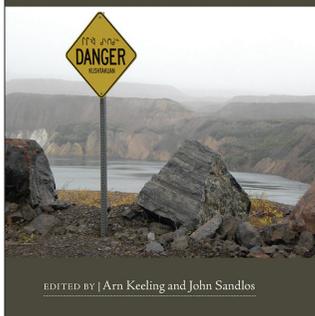




# Mining and Communities in Northern Canada

*History, Politics, and Memory*



EDITED BY | Arn Keeling and John Sandlos

## MINING AND COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN CANADA: HISTORY, POLITICS, AND MEMORY

Edited by Arn Keeling and John Sandlos

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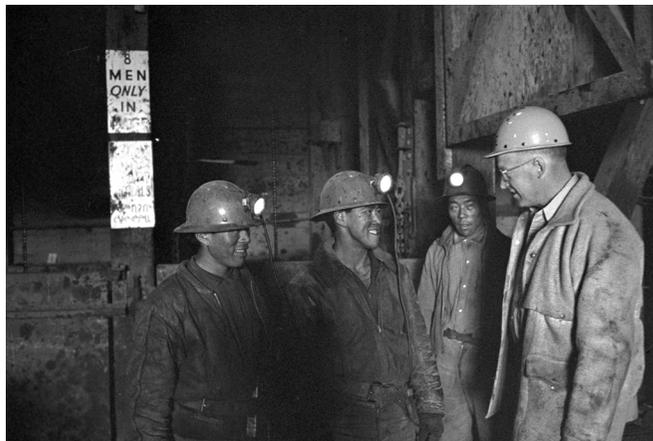
# From Igloo to Mine Shaft: Inuit Labour and Memory at the Rankin Inlet Nickel Mine

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*Arn Keeling and Patricia Boulter*

The North Rankin Nickel Mine in Kangiqiniq (Rankin Inlet)<sup>1</sup> has been closed now for over fifty years, and its iconic headframe lost to fire in the late 1970s. Yet the sense of connection and identification with the mine remains strong in the town. At a workshop held in 2011, nearly seventy people gathered to share stories, examine historical photographs, and watch a screening of the National Film Board documentary “People of the Rock.”<sup>2</sup> The film, made in 1961 and depicting a somewhat sanitized version of the Rankin Inlet mine story, nevertheless elicited poignant memories from elders in the room, who shared stories of lost loved ones and memories of the mining days and their youth. Community members gathered around archival photos of Inuit miners at work, pointing out friends and relations, and helping in some cases with identification (Figs. 1, 2). The mood of the gathering, while reflective, was also celebratory, a

FIGURE 1:  
Workers joking  
with a supervisor  
at the nickel mine  
[Harry Liberal,  
Titi Kudlu, Noah  
Kumakjuaq and  
Andy Easton].  
Photo by Kryn  
Taconis. Library  
and Archives  
Canada photo  
PA-175565.



chance for the community to once again honour its founding members and partake in stories and images of the mining days.

In many ways, a commemorative gathering such as this workshop might seem unremarkable. Indeed, a wide-ranging literature on mining history and heritage explores the persistence of local identities as “mining communities” long after the end of mining. Historically, mining communities have been known for the strong sense of worker solidarity forged in the often-extreme “worksapces” of mining, a solidarity that may extend to community responses to the crisis of deindustrialization.<sup>3</sup> Through rituals, commemorative activities, and a typically strong identification with the mining landscape, many mining communities demonstrate their resilience in the face of the often-devastating economic and social changes associated with mine closure. Describing this tenacious sense of place within marginal communities and landscapes, Ben Marsh notes that, for many people, “land retains its meaning long after the means are exhausted.”<sup>4</sup> While perhaps easily dismissed as exercises in nostalgia, or critiqued for their masking of the social inequities and environmental degradation associated with mineral development and deindustrialization, these perspectives nevertheless capture something of the intense identity formation connected with the experience of mining labour and the role of these identities in fostering community spirit and resilience in the face of economic decline.<sup>5</sup>



FIGURE 2: Two men stand and talk in front of Rankin Inlet Nickel Mines Ltd., July 1961. Douglas Wilkinson fonds/Nunavut Archives/N-1979-051: 2316

But the Kangiqiniq workshop also highlights the absence from these accounts of the experience of indigenous people in many mining regions. Although indigenous people have long worked in and for mines in various capacities, their mining history is usually explored in terms of their dispossession, exclusion, marginalization, and experience of landscape degradation associated with (neo)colonial mineral development. As Bridge and Frederiksen note (with reference to Nigeria), mining was “part and parcel of the process of socio-ecological modernization” of indigenous territories globally, and “the principal means by which [these

territories] became incorporated into a world economy under conditions of colonial rule.”<sup>6</sup> Yet indigenous people did not merely suffer through or resist mineral development; they also participated (willingly or otherwise) and, in so doing, became miners. For instance, classic anthropological studies in Bolivia explored the development of an indigenous mining identity there, associated with the long history of colonial and modern mining in the Andean region.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, few studies (beyond those in this volume) have sought to capture indigenous people’s parallel historical development of mining identities and their experience of mine closure, either as workers or as broader participants in local economic and settlement life.<sup>8</sup>

The history of the North Rankin Nickel Mine provides insights into the complex indigenous experience of mining as an agent of socio-economic change. Founded on a rich nickel deposit located on the western shore of Hudson Bay in present-day Nunavut, the mine formed the basis for the settlement at Kangiqiniq in the late 1950s. Regarded as an experiment in Inuit modernization and a solution to a perceived crisis affecting traditional resources, the mine’s short operational life (1957–1962) belied its importance as Canada’s first Arctic mine and the first to actively promote the employment of indigenous workers. At its peak, Inuit employees, virtually all of whom moved to Rankin Inlet with no experience of wage work, comprised about 70 per cent of the mine’s workforce, as both underground and surface workers. The mine’s sudden closure in 1962 devastated the local economy, threatening the community’s very survival and forcing many Inuit to leave the community to seek alternate employment or to return to traditional harvesting activities.

