ as atheoretical (and apolitical), Leroux does an injustice to his overall argument, since he is presupposing that his perspective as a white, male academic holds no bias. Nor does he acknowledge that the purpose for which his report was written was to inform an Inuit political organization whose concerns are rooted in false assumptions about the scarcity of political resources that are required at the federal level to address Indigenous rights.

This is not simply an academic exercise for me. My father is non-Indigenous and of European descent. He was raised in Trinity Bay on the island of Newfoundland by my grandparents, Rosanna (Cranford) Martin and Walter Martin. My mother is Theresa (Holley) Martin. She was born to Violet (Brown) and Paul Holley and was raised in Fox Harbour (now known as St. Lewis) with her four biological siblings and one additional sibling who, in today’s terms, was raised through ‘custom adoption’. Both of my maternal grandparents were Inuit, although back then they would have been referred to using the derogatory term ‘Eskimo’. My maternal grandfather was a trapper and a fisher.

He traded his catch with merchants from Carbonear in exchange for the basics to get his family through the long winter months: sugar, flour, salt and root vegetables. Racism was rampant back then – directed towards my grandparents and their parents and their parents’ parents. Merchants refused service to ‘Eskimos’ (Fitzhugh, 1999). The volunteer hospital (run by the International Grenfell Association) refused to employ ‘Eskimos’ (Perry, 1997). Eskimo was a dirty word. And so, my grandparents denied their heritage and my grandmother would say that if anyone called

her ‘native’ because of her dark skin that ‘her blood would boil’. Keep in mind that they had six young mouths to feed; eight when two of my aunts had babies before they left home. The choice became: deny your identity or watch your children starve. What would *you* do? This identity denial comes back to bite us now, because the argument, so it goes, is that if your own family denied who they were, then why are you now allowed to claim that identity? I should also qualify here that this is my story – that identity denial did not happen for all families, but I am acknowledging here that it happened in mine. It is part of my story.

As Leroux (2021, p.4) states, “*The NCC fully acknowledges in its 2010 report to the Government of Canada that its membership long denied having Indigenous ancestry, though it downplays how they may have opposed Indigenous peoples in the past*”. Leroux is suggesting here that because of our colonial history we no longer hold a right to claim Inuit identity. This is my identity. They denied who they were because *they had to* – imagine for one second being in that position. The culture doesn’t go away just because others try to forcefully remove it from you. If we continue that logic, then Indian Residential School survivors who also faced intentional and forcible disconnection from culture are also no longer Indigenous. What a horribly offensive argument to make.

Now some might suggest that I am not able to write a refutation to Darryl Leroux’s paper because of my own inability to separate fact from emotion. I am an academic – how can I possibly critique “facts” when I am so utterly and deeply entrenched in my own biases, my own assumptions as an Inuk woman? And to that I would say – in whose favour have the scales historically been tipped? How many academic papers and grants and articles do you see from Inuit writers? A handful. Maybe even that is an exaggeration. How many of those are women? The numbers drop even lower. Now, how many “Darryl Leroux’s” are out there that have written *about* my family, my history and my culture?

So, when one makes assumptions about my ability to assert the sterile analytics required of an academic, I argue, it does not exist. Leroux’s report is a prime example that the existence of white privilege *requires* my interrogation. To do anything less is upholding the status

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quo. And if, by asserting my identity is evidence of my 'superiority', then please, let me use my voice to advance the voices of Inuit, as a collective of people so deeply hurt by the vagaries of colonialism that we are willing to use white voices to tear one another apart.

3. Our History is Our Story to Tell

Leroux grossly neglects to include a critical assessment of the historical context in which Indigenous politics within the Canadian state, and within Newfoundland and Labrador (in particular), are situated.

The federal government's infamous White Paper, or what is more officially known as *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, released in 1969, called for the blanket assimilation of all Indigenous peoples within the Canadian nation-state. The eradication of Indigenous rights, the unilateral removal of all elements of political and legal elements of Indigeneity were being proposed to be removed.

Inadvertently, we have the White Paper to thank for the emergence of national Indigenous organizations like Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), for without the backlash that ensued as a result of the attempted whitewashing of Indigeneity within Canada, it is very likely that it would have taken another generation to witness the emergence of organized Indigenous collectives that were created directly as a means to advance Indigenous rights at a national level.

The mandate of ITK is important to understand – ITK has the responsibility to reflect the overarching interests and vision of Inuit collectives to the federal government. ITK is not an organization equipped to be the arbiter of Inuit identity. Inuit collectives hold that responsibility. It does not have a mandate to weigh in on who is and who is not, Inuk.

The trajectory of colonization took a different turn for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador as a result of the assimilationist zeitgeist of the times that pre-date the actual release of the White Paper in 1969. Whereas First Nations, Inuit, and Métis were a federal legislative responsibility as “Indians” under the Constitution Act of 1867 in the rest of Canada, when Newfoundland (later officially renamed Newfoundland and Labrador) joined Confederation with Canada in 1949 discussions about the eventual assimilation of all Indigenous peoples under the nation-state of Canada were already well underway. And so, in negotiating the Terms of Union with Canada, both parties (the Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland) *decided not to include mention of Indigenous peoples at all* – meaning that Indigenous peoples within the province were not initially considered a federal responsibility as Aboriginal peoples

(Hanrahan, 2003). Why bother to recognize the Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland, when in a few short years, there would be no distinct First Nations, Inuit, or Métis peoples anyway? Effectively, this set the stage for Indigenous peoples to remain ignored and unaccounted for by either the provincial or federal governments in the years to come.

What happens next should come as no surprise. Indigenous peoples within the province began to mobilize. Acknowledgement of their omission from the Terms of Union lit a fire under Inuit, Innu, and Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland and Labrador. And years of litigation ensued – keep in mind that *no other groups of Indigenous peoples in Canada had to litigate to retroactively be identified federally – this is unique to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador* (Grammond, 2014). The result was the emergence of distinct collectives within the province that appeared far later than many of their counterparts across the rest of the country. The earliest of these was Miawpukek First Nation, which was recognized as a federal Indian Reserve in 1987. Next was the “Labrador Inuit Land Claim Agreement” which was finalized in 2005. The “New Dawn” Agreement was signed in 2011 with the Innu, identifying land claim and self-government agreements (and the Innu themselves were only accepted under the Indian Act in 2002). In 2011, the Qalipu First Nation was also recognized on the island of Newfoundland by the federal government.

Why is this background important? Because it speaks to the fact that NunatuKavut Inuit did not just *emerge* out of nowhere in 2010 when it submitted its land claim documents to the federal government. A critical look at the timeline that led to the submission of *Unveiling NunatuKavut* (the document that was submitted to the federal government to support NunatuKavut’s land claim submission) helps to more deeply understand the complex relationship that Southern Inuit (i.e., Inuit that are represented by Nunatukavut Community Council) had with the emergence of a political entity that was meant to represent them to the provincial and federal government.

Leroux (2021, p. 3) notes that it was made clear by the federal government in early negotiations with the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA, which later became the Nunatsiavut Government) that *“the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development let it be known that it would recognize only one organization with Inuit members in Labrador”*. Whereas Leroux uses this as evidence to suggest that there was only one, verifiable Inuit group who could legitimately claim

Inuit presence in Labrador, this is far from the case. At the time that these negotiations were taking place, there was a need to delineate the historical presence and occupation of land that could be attributed to Inuit. The decision around who was and who was not ultimately included in Nunatsiavut's land claim submission boils down to a literal line drawn across a map.

Leroux fails to note that early discussions between the LIA and the Government of Canada in fact, included Inuit as far south as Sandwich Bay and Island of Ponds (where present-day Inuit members of NunatuKavut currently reside). Indeed, these communities were receiving federal transfer payments, as there was no question as to their Inuit identity. Meaning

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that there was never a concern raised over *whether* there were Inuit south of Groswater Bay – it was more about the size of the land claim that the federal government was willing to accept. For reasons that remain opaque (and for which I offer some academic speculation on later), the cut-off was arbitrarily assigned as north of Groswater Bay (see Image 1 below for map of Nunatsiavut land claim area – note that Hamilton Inlet denotes the mouth of Groswater Bay).

One publicly available archival document that Leroux fails to mention is one that details how the Nunatsiavut Government originally decided to include Happy Valley-Goose Bay and the surrounding area in its original land claim (Williamson, 1975):

In Mid-January 1975, there was a joint meeting of the Native Association of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Labrador Inuit Association, at Goose Bay. At this meeting the two Associations agreed on the terms of separate research programs. The Labrador Inuit Association agreed to include the communities of northern Labrador from Rigolet to Nain with the exception of Davis Inlet. The Labrador Inuit Association will also include the interests of Inuit and people of Inuit ancestry in the communities of North West River and Happy Valley. (Williamson, 1975, p. 3 of Activity Report).

