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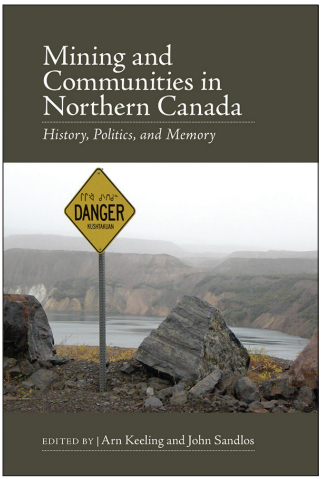

MINING AND COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN CANADA: HISTORY, POLITICS, AND MEMORY

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Uranium, Inuit Rights, and Emergent Neoliberalism in Labrador, 1956–2012

Andrea Procter

The struggle for Aboriginal rights in Canada is closely connected with resource conflicts. The threat of mining projects, hydroelectric dams, pipeline construction, and other industrial developments has often pushed Aboriginal groups to mobilize in order to reclaim control over traditional lands. As a number of chapters in this book demonstrate, many Aboriginal peoples have fought to prevent mining developments or have struggled against the harmful effects of mines on their lives and lands. The mining industry and nation-states have dispossessed Aboriginal groups of their territories and sovereignty on so many occasions that scholars often automatically situate the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and mining as a conflict. Yet increasingly, some Aboriginal governments are choosing to negotiate with mining companies and are entering into impact and benefit agreements and development proposals. Some analysts have connected the shift from protest to negotiation with

Figure 1: Labrador, showing territory of Nunatsiavut in shaded areas and key settlements and locations mentioned in the chapter. Map by Charlie Conway.

hegemonic neoliberal values and practices (see Levitan and Cameron in this volume).[1] The current global economy encourages states to facilitate the unimpeded exploitation of resources, and neoliberal governance tends to prioritize decentralization, a sense of responsibility for self-improvement, and decreased dependency on the state.[2] As Gabrielle Slowey argues, within this context, Aboriginal "self-determination is consistent with normative and neoliberal goals of economic, political, and cultural self-reliance."[3] How does the willingness of Aboriginal governments to negotiate with mining interests, therefore, correlate with Aboriginal goals of self-determination? What are the implications of this engagement with neoliberal projects?

This chapter explores these questions by examining how Inuit in Nunatsiavut, Labrador, have dealt with the prospect of a uranium mine on their territory since the 1950s, and how the relationship between neoliberal and Inuit goals has become complex and entangled. Based on a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Labrador in 2007–8, as well as on archival and media analysis, this chapter examines the historical articulation between changing and contradictory ideas about Aboriginal rights, economic development, and regional autonomy. By attending to the diverse perspectives of individuals and organizations, I illustrate the lived experience of regional and global processes such as modernization, Aboriginal self-government, and emerging neoliberalism, and explore how Inuit self-government and mining have become interconnected in unexpected ways. Over a sixty-year timeframe, Labrador Inuit, state authorities, and industry have come to align Inuit sovereignty, resource development, and regional self-sufficiency in order to further their own political and economic ambitions. As Charles Hale and others have argued, the neoliberal combination of autonomy and constraint can offer some space for Aboriginal rights claims, but, as I demonstrate here, a neoliberal framework can also limit economic and conceptual possibilities and can exacerbate and obscure inequalities.[4]

URANIUM, MODERNIZATION, AND INUIT RELOCATIONS IN THE 1950s

When uranium was found in northern Labrador in 1954, the discovery set off a string of events that profoundly transformed the political, social, and economic circumstances of the region. In the 1950s, the majority of Inuit in Labrador lived in dispersed settlements, homesteads, and camps on the northern coast and in central regions. In the winter months, many chose to stay in the villages established in the late 1700s by Moravian missionaries, in order to trade with the mission store and to attend church events. Most Inuit relied on a combination of commercial fishing for cod and char, fur trapping, and subsistence harvesting for their livelihood. Since World War II and the arrival of the American and Canadian militaries in the region, some also worked on the construction of various military sites, including those near Hopedale and Goose Bay.[5]

In provincial affairs at the time, Labrador was an afterthought. The region only gained political representation in 1946, and responsibility for education and health care had largely been left to the churches and the privately funded International Grenfell Association.[6] The provincial government in St. John's viewed Labrador as predominantly a place for Newfoundlanders to fish and, more recently, to find employment at military bases. Labrador was both a source of resources and a burden; its people were of little consequence to the government. In fact, Newfoundland had tried to sell Labrador to Quebec in 1925 and again in 1933 in order to deal with its financial difficulties.[7] Aboriginal people in the province, including Inuit, Innu, and those of mixed ancestry in Labrador, were "pencilled out" of the Terms of Union agreement when Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949, as Premier Smallwood argued that there were only Canadians in the province.[8]