While the story of the Rankin Inlet mine has been explored by various authors, few have incorporated first-hand perspectives of Inuit miners themselves.<sup>9</sup> Based on oral histories conducted in Kangiqiniq in 2011 with the assistance of Inuit researchers, this essay explores the history of mining at Kangiqiniq and the emergence of a mining identity among Inuit miners.<sup>10</sup> These perspectives are supplemented by archival research on the history of the mine and its relation to government and company policy in the region. In spite of its short, tumultuous life and sudden collapse, the mine remains central to the identity of the community and its Inuit and non-Inuit residents alike. The memories shared by Inuit miners

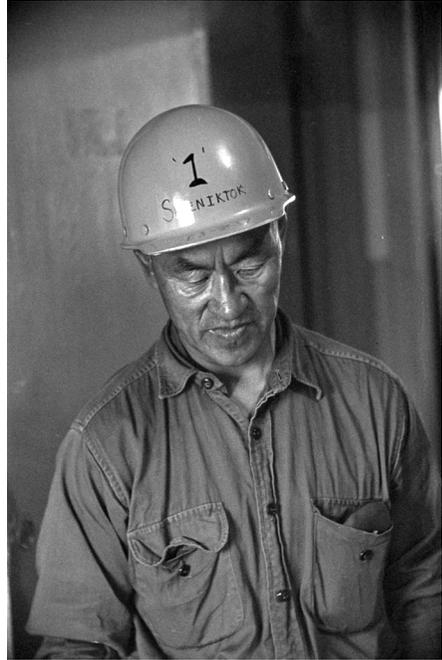
about Kangiqiniq provide important insights into the experience of indigenous workers with mineral development, the transition to industrial modernity, and the impacts of mine closure. The continued close identification with the mine by these elders, and by the broader Kangiqiniq community, reveals the unique and persistent sense of heritage and place connected to the mining experience.

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The North Rankin Nickel Mine, which commenced construction in the early 1950s and produced its first ore in 1957, operated in the context of rapid socio-economic change in the postwar Eastern Arctic. Before the 1950s, northern agencies, including the RCMP and federal government officials, strove to prohibit Inuit from congregating around permanent settlements by enforcing a strict “policy of dispersal.” This policy aimed to protect traditional Inuit land-based culture, but more importantly, to ensure Inuit would not become a financial burden to the nation. At the same time, contradictory educational and settlement policies sought both to elevate Inuit from their “primitive” position through modernizing their social and cultural practices while at the same time preserving their “independent” and “traditional” lifeways.<sup>11</sup> Early in the 1950s, with the collapse of Arctic fox fur prices and a perceived crisis in caribou populations, the Department of Northern Affairs adopted an increasingly interventionist policy in the Eastern Arctic.<sup>12</sup> These developments, and the negative publicity surrounding desperate Inuit living conditions (including episodes of starvation among inland Inuit groups) largely ended the *laissez faire* attitude of the government, which shifted to the promotion of wage labour as a solution to the “Eskimo problem.”

Along with work in construction at Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line stations, the mine at Rankin Inlet appeared to offer an opportunity to shift Inuit away from their seemingly precarious land-based economy and toward industrial wage labour and settlement life. As a Canadian Press reporter noted in 1958, “[Government] officials here call the Rankin experiment a ‘bright shining light’ against the general background of the Eskimo Problem. Sustained success would mean a lot in the program to integrate the Eskimo from his stone-age past into the ‘time clock’

FIGURE 3:  
One of the  
supervisors at  
the nickel mine  
[Singiituuq]. Photo  
by Kryn Taconis/  
Library and  
Archives Canada  
photo PA-175593.



world.”<sup>13</sup> Writing to the mine company’s secretary for information about the operation, Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs R. Gordon Robertson suggested that “because of the steadily increasing inroads on the wildlife resources of the North, it is going to be necessary to have more Eskimos adapted to wage employment as their means of livelihood.”<sup>14</sup> To this end, the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources and other government agencies in the region, such as the RCMP, assisted the North Rankin Nickel Mine in identifying suitable Inuit candidates for employment.<sup>15</sup> As the mine’s first general manager Ken Whatmough recalled, the company also drew on the connections of Singiituuq, a boat pilot from Chesterfield Inlet, to locate local labour when needed.<sup>16</sup>

For its part, the company initially embraced Inuit labour as a seasonal workforce, and Inuit were engaged in construction and stevedore work (as well as trade) at Rankin Inlet as early as 1953. By 1956–57, as the mine shifted to production, Inuit were recruited to Rankin Inlet in increasing numbers. North Rankin Nickel Mine (NRNM) president W. W. Weber told Northern Affairs officials he was “strongly in favor of employing as

many Eskimos as possible” and integrating them permanently into the life of the mining camp.<sup>17</sup> That year, Inuit employment increased from fourteen to eighty workers and, under mine manager J. Andrew Easton, Inuit workers became integrated into nearly all aspects of the operation, including (eventually) underground work. For NRNM, in spite of language and cultural barriers, Inuit workers provided a ready and “cheerful” labour force that helped the company deal with the challenge and expense of attracting and retaining southern mine workers in this remote location. With the mine’s financial viability in question from the outset, Inuit labour presented an important means of reducing costs.<sup>18</sup>

Though the bulk of the recruits were from the Chesterfield Inlet area of northwestern Hudson Bay, Inuit migrated to the new settlement from across the Kivalliq (then known as Keewatin) region. Interviewees recalled travelling by dog sled, airplane, and Peterhead boat to Rankin Inlet in the mid- to late 1950s. Ollie Ittinuar, who was an RCMP special constable at Chesterfield Inlet in the early 1950s, recalled a community meeting at which people were asked if they would like to work at the mine. Seeking better wages, Ittinuar travelled by dog team to Rankin Inlet with another family. “As soon as we got over there the mine people came over and asked us to work for them right away, so we got to work right away upon arrival. So that’s how the job started with the mine.”<sup>19</sup> Others, like Joachim Kavik and Francis Kapuk, lived with their families in the area (Kavik at Meliadine Lake, Kapuk at Baker Foreland), so they were well aware of the developments at Rankin Inlet. Kapuk recalled:

When we came here from caribou hunting we would come back here and stay with people here . . . They were living in igloos at that time when we would come here . . . There was white people who came in at that time as well who came to tell us there were employment opportunities at the mine, who said if you hear of anyone who wants to work for the mine, pass it around.