Another point that Leroux downplays is that one key feature of Nunatsiavut's land claim was that it was entirely based on residents who resided north of Groswater Bay *regardless of whether they were Inuit or not*. Grammond notes, "One original feature of these agreements was that

they did not focus on services provided to individuals holding Indian status, but provided benefits to all residents of certain ‘designated communities,’ which were generally regarded as being mostly Indigenous... Even though these agreements were based on the Indigenous character of the designated communities and the federal government’s jurisdiction over the Indigenous peoples, they used geographical criteria that avoided the identification of specific individuals as being Indigenous or not” (2014, p. 481). In other words, the very questions that Leroux raises about the composition of NunatuKavut’s membership (which I describe in section 6 of this rebuttal) could very well apply to Nunatsiavut – the organization for whom Leroux is writing his report.

Further, Grammond (2014) notes that “...when the “designated communities” system was put in place after Confederation, only northern communities were designated, reflecting and reinforcing the view that there were no Indigenous peoples in southern Labrador. Yet, as [Rompkey] noted, the latter “had just as much Inuit blood [as] and shared a similar way of life” with their northern counterparts”.

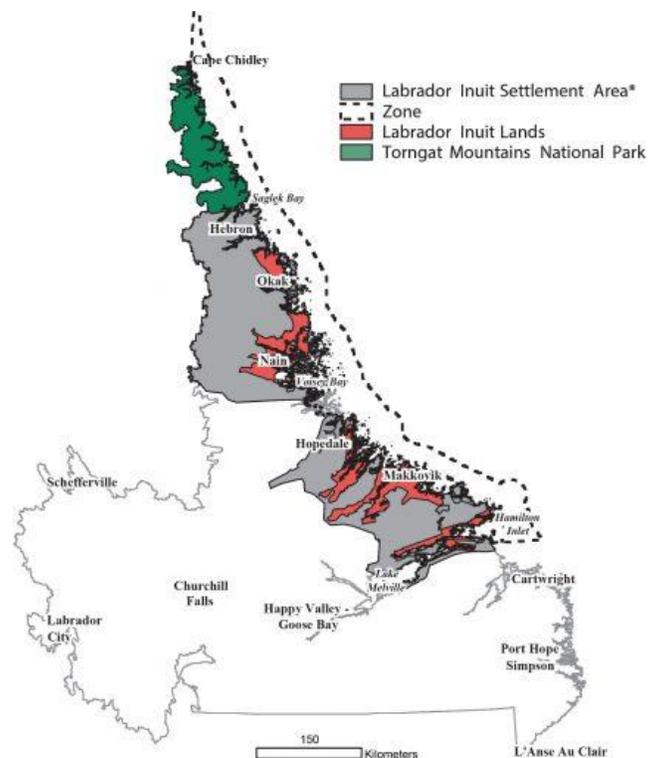


Image 1: retrieved from: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/hunting-trapping-guide/2019-20/labrador-inuit-land-claims-agreement/>

4. The Colonial Politics of Recognition

Taiaiake Alfred describes Glen Coulthard’s description of the Colonial Politics of Recognition as enabling us to see “how our psycho-affective attachments to colonialism are blocking the achievements of a just society” (Coulthard, p. xi). Coulthard himself suggests that within the current liberal nation-state, the recognition sought after by Indigenous peoples is impossible, since the unequal power relationship between the nation-state (Canada) and Indigenous collectives (in the present example, Inuit collectives within Labrador, and, as they are represented – or not represented – by the national-level organization, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami) serves to reproduce colonialist, racist and patriarchal state power.

It is a game of chess, whereby one side knows all the moves of the other side (the one with the power and resources, which in this case, is the nation-state of Canada) and is afforded the unfair advantage of shaping the next move of its opponent (Inuit collectives aiming to assert their rights).

Coulthard’s assessment of neoliberal politics and the use of those politics to re-entrench colonial ideals become increasingly important as we move through the narrative that Leroux has painted. Leroux’s report, on so many levels, serves as an excellent example of the ‘colonial politics of recognition’. Conceived as it was on the part of

Nunatsiavut to undermine the rights and recognition of NunatuKavut Inuit, the underlying motivation for the report by both ITK and Nunatsiavut is a misplaced fear that if NCC are successful in their own land claim, then this will somehow “diminish” (quoting Natan Obed, 2021) the available budget for badly needed resources and supports for Inuit

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who deserve those benefits. Coulthard would say that this is an example of adopting a neoliberal argument to more deeply entrench colonial ideals within Indigenous governments, further absolving the federal government of its own obligations to those Indigenous governments.

Acknowledging the inherent rights of NunatuKavut Inuit is not meant to remove or diminish the already established rights of Nunatsiavut Inuit (or the Innu Nation, for that matter). Historical, archaeological and oral histories confirm that these territories were used extensively by Indigenous collectives, that the lands and its bounties were always used to live and thrive there. “Ownership” of land as it is defined and understood within colonial frameworks requires an understanding of what ownership means for Inuit, a definition that acknowledges and upholds the historical and ongoing land-use patterns that involve moving and travelling and being in relation to the land, sea, ice and air – a very different conceptualization from the static “white-picket fence” colonial concept of ownership.

...it is the failure of the federal government to adequately support the autonomy and self-determination of Indigenous peoples that is the root cause of this dispute. Scrambling over what is deemed, time and again, to be inadequate funding does not serve to advance Indigenous rights and misplaces energy that could be better spent advocating for improvements to resources, programming and supports that are needed for all Indigenous communities.

The land may have been considered vast and barren to colonial eyes, but to Inuit, it has always held bounties, and, has always been home.

Moreover, if we think more deeply about who serves to benefit the most from Indigenous groups disputing land and resources, it becomes quite clear that it is, in fact, the federal government. As Indigenous peoples bicker over what remaining resources and territory are left after the federal government has negotiated or developed the bulk of those resources away, they can sit back and watch the infighting – since the more resources are depleted, the fewer resources they have to divvy up between competing Indigenous peoples – and the further Indigenous cultures erode since our very existence co-exists with that of the land, water, ice and air around us.

The longer resources and territories are disputed, the longer it takes for the federal government to cough up funds for services and programming that are so desperately needed across all Indigenous communities – Nunatsiavut, NunatuKavut and the Innu Nation included among these. I am not here to suggest that one group is more deserving of rights and recognition than

another group; all have been desperately underserved by the federal government, and there is a lot of catching up to do if the federal government is to live up to its own obligations. But what I am asserting is that it is the failure of the federal government (representing a colonial nation state) to adequately support the autonomy and self-determination of Indigenous peoples that is the root cause of this dispute. Scrambling over what is deemed, time and again, to be inadequate funding does not serve to advance Indigenous rights and misplaces efforts that could be better spent advocating for improvements to resources, programming and supports that are needed for all Indigenous communities.

What if we re-imagined the relationship between Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador through an ethic of mutual respect and recognition; one of relational accountability? Where we acknowledged the benefits and resilience and resources and strengths that we all bring to the table? Imagine what we could accomplish if we worked together.

With the colonial politics of recognition in mind, I encourage the reader to think carefully in reading the Leroux Report and this rebuttal about who is being best served by the vitriol and anger stoked by research penned with such divisive rhetoric motivating it.

This is not how we, as Indigenous peoples, do things. It does not align with our teachings of reciprocity and respect.

5. The British-Inuit Treaty of 1765

By his own admission, Leroux indicates that he was unable to locate *any* sources to verify the existence of a British-Inuit Treaty. “*In fact, I’ve been unable to locate a single academic study that discusses any so-called “Labrador Treaty of 1765.”*” (Leroux, 2021, p. 12). Below are eight archival and academic sources that discuss the British-Inuit Treaty of 1765:

1. Archival sources – primarily, CO194/16:225.
https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/cns_colonia/id/22815/rec/17
2. Bonesteel, S. (2008). Canada’s relationship with Inuit: a history of program and policy development. Prepared for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Available at:
https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2010/ainc-inac/R3-82-2008-eng.pdf
3. Gosling, W.G. (1910). *Labrador: Its Discovery, Exploration, and Development*. London, pages 173 – 175.
4. Hiller, J. K. (2009). Eighteenth Century Labrador: the European Perspective. In Rollmann, Roberts, E., Kennedy, J. C., & Hiller, J. (2009). *Moravian beginnings in Labrador : papers from a symposium held in Makkovik and Hopedale, Labrador (2002)*.
5. Kennedy, J. C. (2015). *Encounters: An Anthropological History of Southeastern Labrador*. McGill-Queens, pages 42 – 46.
6. Lysaght, A. M. *Joseph Banks in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1766*, University of California Press, pages 181 – 221.
7. Mitchell, G. (2005). *The Palliser Friendship Treaty: The Esquimeaux-British Treaty of Southern Labrador (August 21, 1765)*. *Newfoundland Quarterly*, 98(1).
8. Whitely, W.H. (1964). The Establishment of the Moravian Mission in Labrador and British Policy, 1763-83, *Canadian Historical Review*, XLV(1), 34 – 36.