It is within this context of political and economic marginalization that the uranium story begins. In 1953, the Newfoundland government leased vast resource rights over much of Labrador to the British Investment Company (or "Brinco"), for very little in return.[9] The one-sided Brinco concession was an example of the government's approach to economic development at the time: natural resources were the property of the Crown and were to be developed for the public good; no special

rights to lands or resources based on Aboriginal rights or historical ownership existed.[10] Brinco prospectors found some uranium deposits near Makkovik and Postville in 1954 and even more in 1956. Although the company tried to keep the discovery secret until the timing better suited it, Premier Smallwood leaked the news during the Labrador Conference of 1956, which had been convened by the provincial government in order to discuss future plans for Labrador and its people.[11]

One major theme at the conference was the social and economic future of the Labrador Inuit. Conference participants from the government, the Moravian mission, and the International Grenfell Association discussed their problems with administering health and social services to such a dispersed Inuit population and their concerns about the Inuit harvesting economy, which some felt should be replaced by wage labour. One option that was considered, in the absence of any Inuit participants, was relocating Inuit in the northernmost communities of Nutak and Hebron to places farther south, where they might find paid employment. In the midst of these discussions, and much to the dismay of Brinco officials, Smallwood announced to the press, "It is quite likely that mining of uranium ore and processing of uranium concentrates could commence in 1957."[12] The possibility of a mine near Makkovik created great optimism in government circles about development potential, especially given the bleak economic and health conditions on the coast that the conference participants had described.

Propelled in part by the possibility of wage labour opportunities, authorities decided to relocate more than four hundred Inuit from Nutak and Hebron to more southern communities in 1956 and 1959, and almost two hundred went to Makkovik. The main rationale was the provision of improved and more efficient services in centralized locations, but the discovery of uranium near Makkovik and the potential for jobs for the relocated Inuit did play a role in the decision.[13] The prospect of a uranium mine influenced the idea of Makkovik as a "growth centre" and therefore as a suitable location for the relocatees. Officials at the time generally assumed that Inuit could adapt easily, both to wage labour jobs and to new environments. Some Inuit who were relocated recount promises made to their families about jobs at the potential mine. One woman recalled, "They said that we're moving to a place where there is lots of things, lots

of seals everywhere, lots of animals and fish. That's what they said. That there were jobs available also. We had to go to Makkovik because they said Makkovik had everything."[14] Another said, "We were told on July 12 that we had to leave Okak and we left on July 25. My father was told there would be lots of work with Brinex. They took dad away from his fishing in Silutalik. My father could not get work so he ended up fishing there."[15]

The Inuit themselves were not consulted about the relocations, and they expressed their opposition to the plans, but paternalistic government authorities argued that the transition to an industrial, modern economy would be beneficial for them. Wage labour jobs would keep Inuit in settlements where they could also be provided with education and health services, and would encourage them to move away from what authorities felt were non-modern harvesting practices. "Both the Eskimos and the Indians [*sic*] have been encouraged and assisted in hunting and fishing," wrote the minister of public welfare in 1959, "but we regard these activities as 'holding operations' until the economy in the area becomes more diversified. However, with the development of the mineral resources of Labrador, there is hope that some progress in this direction will be possible."[16] Modernization would provide the government with the dual benefits of creating "productive" and sedentary citizens, as well as removing people from the land, thus making it available for development.[17]

Despite the promises of houses and jobs, the almost two hundred Inuit from Nutak and Hebron arrived in Makkovik to find nothing of the sort. Most spent many cold months living in tents before houses were eventually built on the outskirts of town in an area called "Hebron village." The relocatees were therefore spatially segregated from the rest of Makkovik and were also socially segregated by the original residents, who, although mainly of Inuit ancestry, considered themselves to be "Settlers," and not Inuit. The ethnic tensions and sometimes outright racism between the two groups added considerably to the already stressful and disruptive relocation.[18] Rose Pamack-Jeddore of Nain describes the relocations from an Inuit perspective:

> Resettlement is one of the gems of Confederation. Hebron and Nutak became non-existent in the rush for centralization. The rationale for resettlement was improvement of services. To

> the Inuit, resettlement meant living in tents while waiting for accommodation, leaving behind personal belongings, adjusting to a different hunting environment, the inconvenience of returning to fishing grounds in open boats and living in tents in the summer, and it led to an increase in community conflicts. The ensuing insecurity of relocation and the futility of attempting to adjust to depleted hunting, fishing, and wooding grounds drove the Inuit to the escape mechanism of drunkenness. Their powerlessness and insignificance in the dominant society had been made all too clear to them.[19]