Others, like Thomas Tudlik (from north of Chesterfield Inlet) and John Towtoongie (from Coral Harbour), had previously left their communities to seek opportunities elsewhere before coming to Rankin Inlet. Veronica Manilak flew to Rankin Inlet from Repulse Bay with her husband in 1961, where they joined her father, who was already working at the mine.

In the *Keewatin Journal* (a recollection of life in the region from the 1950s–70s published in 1979), several people recounted how between 1958 and 1959 they were no longer able to make a living or survive off the land due to the shortage in caribou, and therefore had no alternative other than to work in the mine.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, several miners we interviewed recalled how their moves brought a dramatic, almost immediate change from a predominantly land-based lifestyle of hunting and trapping to industrial work and settlement life. “We lived as a true natured Inuit when I was growing up,” noted Thomas Tudlik. “For example, we had no family allowances. In those days we had no governments, no established governments during the time I was growing up. We had the Hudson Bay Company, where we traded furs and things like that.” Joachim Kavik said that his father, while happy living on the land, was encouraged to come work at the mine and eventually did so. “My father was a very traditional Inuk he did not speak one word of English when he started working for the mine.” His family wanted to keep their dogs for hunting, so they lived about a mile from the Rankin settlement.

The transition to settlement life posed challenges for Inuit workers and their families. Both settlement and work life for Rankin Inuit was highly structured by the paternalistic yet often contradictory policies of the company and Northern Affairs officials. Initially, Inuit workers lived in sod houses and tents at the fringes of the nascent settlement (see Fig. 4), while southern workers occupied bunkhouses near the mine. Francis Kapuk recalled difficult living conditions: “In the early stages when we came here we were living in a tent, we didn’t really stay in an igloo but we stayed in a tent. We fixed it up by putting together whatever cardboard we could find as insulation inside the tent.” Veronica Manilak remembers the challenges of starting over in a new community: “I found it rather boring, extremely lonely [and] strange, because when we left we left everything at home including our husky dogs including our belongings. We left home with nothing, we left our tent, we left everything in there, the only thing we took were our children and our rifle and that’s pretty much it.”

Migration to Rankin Inlet brought Inuit from different regional dialect and kinship groups together with white southerners in the “cosmopolitan” setting of Rankin Inlet, and the settlement was initially segregated by race and kinship. As it developed, the townsite was divided into



FIGURE 4: Reinforced tent house in Rankin Inlet, early 1950s. Photo by Kenneth Whatmough, Consulting Engineer and General Manager, North Rankin Nickel Mines Limited/Nunavut Archives.

three distinct sections: two containing Inuit residents (the New and Old Eskimo Settlements) and the other meant for non-Inuit, Euro-Canadian personnel of the mine, government, or other institutions.<sup>21</sup> The “White Settlement” comprised two neat rows of buildings: houses for the federal northern service officer, the HBC store, the school, and the Roman Catholic and Anglican missions. In this section, houses were supplied with heat, water, and sewage lines from the mine. “The New Eskimo Settlement” was separated from the white settlement and located further from the mine buildings. It was closely monitored by the NRNM and considered off limits to non-Inuit mine workers. The houses here were prefabricated, three-room structures. Although these houses all had electrical lighting and regular garbage collection provided for by the mine, they did not have centralized heating or running water. Instead, Inuit heated their houses with cooking stoves and had to walk to get water. Makeshift outhouses were often shared by several families. Located a quarter mile north of the mine’s headframe, the “Old Eskimo Settlement” consisted

of several clusters of shacks and tents, many built by Inuit themselves. In this section, the mine provided no essential services and “debris [was] . . . scattered everywhere.”<sup>22</sup> This area was typically occupied by those who had lower-paying positions within the mine. However, many Inuit families preferred living in the Old Settlement, for they could live near kin and practise their traditional pursuits easily in the less monitored environment. The settlement’s segregated nature in this period was reinforced by government officials when interior Padlirmiut suffering from starvation in the winter of 1957–58 were relocated and settled in a nearby Keewatin Rehabilitation Project camp called Itivia.<sup>23</sup>

Work for wages was, of course, the principal attraction of Rankin Inlet. Initially, Inuit workers, particularly those doing construction work, were paid less than non-Inuit (as little as 60 cents per hour).<sup>24</sup> The company and federal officials reacted strongly to accusations from the local Oblate missionary, Father Fafard, and others that they perpetuated second-class status and wages among Inuit, noting that Inuit workers also received meals in the mine’s mess hall and, by the end of the 1950s, free housing and stove oil.<sup>25</sup> By the time Inuit workers began working underground, wages were on par with those paid non-Inuit workers for similar jobs. Although the hours were long and the underground environment unfamiliar, Inuit miners appreciated the security of regular wages and, as one miner’s wife recalled, the opportunity to purchase goods at the mine commissary and Hudson Bay store.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Inuit miners’ pay packets were controlled at first by the northern service officer, “in order to ensure that at the outset at least their earnings are used to purchase only essential goods and not frittered away on non-essentials” like luxury goods.<sup>27</sup>

As in most aspects of settlement life, workplace segregation (Inuit and non-Inuit initially ate separately, for instance) gave way to gradual, if partial, integration of Inuit and non-Inuit. Although few spoke any English at all (and no white miners spoke Inuktitut), several Inuit miners recalled how they learned by example how to drill, blast, and operate underground: according to Peter Ipkarnerk, “The white people that we worked [with], they were there to show us how to do things, so we learned by example, by looking, by observing.” In this way, Inuit workers learned to operate machinery above and below ground, trained as mechanics

(such as plumbers), and joined non-Inuit workers on the mine's emergency rescue team. Others, like Jack Kabvitok, worked in construction and performed other services around the settlement before working in the mine itself. The former miners suggested work relations with qallunaat (non-Inuit) workers were good, overall, even jokingly remembering learning how to swear in English from them. Although some tensions and conflicts with supervisors were recalled, the "big boss," mine manager Andy Easton, was fondly remembered as a fair man who cared for the Inuit workers.