The article noted above that was published by Whitely in 1964 notes that in 1764, the Governor of Newfoundland at the time, Sir Hugh Palliser fervently wished to establish and maintain British dominance over the Labrador fishery and to restrict French from fishing or establishing any sort of relationship or foothold in Labrador. He noted that in order to ensure this dominance, he would need to secure the cooperation of the “Eskimo”. He recruited Jens Haven, a Danish carpenter-turned-missionary for the job, since Haven was said to have befriended local Inuit and

was therefore in a good position to negotiate with them. He was given certificates to hand out to Inuit that indicated that they would be protected by the British Crown in early 1765. Shortly thereafter, Governor Palliser arrived at Chateau Bay in Labrador and issued a Proclamation making it illegal to trade fish with the French. In late August of 1765, Palliser recruited missionaries to find as many Inuit as possible and bring them to Chateau Bay. On August 21, 1765, approximately 500 Inuit gathered there alongside 700 British sailors and it was there, on that date, that Palliser entered into an agreement with Inuit offering “protection of His majesty, peace and friendship”, treaty rights of government, harvest of wildlife and natural resources, and a commercial right of trade (Mitchell, 2005; Whitely, 1964, p. 35). In return, the British expected to fish there peaceably. The Inuit response to this was favorable, as one of the Inuit leaders struck him on the breast, kissed him and indicated “we will remain your good friends” (Whitely, 1965, p. 35). As an oral treaty, this treaty would not have been “signed”, but is nonetheless well documented by colonial sources and in subsequent scholarship.

Despite this, Leroux claims that the British-Inuit Treaty of 1765 is a complete fabrication. He asserts this on the basis that there was no mention of a Treaty in NunatuKavut’s original land claim that was submitted in 1995.

The inclusion of the “Labrador Treaty” in “Unveiling NunatuKavut” is directly opposed to their position in their previous land claim submission in 1995 (“Completing the Circle”), in which the then- Labrador Metis Association argued that there had never been any treaties signed in Labrador: “It can be seen by the historical evidence presented in this document that no treaty respecting Aboriginal title exists in Labrador (Leroux, 2021, p. 11)

In actual fact, and more consistent with a nuanced understanding of the limited capacity and resources devoted to understanding Southern Inuit presence on the coast of Labrador, the knowledge about the Treaty of 1765 by scholars until recently was very limited. Verifiable archival research was not uncovered until 2003 while doing research for *Unveiling NunatuKavut* – this was after three previous land claim submissions to the federal government – explaining why it was not mentioned. It was through this research that a report was uncovered that noted a Treaty was formally accepted by the Lords of Trade of the Privy Council of Britain in May of

1769. Additional evidence demonstrates that the treaty-making process was taking place for many years prior to the actual Treaty event described in 1765. Although limited in terms of peer-reviewed literature, as Leroux notes, this does not in any way negate the fact that a Treaty persists. Moreover mention of the treaty is present in publicly available government documents. For instance, the quote below is taken from Anderson (2006, p.2) in a report prepared for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada:

In 1765, Labrador Inuit negotiated a peace treaty with the English Governor of Newfoundland on the advice of Moravian Missionary, Jens Haven, ending years of animosity between Inuit, and European whalers and fishers. As the Moravians were central to the conclusion of this agreement, they were given government sanction to establish and administer communities, and were granted land for this purpose in 1769.

Given the overarching federal political context, and the omission of Indigenous peoples' writ large from the Terms of Union with Canada from its onset, it is worthy to note that the initial movement of NunatuKavut Inuit towards rights and recognition began with little to no resources and supports from either the provincial or federal government. Leroux paints a picture of an organized collective, funded heavily by government and military interests that were intent on nefariously draining resources from Inuit in Northern Labrador (more on this in section 6). In speaking with those who worked tirelessly on the eventual submission of the *Unveiling NunatuKavut* document, I have a very different understanding. Where a very small but dedicated group worked tirelessly for many years to uncover detailed information about NunatuKavut's history and occupation of southern Labrador that had never before been documented.

Leroux uses the fact that very little peer-reviewed information exists to support NunatuKavut's assertions in its land-claim – when in fact, the reason that there is so little information is because so much of it is yet to be documented or published.

The incredible work that NCC is doing to advance what we know regarding the occupation of Inuit in Southern Labrador is ongoing, and in fact, has been even further advanced *since* the submission of its land claim document.

Despite this, Leroux nevertheless goes on to conclude:

Overall, it's my assessment that without reliable peer-reviewed research, the NCC's claims about the existence of a "Labrador Treaty of 1765" are inconclusive. In addition, even if a "treaty" had been negotiated with the Inuit in 1765, it would have been with the Inuit people writ large, not with some segment now being called the "Southern Inuit" by the NCC (Leroux, 2021, p.13).

The fact that this Treaty was not claimed by Nunatsiavut is also evidence that it was not verifiably uncovered at the time that Nunatsiavut had submitted its own land claim submission. If its existence were known, it would certainly raise (even more) eyebrows as to why Southern Inuit were left out of the earlier land claim by the LIA. And why Nunatsiavut Inuit would submit a smaller land claim that intentionally omitted a verifiable British-Inuit Treaty. Otherwise, what we have is a Treaty, accepted by the Lords of Trade, with no Inuit willing to claim the rights and obligations accrued under that Treaty – and wouldn't that be something.

Leroux (2021, p. 1) summarizes his analysis of NunatuKavut identity with a statement that appears in the first page of his report: *My final assessment is that the nature and scale of the NCC's claims aren't supported by the evidence that they bring forward. Notably, their claim to the existence of a distinct "Southern Inuit" people is baseless.* It is quite a twist of logic that Leroux uses his own incomplete research to conclude that no evidence exists.

6. How the NCC Defines Membership

Leroux notes that “*NCC hasn’t been forthcoming about how many individuals without Indigenous ancestry became members and whether they and their children continue to be members today. Overall, the NCC’s registry requires an independent, third-party review before political claims about its membership can be seriously considered in the public realm*” (Leroux, 2021, p. 6).

It is my understanding that Leroux did not approach NunatuKavut to ask them for this information, nor does he appear to have availed himself of publicly available information about NCC’s membership.

A quick google search would have provided this information.

In 2008, the precursor of the NCC, the Labrador Metis Nation, launched a renewal of its membership criteria, tightening its genealogical requirements for acceptance as an enrolled full member. A publication by Kennedy (which is cited in Leroux’s report, although Leroux ignores this particular point) notes that this renewed membership process created a chasm within NunatuKavut communities since many people without an ancestral connection to Inuit lineage were denied membership during the renewal process (Kennedy, 2015). Indeed, I recall filling out this membership renewal application, which included filling out a family tree that extended three generations back, as well as information about my current residence. This information collectively informed whether I would be granted full membership or associate membership. The current membership application for NCC members is publicly available on its website at www.nunatukavut.ca.

On page 6, Leroux posits that “there is a belief that up to 10,500 people in Labrador could become members, which represents about 35% of Labrador’s population according to the 2016 Census of Canada”, and that “NCC has not been forthcoming about how many individuals without Indigenous ancestry became members and whether they and their children continue to be members today”. Let’s start with the 10,500 people. How Leroux arrived at this number is anyone’s guess since no reference is provided for this “belief”. The entire population of Labrador is approximately 27,000 people, some of whom are already Nunatsiavut Government

Beneficiaries, others are members of the Innu Nation, still others are non-Indigenous, immigrants, etc. Without doing any math, this number is not plausible, and, even if it were, what is the fear that is being conjured? That a lot of Inuit live in Labrador? Well, that is a threatening prospect if there ever was one.

Next, without evidence (since he admits he

was not privy to this information), he assumes that NunatuKavut is rife with people who have no Indigenous ancestry. Does he not understand that many Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries have no, or little, Inuit ancestry? And that Nunatsiavut Government also does not make public the personal identity details of its membership? And let's be clear, Nunatsiavut Government, as a self-determining Inuit collective, has the absolute prerogative to determine who gets included or excluded according to its own membership criteria. Why should NunatuKavut not also be afforded that same opportunity?

And let's be clear, Nunatsiavut Government, as a self-determining Inuit collective, has the absolute prerogative to determine who gets included or excluded according to its own membership criteria. Why should NunatuKavut not also be afforded that same opportunity?

Even more strange is his belief that Nunatukavut's origins were rooted in a "pro-military expansion entity funded heavily by the Canadian government." He asserts this easily refutable falsehood despite the fact that the precursor of NCC, the Labrador Metis Association was created in 1981, three years *before* low-level military flying took place in Labrador. Yet he even acknowledges that any academic concern about this was "put to rest in the 1990s." Despite this, he includes it in his report, perhaps to insinuate that 'perhaps' Southern Inuit *were* funded by the military.