The Hebron and Nutak relocations caused widespread social upheaval in Labrador, and the ongoing social devastation and inequalities caused by the resettlement policy are still evident today.[20]

The enthusiasm caused by the discovery of uranium near Makkovik was relatively short-lived. By 1958, Brinco's subsidiary exploration company Brinex had built tunnels and developed plans for a mine at the Kitts site, but by the end of 1959, uranium prices dropped, and the company realized that the mine would be too late to qualify for Atomic Energy of Canada contracts. Brinex exploration stopped soon afterwards. No jobs materialized for the almost two hundred relocated Inuit in Makkovik, who were now far from home and without a meaningful or sufficient livelihood.

NEW LIVELIHOODS: BRINEX IN THE 1970S

Brinex's interest in uranium surfaced again in the early 1970s with the international energy crisis and an improved uranium market. Company employees returned to the Kitts-Michelin site and built a camp fifteen kilometres from the communities of Postville and Makkovik. Labradorians viewed the company's renewed interest in the region with some skepticism. Other Smallwood-initiated developments in the province had failed to create many local or provincial benefits, and people were beginning to call for more local participation in development decision making.[21]

The company's resurgence also coincided with the rise of the Aboriginal rights movement in Labrador. Influenced by social movements in the United States—and driven by the controversy over the 1969 White Paper[22] and large-scale developments such as the Mackenzie Valley pipeline and the James Bay hydroelectric dam—Aboriginal peoples across Canada increasingly challenged state incursions into their lives and lands. In Labrador, the injustice of the 1950s northern relocations prompted many Inuit to voice their grievances and to call for restitution. After the federal government announced in 1973 that it would agree to negotiate comprehensive land claims with Aboriginal groups who had never signed treaties, Inuit in Nain[23] formed the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA). The LIA granted full membership to Kablunângajuit (the Inuttitut word for those of mixed Inuit-settler ancestry) in 1975 and filed a Labrador Inuit land claim in 1977.[24]

The Brinex project proposals of 1976 and 1979 were some of the first development issues tackled by the LIA. Within the context of the global anti-nuclear movement, the uranium development in Labrador was controversial in itself, and the LIA connected environmental and ethical concerns with calls for the recognition of Inuit authority over their homeland. Because they framed their opposition to the project in terms of Inuit rights, identity, and culture, however, the LIA leaders faced some difficulty in finding widespread support for their claims among those who lived closest to the mine site. Many Settler/Kablunângajuit residents from Makkovik and Postville did not self-identify as Inuit at that point, and they expressed some ambivalence toward political claims based on Inuit cultural difference.[25] The Labrador Inuit Association tried to use the sense of crisis created by the Brinex project to convince its potential members to recognize their shared interests and to foster a sense of Inuit identity and solidarity: "Development from big multi-national companies threaten[s] our traditional way of life, not to mention our resources and our land and waters . . . LIA encourages its members to unite and have one voice speaking for the rights of all its members. Let's begin seriously discussing our future and get the most of LIA's land claim for the good of all northern Labrador."[26]

Many residents of Makkovik, especially, framed their opposition to the project and their concerns about the dangers of uranium mining in

terms of the government's obligation to protect "a way of life that is vibrant and strong and where the traditional lifestyle makes for a fiercely independent people."[27] Residents stressed the importance of their "way of life," which encompassed shared values, activities, self-sufficiency, and circumstances,[28] but few labelled it as "Inuit." Evelyn Plaice and Lawrence Dunn have argued elsewhere[29] that this focus on "lifestyle" or "way of life" was an approach that North Coast residents and the Labrador Inuit Association used to avoid issues concerning ancestry.[30] In the 1970s, ethnic tensions and differentiation between Inuit and Settlers/Kablunângajuit were prominent features of social life in the region; the northern relocations had created persistent social and economic inequalities among groups in the communities.[31]

In the 1970s, the provincial government was receptive to the "way of life" argument, but it firmly denied any possibility of Aboriginal rights. It issued an official development policy for Labrador in 1979 that suggested local lifestyles should be taken into consideration, but only to the extent that these lifestyles were deemed desirable. Premier Brian Peckford expanded on how this approach would affect Labrador:

> The special relationship of the people to the land must be accounted for. The traditional lifestyle of Labrador, based on the harvesting of renewable resources, fishing, hunting, trapping, etc., requires a sensitive and symbiotic relationship between man and his delicate northern environment. That relationship permeates almost every aspect of the society and culture of Labrador and has to be accounted for in future development. However, we must also recognize the challenges, opportunities, and rewards of new lifestyles which can be ours through a rational program of resource development.[32]

Although government policy statements allowed that the way of life "must be accounted for," it was framed as something that could (and ideally should) be changed into "rewarding new lifestyles," and not as something that was inherently valuable or vital. Aboriginal rights, on the other hand, as championed by the LIA, had a fundamentally political and anticolonial basis that was much less malleable, more challenging, and therefore less appealing for the government.