For the mine and Northern Affairs officials, one of the main challenges in employing Inuit was the inculcation of the norms and values of wage work, including time discipline. Southern employees, working on seasonal rotation and living in bunkhouses away from families, worked seven days a week, but Inuit workers balked at this schedule (although they worked these hours during construction). As early as 1956, a northern service officer reported that "the Eskimos stated that they were satisfied with the pay and working conditions but that they would like to have time off for hunting meat for their wives and children."<sup>28</sup> From time to time, Inuit employees would fail to show up for shifts in order to go hunting, a source of friction with the mine. Working with Northern Affairs officials, mine management devised a system whereby Inuit could request leave to hunt, so long as they helped to find a shift replacement in advance. As former miner Peter Ipkarnerk recounted, "We . . . made a request to our supervisors, to the authorities, to go out and hunt . . . as long as they agreed then we could go out in the middle of the week." This option was important to the miners, not only materially in helping feed their families, but also culturally. According to Thomas Tudlik: "the work was very important, the fact that we had to work all the time. But, at the same time we are meat eaters, so we used to go out hunting." In 1959, when the mine reinstated seven-day weeks, Inuit miners complained and the northern service officer wrote to manager Andrew Easton, noting that Inuit needed time off to practise "their traditional occupations," with a view to a "return to life on the land" after mining.<sup>29</sup>

Invoking ideas of acculturation and citizenship, many federal officials regarded employment at Rankin Inlet as furthering the Inuit "adjustment and integration into our industrial society" with "the same opportunities

to develop their talents as other Canadians.”<sup>30</sup> Inuit from the coastal regions north of Rankin Inlet (Chesterfield Inlet and Repulse Bay) were considered more acculturated to living in settled communities and participating in wage labour ventures, due to their interaction with whalers and history of Distant Early Warning Line construction employment. For its part, the mining company (which dominated community life) remained mainly concerned with the performance of Inuit as workers, not their status as citizens.<sup>31</sup> As the anthropologist Robert Dailey and his wife Lois noted in their 1958 report on the community, “Those Eskimo [sic] that are frugal, hard working, punctual, and cooperative, are in the eyes of the mine ‘desirable.’ Those who do not readily adjust or who do not pay close enough attention to orders, or who malingers, are rejected and forced to leave the community.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the anthropologist, social worker, and long-time Rankin Inlet resident Bob Williamson concluded that in spite of the ready adaptation by many to mine work, “the Eskimo did not completely identify with the mine and management objectives.” Indeed, some Inuit who worked at the mine chose to leave, returning to former communities or moving to more “traditional” communities like Whale Cove.<sup>33</sup> Clearly some, like John Towtoongie, who told us of splitting his time between living in Whale Cove and working in Rankin Inlet, preferred to retain their connections to hunting life over a full-time commitment to mining.

The emerging social life of the community reflected a similar pattern of segregation, then partial integration. Early efforts to limit and monitor contact between the Inuit and non-Inuit of the community extended to social functions.<sup>34</sup> In spite of a desire to acculturate and “modernize” Inuit, the many entertainments organized within the community were initially racially segregated, and a separate movie night and dance were held each week for Inuit and non-Inuit. Non-Inuit men were strictly prohibited from entering the “Eskimo Village,” or they would be fired.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Inuit women were not allowed access to the male bunkhouses and could not enter the commissary except on Saturdays and only in the company of their husbands. Although later relaxed, these policies aimed to prevent drinking, gambling, and, most of all, liaisons between non-Inuit men and Inuit women, to avoid sexually transmitted diseases, adultery, prostitution, and unwanted pregnancies. In spite of these restrictions, as Ollie

Ittinuar's son Peter, who grew up in Rankin Inlet, commented, "in a way it was more integration than had ever existed before, even though it was segregated. People took part in the same activities, there was community dances, movies . . . white people and Inuit people went to these things at the same time, went to church at the same time." Elders fondly recalled fiddle dances and cowboy films attended by both Inuit and qallunaat. They noted that beer drinking, too, became a feature of community life, a source of bonding between Inuit and non-Inuit workers, but also a source of problems for some workers.

By the early 1960s, Rankin Inlet was a thriving community of about 600 Inuit and non-Inuit, with government offices (housed by the mine), an RCMP detachment, three religious missions, and a Hudson's Bay store. But the North Rankin Nickel Mine, from the outset a financially precarious operation, began to seriously founder in 1960 and on April 3, 1962, the *Globe and Mail* reported that the mine had closed, throwing seventy "Eskimos" out of work and threatening the future of the town. Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs R. G. Robertson ruefully reflected, "The problem with mines is that they run out," while expressing hopes that displaced Inuit workers might eventually find work elsewhere and promising government support in the interim.<sup>36</sup> In another story, business reporter Stanley Twardy, playing on the popular image in the southern press of the modernized Inuit miner, was less sanguine: "Hoping to bring civilization to the Rankin Eskimos the Government sold them on installment-plan-buying of wooden huts and the Hudson's Bay store accepted their credit on other long-term purchases. Some Eskimos learned to live in style and purchased refrigerators, which are operated from the mine's electric supply."<sup>37</sup> A month later, newspapers were reporting the government's emergency response to the emerging "Keewatin crisis" and forecasting "an end to the unique inland caribou people" occasioned by declining caribou herds, relocation to the coast and, now, economic displacement.<sup>38</sup>

Northern Affairs officials, who had so eagerly encouraged Inuit to migrate to Rankin Inlet for work, veered between paralysis and panic at the prospect of the mine's closure and mass unemployment in the region. As early as 1959, the area administrator for Rankin Inlet had urged government planning for closure, noting "wage employment is the basic

need of the people here” but concluding, grimly, that “some of the people might have been better off in the long run had they never entered the field of wage employment.”<sup>39</sup> Through a series of reports, correspondence, and conferences on the future of the region in the wake of mine closure, suggestions for the community ranged from the creation of alternative industries to a return to traditional semi-subsistence activities to the complete depopulation of Rankin Inlet and relocation of its residents (either to other Arctic communities, or to Southern Canada).<sup>40</sup> In the end, the unofficial “plan” for Rankin Inlet’s post-mining future consisted of a chaotic series of initiatives that involved elements of voluntary relocation, migration (back to previous settlements), economic diversification, and (eventually) the move of Northern Affairs’ Keewatin regional headquarters from Churchill, Manitoba, to Rankin Inlet as an economic stimulus. For its part, the mining company and its non-Native employees simply walked away from the settlement, after selling much of the town’s infrastructure to the federal government.<sup>41</sup>