This is ludicrous. My own research in 2009 offers evidence that in fact military presence on the south coast of Labrador during the Cold War period offered very little, if any, support to local families.

In fact, many older people today recall waiting for local military to bring their trash to the local dump so that they could scavenge leftovers (Martin, 2009). Far from offering evidence of being 'funded heavily by the Canadian government' this instead presents evidence that even well into

the 1960s and 70s, both the American and Canadian military in the area at the time offered no measurable, systemic benefits to the local community (Martin, 2009).

Citing Kennedy, Leroux argues that NunatuKavut received \$1.5million in federal funding in the 1980s. He notes,

...the LMA expressly empowered white Labradorians with no Indigenous ancestry to claim to be “Indigenous,” in what appears to have been a political strategy to oppose the Innu and Inuit in the region. Apparently, the LMA was quite successful in mobilizing federal government sympathies, receiving \$1.5 million in funding (\$3.1 million adjusted for inflation) in its first two years of operation (Leroux, 2021, p. 4).

Upon further investigation into this claim (and choosing to ignore the glaringly inflammatory comment about inflation), it is not clear that the Labrador Metis Association (LMA) ever received any funding to this extent from the federal government as there are no records of this funding ever having been received by the LMA, nor are there any records from Indian and Northern Affairs that indicate that funds resembling anything close to this amount were ever transferred. In fact, the direct quote from Kennedy’s original article states that “*...the Native Economic Development Program (NEOP) have already netted seven Labrador Metis companies 1.5 million dollars in grants and interest free loans (CBC 1988).*” The citation here indicates that the source was a CBC program called ‘On Camera’ – which may simply have been an error in CBC reporting at that time, as it is not verifiable. If anything, any funding received by the Native Economic Development Program offers further evidence that the federal government supported Indigenous business in Labrador by offering economic development support for Indigenous business owners in Labrador – this funding was dedicated *not* to the LMA to “empower white Labradorians”, nor does it have anything to do with advancing a land claim, as Leroux asserts.

Grammond (2014) also reaches the opposite conclusion to Leroux. Whereas Leroux suggests that the motivation for seeking Inuit recognition was because of government resources offered by military expansion, Grammond argues that, in fact, the reason that Nunatsiavut did *not* include the south coast of Labrador in its land claim was *because* of the complexity that would have emerged trying to negotiate a land-claim when both foreign and domestic military were occupying tracts of land there.

He notes, “By restricting the area of its land claim to northern Labrador, the LIA excluded persons of Inuit ancestry living in central and southern Labrador, whose Indigenous identity had received less outside recognition and whose claims may have been viewed as more threatening to military and resource development interests” (Grammond, 2014, p. 485).

Leroux omits conclusions reached by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), when it specifically made mention of NunatuKavut Inuit. According to RCAP,

Certainly, the Labrador Métis community exhibits the historical rootedness, social cohesiveness and cultural self-consciousness that are essential to nationhood, and they are developing a political organization that will allow them to engage in effective nation-to-nation negotiation and to exercise self-government. While the way of life of the Labrador Métis is very similar to that of Labrador Inuit and Innu, the Métis culture is sufficiently distinct to mark them as a unique people, and in our view, they are likely to be accorded nation status under the recognition policy we propose (Canada, 1996).

Interestingly, much of Leroux’s scholarship outside of this space revolves around “race-shifting” among the Eastern Métis within Quebec and parts of the Maritimes (Leroux, 2019). His scholarship typically relies upon genealogical evidence to assert that the Eastern Métis are a recently manufactured group of white Settlers wanting to claim Indigeneity. This logic, although not absent from this report, is notably muted when compared with Leroux’s other research with the Eastern Métis. Why is this the case?

Recalling that Leroux is writing a report on behalf of the Nunatsiavut Government, it becomes clear that Inuit ancestry and its ties to rights and recognition are not as clear as he would have us believe from his other research. The genealogical analysis is notably absent, likely because it does not support his conclusion that “race-shifting” occurred in Labrador.

In fact, anthropologist John Kennedy who has written extensively on the subject of Labrador Inuit identity (and in fact, has even changed his own conclusions as a result of further research that has done notably more engagement with local Inuit) notes:

*The recognition of aboriginality by the LIA would have very different consequences for the Inuit-European Settlers of northern Labrador. **They eventually became LIA members** and, as such, full beneficiaries in any future land claim. Under the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement, Settlers/Kablunângajuit, **‘with or without Inuit ancestry’** (LIA 2003: 34), are legally Inuit and today constitute most of Nunatsiavut’s population (Kennedy, 2015, p. 231, emphasis added).*

It would be hypocritical of Leroux to rely on his previous work that argues blood quantum as a measure of Indigeneity, (blood quantum, by definition, intends to literally measure the amount of “native” blood one holds – measuring Indigenous blood similar to the way that you would measure flour to bake a birthday cake), when the organization (i.e., Nunatsiavut) for whom Leroux is working uses a ‘designated community system’ to denote Indigeneity, which has nothing at all to do with blood quantum. Nunatsiavut relies on geographic boundaries and demonstrations of cultural continuity for acceptance. As Kennedy (2015, p. 232) notes, “The LMA [Labrador Metis Association] mobilized the genuine concerns of people of mixed European-Inuit ancestry who were unable to join the LIA [Labrador Inuit Association], primarily because of where they or their kin had been born.”

To put it bluntly, the very argument that Leroux relies upon in his previous research holds no weight when it comes to Inuit in Labrador. And yet, rather than acknowledge this, Leroux (2021, p. 17) chooses to double-down on his blood quantum arguments:

If we accept that Indigenous identity is about much more than “blood” or “genes,” as Indigenous scholars have been arguing now for several decades, then the fact that mixed-descent settlers appear to have historically benefitted from settler colonialism into the present, raises some difficult questions.

Difficult questions, indeed.

7. Absence of Evidence is Not Evidence of Absence

Unequivocally, Inuit occupied south and central Labrador for centuries. Strong archeological evidence exists, plus ongoing land use connects historical places to Inuit culture through very precise, land-based, and highly specific knowledge.

We practiced ‘seasonal transhumance’ or what was locally referred to as ‘shifting’, as did all kinds of people all over the world for many centuries. Indeed, we shifted, but it was not our race that did so.

Leroux repeats worn-out and long-refuted definitions of land use when he asserts that no evidence exists of permanent occupation. Inuit often had no fixed address in the colonial sense of that phrase. But that’s because we were an itinerant people, not because we did not live there. We practiced ‘seasonal transhumance’ or what was locally referred to as ‘shifting’, as did all kinds of people all over the world for many centuries.

Indeed, we shifted, but it was not our race that did so.

Moving around the Labrador landscape is innately Inuit. For Leroux to deny this demonstrates his studied indifference to the fact that Inuit adaptations to the land, sea, ice and air begets Inuit culture.

Throughout its land claim document, *Unveiling NunatuKavut*, NunatuKavut demonstrates beyond a reasonable doubt that Inuit occupied south and central Labrador.

Evidence of occupation to prove Aboriginal Title is very different from the way in which Leroux describes it when he says that Inuit presence on the coast was “brief” (Leroux, p.8). Within Canada, the requirement to prove Aboriginal Title does not require evidence that people live in one place year-round, rather occupation infers usage throughout a territory in a variety of means consistent with how that territory has been used historically (Luk, 2014).

And yet, Leroux repeatedly claims that there is no evidence of permanent occupation, using the term as if it implies the need for a fixed address:

However, the fact that Inuit lived all along the coast for a couple centuries doesn't mean that they lived at any one location permanently. In fact, the academic material suggests the direct opposite to be true (Leroux, 2021, p. 7).

This interpretation of permanent occupation warrants attention, as it illustrates Leroux's colonial understanding of land-use within the Inuit context. An excerpt from his report (that includes the above quote) cites the *Unveiling* report as offering no evidence of permanent occupation, stating:

First, the NCC claims repeatedly that the Inuit occupation of what they call southern Labrador was permanent: 'The Inuit occupations [sic] of southern Labrador were of a permanent nature'. Still, the archaeological evidence that the NCC cites in no way suggests that the Inuit lived permanently in any one location prior to the 1770s, let alone in what they identify as "southern" Labrador. To be clear, the overwhelming academic consensus is that Inuit populations lived down the Labrador coast all the way to the Lower Shore of the St-Lawrence River in present-day Quebec. Most academics also agree that the Inuit retreated to north of the Strait of Belle Isle sometime by the early 1700s. There's also widespread consensus that pockets of Inuit along the southern Labrador coast between Hamilton Inlet and Battle Harbour until the 1850s. However, Carol Brice-Bennett maintained that in 1905 only two "full-blooded" Inuit women, both married to European men, lived south of Hamilton Inlet, which concords with the NCC's own report. None of these points are controversial in the academic literature. However, the fact that Inuit lived all along the coast for a couple centuries doesn't mean that they lived at any one location permanently. In fact, the academic material suggests the direct opposite to be true (Leroux, 2021, p.8).