Brinex's official response to calls for the recognition of Aboriginal rights was to defer to the provincial government's handling of the matter. In practice, however, the company criticized and denied such claims, especially in 1979, when public support for the recognition of Aboriginal rights was increasing,[33] and the issue became prominent in discussions about the potential mining development. In response to this pressure, Brinex worked to minimize the effect of Aboriginal rights on the project, first by arguing that the mine site would not interfere with any current Inuit land use. "I believe the project in question does not directly involve the LIA," argued Brinex's vice president of mining. "I would think they cannot be considered to be residents of the land in the project area south of Kappokok Bay [*sic*]."[34] The company also responded to local concerns by arguing that the mine could be designed on a very local scale and in isolation from places and people who did not wish to be "involved." A Brinex official stated, "The communities of Postville, Makkovik and North West River have special concerns relating to impacts such as lifestyles. I am confident that we can work closely with these communities to resolve concerns and design our systems to have them participate only to the extent they wish."[35] At a public meeting in 1976, when residents commented that local people would likely only get the lowest-paid jobs, Brinex's Murray Poloski replied that they "have to start somewhere—have to choose a lifestyle . . .The communities can choose their amount of involvement."[36]

Brinex thus acknowledged the "special concerns" of residents by appropriating the claim for local rights through isolating the residents geographically, socially, and economically from any development. Any economic benefit that may accrue to local people from the mine would be a result of their own choice to "change their lifestyle"—they would not be forced to participate. The company thus attempted to defuse and neutralize the residents' claims of local rights by conflating "local" with "isolated," and by relying on the liberal championing of the individual right to choose.

Despite the fierce denial by industry and government of local arguments against the Brinex proposal, moral and political support for the Inuit claims grew. In 1980, the Environmental Assessment Board for the Kitts-Michelin uranium project concluded that the Brinex mining

proposal did not prove that the project was environmentally, socially, and economically acceptable, and that serious concerns about Aboriginal rights must be addressed.[37] By the time of the board's report, however, internal company politics and poor global markets for uranium after the Three Mile Island accident in 1979 had prompted the company to shelve the project for the final time.

NEOLIBERAL CONTEXTS: NUNATSIAVUT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In the years following the Brinex proposals, Inuit land claims negotiations between the Labrador Inuit Association and the provincial and federal governments were often stalled.[38] In 1980, the provincial government reluctantly acknowledged Aboriginal rights, but it limited its definition of Aboriginal rights to culture, heritage, and the traditional use of renewable resources, and refused to consider any rights to subsurface or "non-traditional" resources.[39] In the 1980s and early 1990s, the province framed its approach to the land claims negotiations as affirmative action for a disadvantaged minority, who, once lifted to the economic status of others in the province, would presumably then become socially indiscernible.[40] This perspective on Inuit concerns contrasted greatly with the LIA's position that the Inuit were a political community with inherent rights to resources and autonomy.

Even in 1989, when LIA President William Andersen III articulated a possible alignment between Inuit and provincial goals, the Newfoundland and Labrador government was slow in following the LIA's lead. Andersen argued that Labrador Inuit must be "guaranteed their own lands and resources in sufficient quantities to be as self-sufficient a people as possible . . . Of fundamental importance to us, as Labrador Inuit, is our future as a distinct and viable people. We are looking to the next 200 years—not the next 20."[41] The LIA's approach changed slightly from demanding recognition of Inuit rights to demanding the means by which Inuit could sustain themselves in a self-contained territory. Inuit were looking to land claims to help create political and economic independence, he argued: "To us, land claims is not a threat to non-aboriginal people, it's a way

to self-sufficiency."[42] By situating the Labrador Inuit as a political community in search of self-sufficiency, the LIA framed its claim in the dominant society's terms by appropriating concepts from the state's neoliberal project of producing self-reliant subjects.[43] Given the government's insistence on limiting Inuit rights to those based on an image of Inuit as self-sustaining subsistence harvesters, aligning the goals of self-sufficiency and resource development offered some middle ground to the provincial government.