Inuit workers and their families recalled closure as a time of hardship and adjustment. As two workers interviewed by filmmaker Peter Ittinuar in the early 1970s recalled, with few work opportunities in Rankin Inlet, many Inuit returned to their former communities at their own expense. “I thought there was going to be permanent mining activity, and I thought there was going to be a lot of employment,” David Iglukak told Ittinuar.<sup>42</sup> While Northern Affairs officials encouraged Inuit to leave the community and to return to land-based activities for survival, many who had left this life struggled to re-adjust. Veronica Manilak recalled:

We became extremely poor after the mine closed. We were as a matter of fact very hungry at times. . . . There was a man named Batiste who had dogs, and with his dogs my husband went out caribou hunting one day and he got lots of caribou and we got lots of meat at that point. We had no more snowmobiles and things like that because the mine had closed and we became extremely poor.

As Shingituk [Singiituuq], the Inuk foreman, pointed out in a meeting with Rankin Inlet’s Eskimo Affairs Council in February 1962, many people who had moved to Rankin Inlet “no longer had the type of equipment

they would need to return to the land”—especially dogs.<sup>43</sup> Belying their supposed status as working Canadian citizens, Inuit workers were excluded from unemployment insurance benefits, and welfare payments in the community skyrocketed in 1963. Reflecting the efforts to push Inuit back onto the land, welfare rates were adjusted to account for an individual’s ability (though not necessarily success) to obtain “country food.”<sup>44</sup> For its part, the mining company, Veronica Manilak suggested, “just left us behind,” and the interviewees in Peter Ittinuar’s film lamented the hardship and reliance on government assistance that resulted.

Contemporary interviews illustrate the diverse strategies for survival pursued by the unemployed miners. Many families (indeed the majority in Rankin Inlet) did not want to leave; as Jack Kabvitok noted, “Rankin Inlet had become my home.” He sold carvings to stake hunting activities (“it was a bit of a struggle at that point because we had practically nothing, even though at that time I had five dogs”), and eventually found work with the town government. John Towtoongie recalled that people who returned to Arviat and Whale Cove also found it difficult to hunt for a living. “I was actually about the only one with a team of dogs, along with [another] man. When we would go out caribou hunting for example, there were a few caribou around at that time, when we would catch caribou we would distribute the meat among the other people.” Francis Kapuk briefly returned to Chesterfield Inlet to hunt seal, then was recruited to return to Rankin Inlet to work in the government-established fish canning enterprise. This and other government-sponsored arts and crafts initiatives, including a sewing centre and ceramics studio, provided some income for the families of displaced miners, and opened up wage-earning opportunities for women.<sup>45</sup>

As many noted at the time, however, Rankin Inuit no longer desired to live fully off the land, but instead wished to be given the choice of practising their traditional lifeways, participating in wage labour opportunities, or balancing the two. Many of the miners, in fact, wanted to continue mine work, and Northern Affairs officials sought to match Inuit mine workers with other industrial opportunities elsewhere in the North, with some success. With government assistance, Inuit from Rankin Inlet relocated to work in mines in Quebec (at the request of former NRNM manager Andy Easton), Manitoba, the Yukon, and the

Northwest Territories; as well, they went to work on the construction of the Great Slave Lake Railway line from Alberta to the Pine Point Mine in the NWT.<sup>46</sup> Peter Ipkarnerk and Francis Kapuk, along with two other miners, were flown to Yellowknife in late 1963 to work at Con Mine. Ollie Ittinuar, after a short stint at the Asbestos Hill Mine in Quebec, joined several other Rankin families at the Sherritt Gordon mine in Lynn Lake, Manitoba, where he worked for nine years, eventually becoming a shift boss. Some relocated miners brought their families (like the Ittinuars); others, like Joachim Kavik, lived in bunkhouses or in rented accommodations with other miners.

These moves (as with the relocations to Rankin Inlet) were treated by Northern Affairs officials as an “experiment,” so they were closely monitored and reported on, including in the press.<sup>47</sup> As with Rankin Inlet, the redeployment of Inuit miners at other northern sites was intended to reduce labour turnover costs at northern mines and to continue the process of Inuit social development. Government reports and correspondence document the miners’ struggle to adjust to new surroundings and their separation from families, but also the successful transplant of many workers.<sup>48</sup> Several workers moved repeatedly between Rankin Inlet and different locations or jobs as they sought personal stability and opportunity. Separation from family was, oftentimes, an obstacle to long-term employment at mines and communities far from Rankin Inlet. Others, particularly those like the Ittinuars whose family remained together, thrived in their new locations. Many miners gained reputations as valued employees and went on to work at mines across the North, including Cullaton Lake, Nanisivik, and others.

Nevertheless, for many miners, Rankin Inlet continued to draw them back, in spite of the community’s challenges. Upon returning from a few years working in Yellowknife, Peter Ipkarnerk found that “it was lonely when we came back here to Rankin Inlet. Looking at the mine . . . seeing the mine closed it was very lonely because that was the only place where we were making money, where we were able to work and make money.” He continued working on long rotations away from the settlement before retiring as a miner in 1969. After a long period as a miner in Lynn Lake, eventually Ollie Ittinuar also brought his family back to Rankin Inlet, where he opened a coffee shop. As Williamson and Foster noted in their

1975 report on the relocations, most non-Inuit observers regarded the return of the miners to Rankin Inlet as a failure of the relocation and re-establishment program.<sup>49</sup> But it appears many workers simply seized the opportunity to return to the community they and their families now called home, particularly once the establishment of regional administration in Rankin Inlet somewhat stabilized the community in the 1970s. Many of the original Rankin mining families became leading families in the town; their names adorn the lists of past town councillors and mayors posted on the wall of the hamlet chamber, and they are regularly honoured as the founding generation of the community. As several miners we interviewed told us, mining is still regarded as the community's reason for being and as a shaper of its character.<sup>50</sup>

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Asked about the hard work performed by the miners of Rankin Inlet, Peter Ipkarnerk offered this analogy:

Inuit are no strangers to hard work . . . many years ago Inuit lived a very difficult life with the contact with the white man, you know. We would receive matches for example, in order to save one stick of match, for example, we used to split in half so that we'd have another match, another a bit more match . . . to light the Inuit oil lamp. My parents, for example, had maybe two bags of tea and those bags of tea would last for a very long time. So we were always aware of the hard work that we did, that we used to do years and years ago.