Leroux draws this conclusion despite peer-reviewed evidence by a respected archaeologist, cited within the *Unveiling* document, to the contrary:

Dr. Rankin, building upon the work of others, confirms in her March 2009 report that the Inuit were in year-round settlement of south and central Labrador well before the mid-1600s. They were present in extended family groupings as part of their usual, customary and traditional territory. They were not engaged in mere seasonal trading journeys.

Among Dr. Rankin's observations: 'Recent archaeological evidence has suggested that there was year-round Inuit settlement on the coast of Southern Labrador by the mid-17th century and that the Inuit presence was not simply a matter of seasonal trading journeys' (Clarke & Mitchell, 2010, p. 9).

Moreover, when Marianne Stopp, another archaeologist whose extensive research informed NCC's land claim, asserted that the migratory patterns observed within the archaeological evidence matched how local Inuit describe their own land use patterns, Leroux deduces that this is yet more evidence of impermanence:

Archaeologist Marianne Stopp, who has been leading fieldwork on the southern Labrador coast for a couple decades, argues against the very category of "permanence" in reference to historical Inuit occupation in the region: "'Permanence' applies a colonialist criterion of belonging to a place. In reference to Inuit occupation, it obscures the reality of forager adaptation, of the distances covered to obtain resources, and of the seasonal flux of the forager group." All told, the same researchers who the NCC rely on to make their case for the permanent presence of an Inuit population along the south coast generally don't support their claims, which are the basis for their creation of a distinct "Southern Inuit" people (Leroux, 2021).

Leroux erroneously concludes that because Inuit maintained land-use patterns consistent with Inuit land-use patterns that have existed since time immemorial, this somehow verifies that Inuit never lived there in the first place:

...NCC openly undermines its own creation of a "Southern Inuit" population regularly throughout the report by highlighting Inuit mobility along the coast (Leroux, 2021, p. 9)

Leroux insists that NCC is aiming to establish an Inuit culture separate and distinct from Nunatsiavut Inuit, and that there has never been a collective "Inuit homeland":

throughout the report, the NCC maintains that a strong division existed between Inuit in the so-called south and north. They even go so far as to argue against the idea of there

being a Labrador Inuit homeland, since this would suggest that there is only one Inuit people in Labrador (Leroux, 2021, p. 8).

Leroux specifically references page 114 of the ‘Unveiling report’ when he draws this conclusion. It is stated that “the presumption about the location of an Inuit ‘homeland’ has also motivated a biased interpretation of the meticulous records kept by the Moravians following their establishment at Nain in 1771” (Clarke & Mitchell, 2010, p. 114). Taken out of context, one might assume that the conclusion that Leroux is drawing here makes sense, however, this section of text is taken from within a subsection of the report titled ‘Presumption of social organization and cultural forms’ whereby the authors of *Unveiling* are critiquing the colonialist conventions within which a homeland was being defined, and the difficulty in applying this sort of static concept to Inuit, given that they are notoriously transhumant and ‘rapid movers’ (Clarke & Mitchell, 2010, p. 113). In fact, this very section of the report highlights that Inuit “defy most territorial conventions since they were following marine resources wherever they travel in the Arctic round of seasonal opportunity and, as well, are noted for following opportunities for the acquisition of iron and for trade” (Clarke & Mitchell, 2010, p.113).

The *Unveiling* report itself notes that there is, in fact, very limited archival material to support the heretofore accepted notion that Inuit moved from the north to the south only for trading purposes (i.e., post-contact) – suggesting that the opposite is, in fact, plausible *and* supported by evidence (see reference to the Cartwright Journals in the *Unveiling* report). What this section of the *Unveiling* report *is* saying is that Inuit presence in southern Labrador was well-established *prior* to the arrival of Europeans, and in fact, that there was motivation on the part of the Moravians and the British to ‘shoo’ Inuit further north and away from lucrative fishing grounds.

On page 8 of his report, Leroux incorrectly claims that in its *Unveiling* document, NCC is attempting to prove that such a strong division existed between north and south Inuit, that a separate and distinct culture of Inuit emerged on the south coast. There is little basis for this argument, since the *Unveiling* document itself indicates instances where there are deep connections between north and south Inuit, and through the practice of *shifting* or moving to access seasonally available resources, it does not make practical sense for distinct boundaries to be drawn between the north and south. Differences in cultural expressions between north and

south Inuit would have emerged as a result of natural differences that any Inuit culture would adapt to based on where they live. Inuit who live on Baffin Island, for instance, have cultural distinctions (and different trajectories of colonization) from those who live in Nain.

Additionally, Leroux references work by Brice-Bennett that supposes that only two-full blooded Inuit existed on the coast in 1905. This is an egregious misrepresentation and archival materials demonstrate its inaccuracy. Leroux neglects to include evidence published by John Kennedy (2015) which presents photographs of Inuit families (with small children) in Fox Harbour dating as far back as 1890, and the last names of those families persist today signalling that there were, unequivocally, Inuit families living and thriving in southern Labrador during this time period (incidentally, these photographs are very dear to me because they depict some of my own family members).

However, there *is* one point that requires clarification. Quoting directly from the *Unveiling* report, Leroux notes,

Early in the report, the NCC claims that, ‘The Inuit of south and central Labrador had a different language system than those of northern Labrador’. The only citation is to research conducted for their report and thus, unavailable to the broader research community. I have found no evidence to support this statement (Leroux, 2021, p. 8).

I connected with one of the authors of the *Unveiling* report to seek clarification on this statement, and indeed, this particular statement about a ‘different language system’ is not accurate. The author pointed me to the citations that were used to support the statement (one of which is a manuscript published in *Études/Inuit Studies* by Dorais in 1980 of the title ‘The Inuit language in Southern Labrador’), which offers evidence that there were different *dialects* of Inuttitut spoken throughout Labrador, and indeed, he notes that references made to Inuttitut spoken in southern Labrador in the mid-1700s are some of the earliest documented evidence of the Inuit language in Canada, noting that early missionaries described the dialect similar to that found in Greenland (Dorais, 1980, p.6). Additional references that support the existence of distinct Inuttitut dialects would be Andersen & Johns (2005), another reference by Dorais (1980), and extensive supplemental research for the land claim submission by Hanrahan (2001). Further into the

Unveiling document (beginning on page 240), there is an entire section devoted to offering evidence of this distinct dialect (i.e., with no reference made to a distinct language system), proving that the error on page 9 of the report, was simply an editorial mistake. Again, rather than offering unequivocal ‘proof’ that NCC was trying to ‘create’ an Inuit culture in southern Labrador, this error strengthens my overall assertion that relational research is critical – had Leroux engaged with the notion of ‘relational research accountability’ and attempted to connect with NCC and the authors of the *Unveiling* document, he would have been provided information needed to make an informed conclusion.

8. Troubling Assertions of Racial Superiority

Leroux claims that NunatuKavut Inuit are “white Labradorians” intent on siphoning resources away from “real Inuit”. Leroux, himself a white scholar, has nowhere near the level of scholarship, judgement, or authority required to determine (or even weigh in on) such a deeply cultural, deeply Indigenous, matter.

All Labrador Inuit have been marginalized for centuries by the corrosive effects of racism and colonialism. It is exceedingly offensive to have those same arguments used as evidence to divide us.

Leroux claims that NunatuKavut Inuit are “white Labradorians” intent on siphoning

resources away from “real Inuit”. Leroux, himself a white scholar, has nowhere near the level of scholarship, judgement, or authority required to determine (or even weigh in on) such a deeply cultural, deeply Indigenous, matter. Moreover, this determination is highly offensive to the family and kin whose lineages do not fit neatly within either of the geographic or cultural boundaries created by political organizations like Nunatsiavut Government or NunatuKavut Community Council (or, for that matter, those who might find themselves meeting the membership criteria for both).

Leroux does not present one core argument for his jaw-dropping claim about “Southern Inuit superiority”; he presents four.

1. The presence of Moravians was used “as a foil through which to advance its superiority as Inuit people.”
2. The presence of a commercial fishery is used to highlight “superior Inuitness.”
3. The Southern Inuit benefited from identifying as Settlers to the detriment of their Inuit and Innu neighbours.
4. Socio-economic indicators offer a way to measure racial superiority.

I have detailed my rebuttals to each of these claims below. They can best be summed up by saying that using racism as a final argument to make the case that “Southern Inuit” benefit too much from white privilege to be “truly Inuit” is racist in itself.