Ipkarnerk's story, like those of some others we interviewed, reflects the connection of his Inuit values of industriousness and adaptability with his life experience of mine work. Although wage employment, as Pamela Stern points out, is often contrasted with subsistence work,<sup>51</sup> Ipkarnerk's comment suggests a kind of continuity or connection between these activities and the struggles associated with them.

In the interviews we conducted, the miners' articulation of a strong sense of identity *as* miners does not supplant, but is folded into their sense of Inuitness and seen as contiguous with it. While clearly influenced and

perhaps to some degree controlled by federal officials and mine managers in the settlement, Inuit miners also pursued goals and practices commensurate with their own “life projects,” whether hunting for country food or leaving jobs altogether to return to their families and homes.<sup>52</sup> In some cases (perhaps among the miners we were unable to interview), former workers might not have identified so closely or positively with their mining experience. Nevertheless, the miners we interviewed talked not only with evident pride about their achievements working underground in the Rankin Inlet mine and elsewhere, but also about the importance of hunting and language, their work ethic, and their sense of connection to Kangiqiniq as an Arctic place. In the crucible of their struggles to adapt and survive in difficult circumstances, whether environmental or economic, identities were forged and transformed: the miners’ and that of the Kangiqiniq community.<sup>53</sup>

The Rankin Inlet story, as told in the archives, in film, and in the oral histories of miners and their spouses, adds a significant indigenous dimension to the stories of work, community life, and survival in mining and post-mining communities. As Katharine Rollwagen observed in relation to the Britannia Beach mine in British Columbia, “employees’ experiences during these crises . . . remind us that resource-town closures cannot be characterized as inevitable or tragic; these are dynamic periods of intense change, shaped by both material realities, such as income and commodity prices, and discursive factors, such as loyalty and community”—to which we would add, identity.<sup>54</sup> In some cases, elders’ memories of the mining experience at Rankin Inlet seem to have been filtered, to some extent, through the lens of personal and collective nostalgia, and the sharp edges of social struggle and economic hardship dulled somewhat by the passage of time. But as Piita Irniq, former commissioner of Nunavut and Kangiqiniq resident in the 1980s and 1990s, noted in an interview, the experience of moving “from igloo to mine shaft” in a single generation also resonates with the larger story of Inuit resilience in the face of colonialism and rapid socio-economic and cultural change. While federal officials at the time promoted mineral development as an instrument of Inuit acculturation and assimilation into modern Canadian society, what the mine’s history and its aftermath show is that while Inuit successfully, in many cases, became miners, they definitively remained

Inuit. Similar to the “entanglements of industry and indigeneity” documented by Jean-Sébastien Boutet in his account of Naskapi and Innu communities near Schefferville, Quebec, Inuit in Rankin Inlet embraced a variety of strategies as they pursued their life projects in the context of rapidly changing historical-geographical circumstances, including environmental change, the growing influence of colonial forces in their lives, and the opportunities and challenges presented by industrial development and decline.<sup>55</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Since the conclusion of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and the creation of the Nunavut Territory in 1998, many of the English-language place names in Nunavut have reverted to their Inuktitut names. Although the Hamlet of Rankin Inlet continues to use its English name, in this chapter, generic reference to the contemporary place will be the Inuktitut “Kangi-iniq,” meaning “deep bay.” Historical references to Rankin Inlet will remain in English.
- 2 *People of the Rock*, directed by Clarke Daprato (National Film Board of Canada, 1961). The workshop was hosted by the authors, with the help of the research assistants noted below (see note 10) and the vital translation assistance of Piita Irniq. The authors wish to thank these contributors, the workshop participants, and the Hamlet of Rankin Inlet, and to acknowledge funding support from ArcticNet for this research.
- 3 Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Janet L. Finn, *Tracing the Veins: Of Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Katharine Rollwagen, “When Ghosts Hovered: Community and Crisis in a Company Town, Britannia Beach, British Columbia, 1957–1965,” *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 35, no. 2 (2007): 25–36; William Wyckoff, “Postindustrial Butte,” *Geographical Review* 85, no. 4 (1995): 478–96.
- 4 Ben Marsh, “Continuity and Decline in the Anthracite Towns of Pennsylvania,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77, no. 3 (1987): 351.
- 5 Thomas Dublin, *When the Mines Closed: Stories of Struggle in Hard Times* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Peter Goin and Elizabeth Raymond, “Living in Anthracite: Mining Landscape and Sense of Place in Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania,” *The Public Historian* 23, no. 2 (2001): 29–45; John Harner, “Place Identity and Copper Mining in Sonora, Mexico,” *Annals of*