Here are detailed arguments to rebut the following claims:

1. The presence of Moravians was used “*as a foil through which to advance its superiority as Inuit people*” (Leroux, 2021, p. 13)

The presence of Moravian priests on the Northern portion of Labrador offers evidence of a distinct trajectory of colonization that differed substantially from that of the South Coast. In fact, it might be argued that were it not for these two very distinct versions of colonization, one through religious indoctrination and the other through economic and resource exploitation, Inuit throughout Labrador would have likely retained many of the same culturally distinct practices and protocols, with any differences in expressions of culture being rooted in geographic location and the necessary culture and lifeways that would emerge from distinct localities. Where Moravian influence encouraged indoctrination into Christianity, economic exploitation on the south coast included enforced religious indoctrination by creating a dependence on external trade, and then withholding that trade if Inuit refused to attend church or school or to speak English (Fitzhugh, 1999). This is not an argument for ‘southern Inuit superiority’ but simply acknowledges a distinct version of colonization that differed from how it unfolded for those in the north. More on this below.

2. The presence of a commercial fishery is used to highlight “superior Inuitness”.

Leroux uses the following passage, found on page 98 of the *Unveiling* report to make the above claim:

In the same way that outsiders had devastated the whale populations in the early generations after contact, Canada and Newfoundland had devastated the cod fishery in the 1900s, with no thought or care for protecting the priority Aboriginal fishery rights of the Labrador Inuit descendant communities. This was particularly an issue in

...waters off the coast of NunatuKavut offer a source of present-day commercial income for shrimp harvesters from Nunavut and both shrimp and turbot harvesters from Nunatsiavut. Why is the commercial fishery in waters off NunatuKavut territory only a select threat to NunatuKavut Indigeneity but not to other Inuit who fish there?

south/central Labrador, which had, for example, 150 apprentice fishermen and 256 level 2 fishers, while Northern Labrador had only 13 apprentices and 13 at Level 2. This demonstrates again that these south/central Labrador communities retained their original land use patterns, adaptability, and inventiveness, never being anchored to, and dependant on, the northern missions (Clarke & Mitchell, 2010, p. 98).

The chapter of the report within which this

statement appears is about the influence of the Moravian Missionaries and their active attempts to draw Inuit away from the lucrative fishing grounds in southern Labrador so as to further the objective of an open British fishery.

Leroux would be hard-pressed to argue that the Moravian Missionaries did not have a lasting impact on the trajectory of colonization for the Inuit in Northern Labrador. This is not evidence of “Southern Inuit” superiority; rather, it is evidence that, as mentioned above, colonization on the South coast took a different trajectory that was more heavily influenced by the unregulated and politically supported advancement of merchant trade. Merchant trade that was, to put it mildly, morally suspect when compared to Moravian Missionaries in the North, who (perhaps, at a minimum), were operating under at least a guise of religious direction. In fact, had Leroux consulted archival documents that are publicly available through the Centre for Newfoundland and Labrador Studies at Memorial University as well as various other archives, he would have uncovered evidence of a slave trade¹, the rape of “Eskimo” women on the south coast², and concerted efforts on the part of the English to use war tactics to eliminate Eskimos that were

¹ Brouage, F., 1729, September 20th, Letter from Brouage, Commandant for the King on the Coast of Labrador to the Conceil de Marine, in Roy Pierre-George (ed.), *Rapport de l'Archiviste de la province de Québec pour 1922-1923*, Quebec City, Ls-A. Proulx: 384. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/CollectionSearch/Pages/record.aspx?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=3073990&new=-8585856128331295885>

² Raudot, Antoine Denis, and Camille De Rochemonteix. *Relation Par Lettres De L'Amerique Septentrionale (années 1709 Et 1710)*. Paris: Letouzey Et Ané, 1904. Print: 59 – 60.

impeding the fishery³⁴. Whether he was in possession of these publicly available documents and selected not to include them, or whether he just did not make the effort to challenge his own assertions, is anyone's guess.

Regardless, to suggest that NCC is offering the commercial fishery as evidence of its "superior Inuitness" is a blatant misinterpretation of what this chapter on Moravian history, is suggesting.

In addition to this, Leroux claims that NunatuKavut Inuit availing of a commercial fishery is, in and of itself, a marker of whiteness. Another way to look at it is that Inuit presence on the south coast enabled access to lucrative fishing grounds nearby as a food source – what was always, and still remains, a traditional way to harvest food, has now become a way to maintain cultural continuity while receiving a commercial income.

Maintaining a present-day commercial fishery offers evidence that Inuit in Southern Labrador continue to avail of the fishery as a means to sustain local families and communities. It is a marker of cultural continuity.

Moreover, waters off the coast of NunatuKavut offer a source of present-day commercial income for shrimp harvesters from **Nunavut** and both shrimp and turbot harvesters from **Nunatsiavut**. Why is the commercial fishery in waters off NunatuKavut territory only a select threat to NunatuKavut Indigeneity but not to other Inuit who fish there?

3. Southern Inuit benefitted from identifying as Settlers to the detriment of our Inuit and Innu neighbours

Leroux (2021, p. 14) notes that "*mixed-descent family success was underwritten by a system of racial discrimination practiced by the HBC, which ensured that Inuit and Innu people were*

³ Brouage, F., 1718, September 9, Letter from Brouage, Commandant for the King on the Coast of Labrador to the Conseil de Marine, in Roy Pierre-George (ed.), *Rapport de l'Archiviste de la province de Québec pour 1922-1923*, Quebec City, Ls-A. Proulx: 359. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/CollectionSearch/Pages/record.aspx?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=3073979&new=-8585856126364028744>

⁴ Palliser, 1766, Letter to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, CO 194, Volume 16: 273-275. https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/cns_colonia/id/22894/rec/17

unemployable. Strictly speaking, what Stopp calls “ethnicity” wasn’t passively tied to economic success, but it became an active determinant of success due to HBC policy from the 1830s to the 1920s”. This was the *de facto* interpretation of white scholars who wrote about the south coast in the 1960s and 70s (see, for example, Kennedy, 1995). What has been clearly illustrated since that time is that the racial discrimination that existed on the south coast was part and parcel of the reasons why some Inuit in southern Labrador denied their Inuit heritage. If they did not, they would have been denied the ability to trade with HBC and other merchants, effectively assuring the starvation of themselves and their children. So, on the one hand, you have the Moravians actively pushing Inuit to the north to support an unimpeded British fishery, and on the other, you have corrupt traders and merchants intentionally aiming to starve off those who stayed unless they demonstrated allegiance to the British Crown and to Christianity. To me, this reinforces the resilience of Inuit in Southern Labrador. Our families were subjected to unspeakable horrors, and yet, we persist.

Another element of this argument which Leroux fails to unpack is the distinct and complicated use of the term Settler as it was used by the Moravians. With reference to the Northern Inuit, Kennedy (2015, p.228) notes, “The category “Settlers” is one of several problematic names the Moravians and others used to refer to the descendants of unions between European men who came to work for the Hudson’s Bay Company or other trading companies and local Inuit women”. Indeed, Procter (2020) notes that in Northern Labrador, the Moravians set up a segregated school system, whereby Inuit children were taught strictly in Inuttitut and children of mixed-descent families were instructed at a separate school entirely in English. There were pragmatic and economic advantages for children to be instructed in English, helping to explain why many Settler families requested this for their children. Through today’s lens, we can now see how the Moravians would have sped up colonial assimilation of mixed-race children through this arrangement. But we must ask ourselves, should the indoctrination of Indigenous children into a European education system be used as evidence that they are not Indigenous? Using Leroux’s argument, the answer would concerningly be, “yes”.

Thus, the term Settler, as it was used within the Labrador context, was not meant to refer to people of entirely European descent, but rather was a specific term used to indicate mixed-race European-Inuit people (Procter, 2020). In fact, these mixed-race European-Inuit people were not

confined to southern Labrador, as Kennedy has noted. They also lived, and still live, in northern Labrador. Contrary to what Leroux posits throughout his report, Grammond argues that “The Settlers were initially mocked by the Inuit” (Grammond, 2014, p. 479). If one re-reads Leroux’s report applying the same impossible standards of Indigeneity he requires of NunatuKavut, one would find that more than a few Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries would not reach the bar he has set. Again, this is not meant to denigrate Nunatsiavut Government’s membership criteria, it is simply meant to point out the contradictions advanced by Nunatsiavut in relying upon a report that would be simply offensive and inaccurate were it to be applied to its own people.

NCC fails to take into account that its members have been privileged vis-à-vis their Inuit and Innu neighbours at least since the time of the Hudson’s Bay Company in the region (Leroux, 2021, p. 14).

There are a couple of concerning issues with this statement. The first is one that Nunatsiavut should have picked up on – and that is, the Hudson’s Bay Company had far greater influence in areas of northern Labrador than it did in southern Labrador. Therefore, in stating that benefits accrued to those who relied on HBC implicates Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries moreso than NunatuKavut Inuit.

The second issue with this characterization is that Leroux paints a picture of (both northern and) southern Labrador that is incredibly offensive. As if the people on the coast were living in luxury and somehow were intentional in their efforts to enact racism to their cousins in the north. An elder from the community of Fox Harbour told me firsthand of a time that he spent the summer fishing, and after he had dried his catch, he travelled to Battle Harbour to trade his fish with the local merchant. The merchant he was dealing with did not want to offer anything for his catch and refused to provide him the supplies he needed to get his family through the winter – flour, sugar, salt and root vegetables. The elder left and was heading back to Fox Harbour, devastated. He knew that if he didn’t get anything for his fish that him and his family would in all likelihood starve to death. He turned around and went back. And he took a chair, lifted it over his head, and threatened to hit the merchant if he didn’t give him what he was owed. Rather than risk getting hurt, the merchant gave him supplies and he said that was the only reason his family didn’t starve that winter. Do you think this elder busied himself with being intentionally racist towards Inuit

Has there ever been an example throughout history where any Indigenous population immediately submitted to colonists upon their arrival? And said, “yes. Please take away all that is mine – my language, my spirituality, my culture, my customs, my very way of life – because your way is better”? This is what Leroux is saying happened on the south coast, despite reams of evidence to the contrary.

from the north? If anything, he was doing what he had to do to survive. And I would hazard to guess that the Inuit in the north were doing the same thing – it serves no one to advance arguments of racial superiority. This is but one story that was told to me – many stories of hunger, resilience and survival were also relayed during my time spent on the coast for my doctoral dissertation (Martin, 2009).

If anything, the very presence of traders and merchants on the coast expedited the need to assume European last names, speak English and forego Inuitit, and attend schools and church. And yet, when the merchants began to over-winter in Labrador, *their* very survival depended upon the know-how of the Inuit who lived there (Hudson, 2020; Hudson & Vodden, 2021).

Rather than interpret this generosity on the part of the Inuit towards their settler-kin as evidence of a strong moral ethic grounded in Inuit principles of respect and reciprocity, Leroux chooses to assert the opposite – that it is somehow evidence of racial superiority.

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Moreover, Leroux’s research supports a patriarchal stereotype of Inuit, whereby the assumption is that the intermarriage of Inuit women with European men signalled the end of Inuit culture. This ignores the vast and growing amount of evidence which demonstrates that the opposite, in fact, was more likely the case. One of the most prominent authors of this one-sided sentiment is

anthropologist, John Kennedy, who in more recent years has softened, if not reversed⁵, his earlier conclusions entirely by noting that in fact, the opposite is a more likely scenario – whereby European men, ill-equipped to over-winter in the harsh Labrador landscape would have benefitted from intermarriage with Inuit women, insofar as entering into the kinship relations of Inuit would assure that Inuit survival skills and land-based cultural knowledge would be passed along to them (Hudson, 2020). Were this logic applied also to Nunatsiavut, it would help to explain why their membership criteria (which, in some ways, very progressively) includes Settlers (non-Inuit and later, mixed Inuit) adapted to the life and lifeways of Inuit; it was necessary for them to do so, since their European-derived agricultural know-how would mean very little for survival in sub-Arctic terrain. The summary report submitted by NunatuKavut for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry supports this:

The incorporation of a single European male into an Inuit kinship structure did not eliminate the cultural practices within that kinship, which is a testament to the strength of our culture as Inuit. However, historical accounts of our people have been viewed through a patriarchal lens. European reporting of our Inuit ancestors in the 1700's and 1800's was always male-focused, and ignored or dismissed the work and contributions of Inuit women; which has resulted in a false narrative of our people, especially Inuit women. Such western cultural bias associated with inaccurate interpretations of cultural and political society by outsiders has proven to be a common reality across Indigenous nations.

Inuit women were intimately involved in resource extraction, wildlife harvesting, fishing, operating their own umiaks and shallops, and a myriad of other resource-based activities. The European male adopted a life filled with our Inuit cultural practices in housing, cooking, eating, childrearing, harvesting, use of dogs and sleds, and a multiplicity of other matters” (Burchells, 2018, p. 4, emphasis added).

⁵ Leroux notes on page 6: “While Kennedy has now become one of the most supportive academics of the NCC’s political claims—he was one of the main academics on the NCC’s Community-University Research Alliance research project that led to the publication of “Unveiling NunatuKavut”—his early work poses some incontrovertible barriers to NCC’s present-day claims”. This is untrue because it is not possible. Although Kennedy was involved in the CURA research, this grant began in June 2009 and ended in 2014. The land claim document *Unveiling NunatuKavut* was written in late 2009, finalized and submitted in June of 2010. Therefore there is no possible way the Kennedy heavily participated in the formation of the land claim document under the auspices of the CURA grant.

4. *Socio-economic indicators offer a way to measure racial superiority.*

Leroux’s strategic selection of certain census data to the exclusion of a more representative sample of NunatuKavut Inuit communities is striking... he compares the socio-economic indicators solely from [Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Northwest River] (labelling them as “NunatuKavut communities”) to those of the north coast of Labrador, which are remote and isolated. He omits data from the actual remote and isolated areas of NunatuKavut, which would offer a comparable sample to Nunatsiavut Beneficiary communities. He then draws the conclusion that because Inuit in Southern Labrador “rank” higher in measures of income, education and labour force participation, that this is evidence of racial superiority.

The fourth point that Leroux advances to assert the ‘racial superiority’ of the southern Inuit uses socio-economic indicators drawn from Statistics Canada census data. Leroux notes:

The NCC’s prior research clearly demonstrates several socio-economic indicators that are without a doubt the legacy of deep-seated, historical inequities between today’s so-called Southern Inuit and the Inuit. From lower educational attainment through to lower labour force participation and annual income, by 1991 the “Southern Inuit/Metis” had established a clear pattern of material advantage over the

Inuit in Labrador. According to data from the 2016 Census of Canada, those same inequalities persist despite more than a decade since the signing of the Nunatsiavut land claims agreement (Leroux, 2021, p. 16).

Table 4 of Leroux’s report (found on page 16 of that document), which contains Census Canada data from 2016, and his subsequent analysis of that data are confusing, and no methodology is appended that details how he arrived at this table. Leroux’s strategic selection of certain census data to the exclusion of a more representative sample of NunatuKavut Inuit communities is striking. Note that the communities of Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Northwest River would be considered “small urban”, complete with industry, a college, a university campus and all of the other amenities and opportunities that one might expect to find in an urban centre. Without any qualifiers he compares the socio-economic indicators solely from these two communities (labelling them as “NunatuKavut communities”) to those of the north coast of Labrador, which

are remote and isolated. He omits data from the actual remote and isolated areas of NunatuKavut, which would offer a comparable sample to Nunatsiavut Beneficiary communities. He then draws the conclusion that because Inuit in Southern Labrador “rank” higher in measures of income, education and labour force participation, that this is evidence of racial superiority.

The sub-text here is that maintaining poverty through low education levels and employment participation offers evidence of Indigeneity. This is incredibly problematic.

And yet, it is hard to discern *what* is more problematic here – whether it is the fact that the data selected is *intentionally incomparable*, or that the conclusions drawn are, in and of themselves, racialized.

Or perhaps it is that the data analysis completed by Leroux was unable to be reproduced by an experienced data analyst, which I hired for the purpose of presenting and analysing comparable data. I asked that person to complete two tasks, which I summarize here.

The first task is presented in Table 1 (below). It attempts to simply replicate Table 4 listed in Leroux’s report. The analyst identified two issues with Leroux’s presentation of the table. The first being that the data for what constitutes “Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries” was unable to be reproduced using the StatsCan data from the 2016 Census as cited by Leroux. Therefore, all five Nunatsiavut Beneficiary communities (i.e., Postville, Hopedale, Rigolet, Makkovik and Nain) were re-calculated and included in the column as Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries (the numbers are not meaningfully different from what Leroux included, but it is not clear how Leroux completed his analysis). The second issue is that Leroux also falsely asserts that Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Northwest River, in their entirety, are “Metis” communities, which we know to be false, since these communities are home to many non-Indigenous people (as well as Nunatsiavut Inuit and Innu) and they are erroneously included in his reporting. However, StatsCan does not present a way of analysing only ‘Metis’ within Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Northwest River, making it impossible to actually ascertain any value in presenting the information in this way – particularly since we are comparing two small urban areas (Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Northwest River) with a series of five remote and isolated communities. Ultimately Table 1 (below) offers no value to the reader other than to point out the fact that statistics presented are not comparable

across columns and that the statistics as calculated by the data analyst produced different numbers from the same table Leroux included in his report – since Leroux does not present his methodology it is impossible to say how he arrived at those percentages.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Indicators – Nunatsiavut¹ Beneficiaries and Less Remote Communities

	Nunatsiavut* Beneficiaries	Happy Valley Goose Bay	North West River
With a High School Diploma or Equivalency	57.64%	79.80%	81.91%
In Labour Force	57.75%	72.94%	62.11%
Unemployment Rate (%)	29.3	8.3	11.9
Median After-Tax Income 2015	23,311	42,063	37,803
Average After-Tax Income 2015	30,844	41,161	42,847
Total Income Under \$10,000	22.76%	11.12%	9.57%
Total Income Over \$100,000	5.42%	15.32%	12.77%