- the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 4 (2001): 660–80; Rosemary Power, “‘After the Black Gold’: A View of Mining Heritage from Coalfield Areas of Britain,” *Folklore*, no. 119 (2008): 160–81; David Robertson, *Hard as the Rock Itself: Place and Identity in the American Mining Town* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006); Robert Summerby-Murray, “Interpreting Personalized Industrial Heritage in the Mining Towns of Cumberland County, Nova Scotia: Landscape Examples From Springhill and River Hebert,” *Urban History Review* 35, no. 3 (2007): 51–59.
- 6 Gavin Bridge and Tomas Frederiksen, “‘Order Out of Chaos’: Resources, Hazards, and the Production of a Tin-Mining Economy in Northern Nigeria in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Environment and History* 18, no. 3 (2012): 371. See also John Sandlos and Arn Keeling, “Claiming the New North: Development and Colonialism at the Pine Point Mine, Northwest Territories, Canada,” *Environment and History* 18, no. 1 (2012): 5–34; William Holden, Kathleen Nadeau, and R. Daniel Jacobson, “Exemplifying Accumulation by Dispossession: Mining and Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines,” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 93, no. 2 (2011): 141–61.
  - 7 June Nash, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us: Dependency and Exploitation in Bolivian Tin Mines*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).
  - 8 One notable exception is the Navajo Uranium Miner Oral History Project, although the focus of many of the interviews was on the health legacies of uranium mining in Navajo Country in the US Southwest. See Doug Brugge, Timothy Benally, and Esther Yazzie-Lewis, *The Navajo People and Uranium Mining* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006).
  - 9 Most notably, Robert G. Williamson, *Eskimo Underground: Socio-Cultural Change in the Canadian Central Arctic* (Uppsala, Sweden: Institutionen för Allmän och Jämförande Etnografi, 1974). Williamson, a social worker and anthropologist living in Rankin Inlet in the 1960s, based his research on intensive local interaction with Rankin Inlet residents, but tended to be pre-occupied with questions of collective cultural adjustment and dislocation. Robert McPherson, in *New Owners in Their Own Land: Minerals and Inuit Land Claims* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003), based much of his analysis on Williamson. For histories of the mine based on archival research, see Mary Josephine Taylor, “The Development of Mineral Policy for the Eastern Arctic, 1953–1985” (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1985) and Patricia J. Boulter, “The Survival of an Arctic Boom Town: Socio-economic and Cultural Diversity in Rankin Inlet, 1956–63” (MA major paper, Memorial University, 2011), the latter of which formed the basis for portions of this article.

- 10 Interviews were conducted with nine Inuit elders, including seven former miners and two miners' wives. Interviews took place in English and Inuktitut, with Piita Irniq, former commissioner of Nunavut and an expert translator, simultaneously translating and facilitating the interviews. Although the questions were developed and posed by the authors, other participants included research assistants Pallulaaq Kusugak Friesen of Rankin Inlet and Jordan Konek, a young Inuit filmmaker from Arviat who video recorded the interviews. Keeling also interviewed Irniq, a former Rankin Inlet resident but not a miner, about his memories of this period, and (later) Peter Ittinuar, son of former miner Ollie Ittinuar, now living in Ontario.
- 11 David Damas, *Arctic Migrants, Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); "Notes Respecting the Administration of Eskimo Affairs," 10 March 1948, RG 85 vol. 2081 file 1012-4 pt. 3, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).
- 12 Peter K. Kulchyski and Frank J. Tester, *Kiumajut (Talking Back): Game Management and Inuit Rights, 1900–70* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); John Sandlos, *Hunters at the Margin: Native People and Wildlife Conservation in the Northwest Territories* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).
- 13 Arch MacKenzie, "Eskimos Said May Be Big Factor in Northern Mining," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, September 22, 1958, 13.
- 14 R. G. Robertson, Letter to Secretary, North Rankin Nickel Mine, 18 November 1955, RG22 R216 vol. 210 file 40-3-22 pt. 1, LAC.
- 15 Indeed, it appears that the mine approached the RCMP detachment in Chesterfield Inlet for help in recruiting workers in early 1956. Report by Cpl. C. E. Boone, RCMP Chesterfield Inlet Detachment, 14 March 1956, RG 85 vol. 1268 file 1000-184 pt. 1, LAC.
- 16 File 1, Ken Whatmough Fonds, Nunavut Archives. Electronic copies of two files from these fonds, as well as numerous photographs, were provided by Nunavut territorial archivist, Edward Atkinson. Singiituuq went on to play an important role in the community as an intermediary between the mine and its Inuit workers.
- 17 Cited in C. H. Herbert, Memorandum to the Deputy Minister, 25 April 1957, RG22 R216 vol. 832 file 40-3-22 pt. 2, LAC.
- 18 "Employment for Northern People," no date (likely 1950s), RG 22 vol. 1339-180 file 40-8-23 pt. 2, LAC.
- 19 Ollie Ittinuar interview, August 2011. Peter Ittinuar also related the story of his father's move in an interview with the author in May 2012, as well as in Thierry Rodon, ed., *Teach an Eskimo How to Read...: Conversations with Peter Freuchen Ittinuar* (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2008).

- 20 Dale Smith, ed., *Keewatin Journal* (Rankin Inlet, NU: Dale Smith, 1979), 17. Held in National Library of Canada.
- 21 The following description comes from Robert C. Dailey and Lois Dailey, "The Eskimo of Rankin Inlet: A Preliminary Report," Ottawa: Northern Co-ordination and Research Centre, June 1961.
- 22 Dailey and Dailey, "Eskimo of Rankin Inlet," 17.
- 23 On the relationship between the Keewatin Relocation Project and wider developments in the region, including Rankin Inlet, see Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), chapters 7 and 8, and "The Keewatin Project" (November 1958), RG 85 vol. 1071 file 251-6 pt. 2, LAC.
- 24 Ipkarnerk interview with Arn Keeling, August 2011. A government memorandum from 1956 lists the rate as 75 cents an hour, and suggests the rate be increased: Letter from Sivertz to Kerr, "Eskimos of Rankin Inlet, N.W.T.," 10 December 1956, RG 85 vol. 1268 file 1000-184 pt. 1, LAC. These low wages were justified due to the "primitive" nature of Inuit lifeways at this time. Letter to Maurice Marrinan from Jean Lesage (March 18, 1957), RG 85 vol. 1268 file 1000-184 pt. 1, LAC.
- 25 These accusations, published in southern newspapers, and the responses, including from the minister of Northern Affairs, are detailed in RG 85 R216 vol. 1268 file 1000-184 pt. 2, LAC.
- 26 Irkootee interview with Patricia Boulter, August 2011.
- 27 Letter, B. G. Sivertz to H. Larsen, RCMP G. Division Chief, 12 April 1956, and B. G. Sivertz, Memorandum for W. G. Kerr re: Eskimos, Rankin Inlet N.W.T., 10 December 1956, RG 85 vol. 1268 file 1000-184 pt. 1, LAC.
- 28 Memorandum, F. G. Cunningham to Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs, 10 December 1956, RG 85 vol. 1268 vol. 1000-184 pt. 1, LAC.
- 29 Letter, D. W. Grant to Andrew Easton, May 1959, RG 85 vol. 1512 vol. 1000-184 pt. 3, LAC.
- 30 "Employment of Eskimos," 26 December 1956, Alexander Stevenson fonds, N1992-023 box 31 file 1, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre (hereafter PWNHC), Northwest Territories Archives.
- 31 McPherson, *New Owners*, 12.
- 32 Dailey and Dailey, "Eskimo of Rankin Inlet," 94. For instance, in 1958, eleven men were returned to Baker Lake after failing to report for work at the mine. Monthly Report by W. G. Kerr (July 31, 1958), RG 85 vol. 623 file A205-184, LAC.