¹population-weighted average of Rigolet, Postville, Makkovik, Hopedale, Nain

[Source: Statistics Canada Data Liberation Initiative, via the Computing in the Humanities and Social Sciences (CHASS) Census Analyser, 2016 Census]

Secondly, I had the analyst draw data from the 2016 Census to compare Nunatsiavut Beneficiary communities (i.e., Rigolet, Makkovik, Postville, Hopedale, Nain) to the Southern Inuit communities of Fox Harbour, Port Hope Simpson, Cartwright, Black Tickle-Domino, Mary's Harbour and Lodge Bay, using the same socio-economic indicators that Leroux selected. The following two tables present this data. Table 2 includes data from each of these communities in the interest of being transparent. Note that the column in Table 3 labelled 'NunatuKavut remote/isolated' combines the south coast communities of Cartwright, Black Tickle-Domino,

Charlottetown, Port Hope Simpson, St. Lewis, Mary's Harbour and Lodge Bay which makes them easier to compare with the Nunatsiavut Beneficiary communities.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Indicators – Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries and NunatuKavut Remote Communities

	Nunatsiavut ¹ Beneficiaries	Port Hope Simpson	St. Lewis	Mary's Harbour	Cartwright, Labrador	Charlottetown	Lodge Bay	Black Tickle- Domino
With a High School Diploma or Equivalency	57.64%	59.42%	55.88%	59.65%	56.94%	61.22%	50.00%	41.67%
In Labour Force	57.75%	63.77%	32.35%	53.45%	62.50%	50.00%	38.46%	44.00%
Unemployment Rate (%)	29.3	45.5	18.2	38.7	48.9	56.0	60.0	36.4
Median After-Tax Income 2015	23,311	28,352	na	29,344	26,432	32,320	na	na
Average After-Tax Income 2015	30,844	35,168	na	38,188	33,790	39,289	na	na
Total Income Under \$10,000	22.76%	11.43%	na	10.53%	9.72%	10.20%	na	na
Total Income Over \$100,000	5.42%	8.57%	na	10.53%	8.33%	14.29%	na	na

¹population-weighted average of Rigolet, Postville, Makkovik, Hopedale, Nain

na: not available

Table 3: Socio-Economic Indicators – Nunatsiavut¹ Beneficiaries and Remote Communities Combined²

	Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries	Remote NCC Communities Combined
With a High School Diploma or Equivalency	57.64%	57.07%
In Labour Force	57.75%	53.79%
Unemployment Rate (%)	29.3	43.6
Median After-Tax Income 2015	23,311	28,807
Average After-Tax Income 2015	30,844	36,278
Total Income Under \$10,000	22.76%	10.48%
Total Income Over \$100,000	5.42%	10.08%

¹population-weighted average of Rigolet, Postville, Makkovik, Hopedale, Nain

²population-weighted average of Port Hope Simpson, St. Lewis, Mary's Harbour, Cartwright Labrador, Charlottetown, Lodge Bay, Black Tickle-Domino where information is available

As you can see from Table 2 and 3, when communities of comparable geographic remoteness and size are analyzed according to the socio-economic indicators that Leroux has included in his original analysis, *one cannot draw the same conclusions*. In other words, remote and isolated Southern Inuit communities have, in fact, a higher unemployment rate than Nunatsiavut and a slightly lower rate of high school completion. Aside from NunatuKavut reporting fewer people

with an annual income of less than \$10,000 (at 10.5%) and slightly more people with an average income of over \$100,000 (5.5% for Nunatsiavut versus 10% for NunatuKavut), all other measures (labour force participation, education level, median and average after-tax income) are so very similar that it makes no sense (any way you look at it) that

...remote and isolated Southern Inuit communities [and Nunatsiavut communities] are so very similar that it makes no sense (any way you look at it) that NunatuKavut would ever be able to assert any form of moral or racial superiority on the basis of these socio-economic indicators – even if they wanted to.

NunatuKavut would ever be able to assert any form of moral or racial superiority on the basis of these socio-economic indicators – even if they wanted to.

It should also be noted that one of the smaller, isolated communities, Black Tickle, does not have all of the StatsCan data cells included here because population numbers are too low for accurate reporting. However, a recent publication by Mercer et al. (2019) collected demographic survey data in Black Tickle noting that 67% of the population reported an income of “less than or much less than” \$29,000 per year. Thus, were all of the data available through StatsCan, it would in all likelihood paint a picture where NCC and NG communities are not distinctly different from one another at least in terms of socioeconomic indicators.

Regardless, it should not have to be explained that such incomes are patently insufficient and warrant our attention at all levels of government. There are human beings behind these numbers – using numbers to compare and contrast Inuit communities benefits no one.

Further to this, if one was to examine the education and employment statistics of urban Indigenous peoples across Canada, there is a stark difference between them and their more rural and remote counterparts – Leroux is drawing causation where there is none; the relationship between “being a member of NunatuKavut” as evidence of higher employment and education is entirely spurious.

It is distressing and highly concerning that Leroux was able to submit such highly suspect findings to Nunatsiavut, and for ITK to then use those findings to suggest that NunatuKavut people think they are ‘racially superior’.

As a final point on this matter, in my own research conducted back in 2009 with Inuit in St. Lewis/Fox Harbour, it was asserted by the participants that material advantage was not something that many ascribed to – and in fact, greater value was placed upon their connection to their culture, the ability to maintain their ties to the land and ice, and that this was, in fact, what made one ‘rich’ as opposed to income level (Martin, 2009). This is a far cry from Leroux’s conclusions, who did not engage in research with any members of NunatuKavut for his report, when he suggests that educational and employment advantages are evidence of racial superiority.

9. A Flawed Argument Can Never Reach an Unflawed Conclusion

Natan Obed is ITK’s President and a Nunatsiavut beneficiary. On October 7, 2021, he addressed a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, relying upon Leroux’s report to ask the PM to specifically exclude NunatuKavut “from accessing federal Inuit-specific policies, programs and initiatives that are intended to benefit Inuit, and to refrain from including NCC communities in any future federal Inuit-specific budget allocations...” (Obed, 2021).

Obed has, perhaps unwittingly, relied upon the false arguments conjured up by Leroux to assert that NCC’s claims to Inuit identity are “fraudulent”.

As is repeatedly pointed out in this rebuttal, the conclusions drawn by Leroux should not be relied upon as factual. It is offensive to the researchers, Inuit knowledge-holders, archaeologists, genealogists, historians and others who have spent decades researching and validating NCC’s claims to its territory and to asserting its inherent rights to now have a non-Inuk, non-Indigenous researcher commissioned to specifically undermine this work.

Leroux’s report offers a text-book example of the colonial politics of recognition at work. The fear-mongering supported by Leroux and subsequently stoked by Obed’s letter suggests that should NCC succeed in its “false claims”

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that “sorely needed federal funding” will be drawn away from Inuit and “threatens to diminish the rights and status of Inuit rights holders and adversely impact progress made by your government to strengthen Inuit-Crown partnership” (Obed, 2021). Analyzing such a statement through the lens of a colonial politics of recognition, we can see that this sort of language serves no one except a neoliberal nation-state, who can sit back on its laurels.

The role of ITK as a political organization is not to ascertain who is and who is not, Inuit. Its role is to support and advocate for resources and supports via federal budget allocations for Inuit. The federal government holds a responsibility to provide adequate funding, policy, program, and resource supports for Inuit – if those supports are inadequate, then it is the federal government’s responsibility to redirect funds so that they *are* adequate. And ITK’s role is to hold the federal government’s ‘feet to the fire’ so that it lives up to those obligations. It is disheartening to see that rather than welcoming the possibly thousands of Inuit who offer diverse skillsets and knowledge that could augment and strengthen ITK and Inuit rights and recognition more generally, ITK is choosing instead to cast us aside.

Ironically, Leroux points out in his final assessment that “*the NCC gives no indication that it’s committed to building bridges with Nunatsiavut’s Inuit citizens*”. A reminder that Leroux’s report was commissioned by the Nunatsiavut Government. If there were a commitment to ‘building bridges’, then these bridges should absolutely start at both sides. The report itself is indicative of a deeply rooted and fundamentally flawed relationship between the north and south Inuit, that is, in fact, further divided by the commissioning and creation of such a blatantly disrespectful piece of writing.

To conclude, I am requesting an immediate retraction of Leroux’s report as it was submitted to the Nunatsiavut Government, and for Leroux to apologize to NunatuKavut Community Council and its members for his inaccurate, misleading and offensive portrayal of NCC’s land claim. I am also asking that the letter written by ITK’s President, Natan Obed, be retracted because it was informed by inaccurate information as presented by Leroux.

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