- 33 F. G. Vallee, *Kabloona and the Eskimo in the Central Keewatin* (Ottawa: Northern Co-ordination and Research Centre, 1962), 56; Letter from Easton to Grant (Aug. 26, 1959), RG 85 vol. 1512 file 1000-184 pt. 3, LAC.
- 34 Letter by B. G. Sivertz to Kerr, "Eskimos, Rankin Inlet, N.W.T." (Dec. 10, 1956), RG 85 vol. 1268 vol. 1000-184 pt. 1, LAC.
- 35 In spite of these restrictions, a Northern Affairs welfare officer reported in 1957 two instances of liaisons between non-Inuit men and Inuit women resulting in pregnancies. F. W. Thompson, "Report on Visit to Rankin Inlet, November 11–15, 1957," RG 85 vol. 1268 vol. 1000-184 pt. 2, LAC.
- 36 "Eskimo Job Problem Posed by Mine Closure," *Globe and Mail*, April 3, 1962, 25.
- 37 Stanley Twardy, "Ebbing Ore Blow to Eskimos," *Globe and Mail*, April 3, 1962, cited in RG 22 vol. 832 file 40-3-22 pt. 2, LAC.
- 38 "Displaced by Caribou Shortage, Eskimos to Get Aid From Ottawa," Canadian Press story clipping, 24 May 1962, cited in RG 22 vol. 832 file 40-3-22 pt. 2, LAC.
- 39 Report by D. W. Grant, Area Administrator, N1992-023 file 35-8, PWNHC.
- 40 See the extensive correspondence and reports in RG85 R216 vol. 1448 file 1000-184 vols. 7 and 8, LAC, as well as D. M. Brack and D. McIntosh, "Keewatin Mainland Area Economic Survey and Regional Appraisal," report for Industrial Division, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, March 1963, held in National Library of Canada.
- 41 See documents in RG85 D-3-a A251-3-500 file 1933 pt. 3, LAC.
- 42 Interviews in film, "Rankin Inlet Mine," Peter Ittinuar, film held in Rankin Inlet Community Resource Centre. This remarkable film (shot on black-and-white video) consists of a series of interviews in Inuktitut between Ittinuar and former miners, documenting the challenges the community faced after the sudden closure of the mine. This quote is based on a recorded simultaneous translation of the film by Piita Irniq. In an interview with Keeling, Ittinuar himself noted the film's "poignancy" and the miners' eloquence in discussing their post-mining struggles.
- 43 "Proceedings of a Meeting with the Eskimo Affairs Council and People of Rankin Inlet on February 26, 1962," RG85 Series D-1-A R216 vol. 1448 file 1000-184 pt. 7, LAC.
- 44 T. D. Stewart, Memorandum, Social assistance payments—Rankin Inlet, 6 March 1964, RG85 Series D-1-A R216 vol. 1962 file 1009-10 pt. 1, LAC. These welfare policies are also discussed in Williamson, *Eskimo Underground*.
- 45 Several interviewees mentioned these activities; they are discussed in detail in Stacy Neale, "The Rankin Inlet Ceramics Project: A Study in Development and Influence" (MA thesis, Concordia University, 1997).

- 46 These relocations are discussed in detail in Robert G. Williamson and Terrence W. Foster, "Eskimo Relocation in Canada," Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1975.
- 47 See, for instance, Bob Hill, "Transplanted Eskimos Doing Well," *Edmonton Journal*, November 28, 1963, 8; "Great Slave Lake Railway Begins Training Program," *North* magazine, March–April 1966, 44–45.
- 48 In addition to Williamson and Foster, several files in boxes 31, 51, and 57 of the R. G. Williamson fonds (MG 216) at the University of Saskatchewan Archives in Saskatoon also document the relocations and their challenges. Another report dealing with worker relocation is D. S. Stevenson, "Problems of Eskimo Relocation for Industrial Employment: A Preliminary Study," Northern Science Research Centre report, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, May 1968.
- 49 Williamson and Foster, "Eskimo Relocation in Canada," 108.
- 50 The crest of the Hamlet of Rankin Inlet, for instance, depicts the mine headframe (ironically, now gone from the landscape) fronted by an inukshuk, with a crossed miner's pick and Inuit harpoon. On the identification of contemporary residents with the mining past and landscape, see Tara Cater and Arn Keeling, "That's where our future came from": Mining, Landscape, and Memory in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut," *Études/Inuit/Studies* 37, no. 2 (2013): 59–82.
- 51 Pamela Stern, "Upside-Down and Backwards: Time Discipline in a Canadian Inuit Town," *Anthropologica* 45, no. 1 (2003): 155.
- 52 For a discussion of indigenous "life projects" and development, see Mario Blaser, Harvey Feit, and Glenn McRae, "Indigenous Peoples and Development Processes: New Terrains of Struggle," in *In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Life Projects, and Globalization*, eds. Mario Blaser, Harvey Feit, and Glenn McRae (London: Zed Books, 2004), 1–25.
- 53 This comment reflects the discussion of the politics of Inuit cultural identity in Edmund (Ned) Searles, "Anthropology in an Era of Inuit Empowerment," in *Critical Inuit Studies: An Anthology of Contemporary Arctic Ethnography*, eds. Pamela Stern and Lisa Stevenson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 89–101.
- 54 Rollwagen, "When Ghosts Hovered," 33.
- 55 Jean-Sébastien Boutet, "Opening Ungava to Industry: A Decentering Approach to Indigenous History in Subarctic Québec, 1937–1954," *Cultural Geographies* 21, no. 1 (2014): 79–97.