Yet it was only when a massive nickel deposit was found in 1994 at Voisey's Bay, south of Nain, that land claims negotiations heated up. With the increasingly mobile nature of capital markets, investors jumped at the prospect of a mining development, but they were also increasingly sensitive to uncertainties about land tenure, and the provincial government felt new pressure to settle Aboriginal land claims in Labrador. Its first step was to take the Voisey's Bay area completely off the negotiation table, but the government also fast-tracked the Labrador Inuit land claim talks. An agreement in principle was signed in 1999, and the final agreement was signed in 2004, at which point the provincial government also issued a formal apology and financial compensation for its role in the 1950s relocations. The Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement created the Labrador Inuit Settlement Area, a region administered by the Nunatsiavut Government.

Within the Settlement Area, the Nunatsiavut Government has enhanced authority over a proportion of land (15,799 square kilometres of the total 72,520 square kilometres of land) specifically selected by Inuit and designated as Labrador Inuit Lands.[44]

Shortly after its creation, the Nunatsiavut Government (NG) faced one of its first major crises. Uranium prospects had improved in the early 2000s, due to uncertain global geopolitics concerning oil resources and renewed interest in nuclear power as a possible response to climate change. Accordingly, the price of uranium had risen from US$7/lb in 2001 to US$136/lb in 2007.[45] Exploration companies returned in full force to Labrador, and Nunatsiavut beneficiaries were embroiled in an intense debate about how to approach the renewed possibility of uranium mining on their lands near Makkovik and Postville.

The Kitts-Michelin site, now under lease to Aurora Energy Resources Ltd., was called "the largest undeveloped uranium deposit in Canada," and Aurora spokespeople claimed that a mine would be many times the size of the nearby Voisey's Bay nickel mine.[46] However, this project would mine uranium—a substance that was much more controversial than nickel. The global anti-nuclear movement had quieted significantly since the Brinex proposals, due in no small part to the post-Chernobyl decline of the nuclear power industry, but uranium remained a contentious topic. The jurisdiction over the land and the allocation of potential economic benefits had, however, significantly changed since the 1970s. The Michelin deposit is on Labrador Inuit Land, which means that NG has jurisdiction over surface access and would receive a 25 per cent share in any provincial royalties of a future development.

In August 2007, Aurora notified the Nunatsiavut Government of its intention to register its project for an environmental assessment by the end of the year. NG had not yet developed a regional land use plan or legislation on environmental assessment, and so the NG minister of lands and environment tabled a motion in the Nunatsiavut Assembly to ban uranium development on Labrador Inuit Lands for three years.[47] Debate about "the moratorium," as it was called, was fierce and endured for many months until the Nunatsiavut Assembly voted to pass the bill in April 2008.

For those who supported the moratorium, the idea that the Inuit government was actively protecting its land and people from potentially harmful developments was a source of pride based in ideas about post-colonial control, environmentalism, and Inuit culture. Given the history of frustrated efforts to defend their lands from industrial incursions, many Inuit took great comfort in knowing that the NG has, in the words of one man, "complete sovereignty" over the land and is willing to exercise that authority.[48] The lengthy land claims negotiations had resulted in some concrete authority over land governance, and some people expressed their relief that the NG was not simply going to "give the land away" for quick economic gain, or capitulate to industrial and economic pressures.[49]

Some who supported the ban described aspects of the Nunatsiavut Government's approach as characteristically Inuit: "When people are

hasty to encourage economic development for the sake of accessing jobs and revenues, important details get overlooked. Nunatsiavut Government does need time to be able to stand on solid ground before taking part in an environmental assessment for a proposed uranium development on Labrador Inuit Lands. One common virtue that Inuit culture is based on is patience. We are an Inuit Government."[50] Unlike the situation in the past, the Inuit now had the ability to control development within Nunatsiavut, and many argued that it should do so carefully, at its own pace, and based on its own priorities.

To many Inuit, the connection between the land and the well-being of future generations was fundamental and must be protected. As in the 1970s, the issue of people's "way of life" was prominent in the debate, but this phrase took on various meanings. For some, protecting the "way of life" entailed protecting the integrity of the land for future generations by prohibiting mining. For others, protecting the "way of life" entailed protecting the viability of living in Nunatsiavut by developing resources in order to support Inuit jobs, housing, and infrastructure.

Some argued that the potentially disastrous environmental effects of uranium tailings could destroy the land, water, and wildlife in the vicinity of the development, and could pose a health risk. Many felt that this potential harm was not worth the short-term economic benefits of a mine: "The employment benefits are not going to be there forever, so it's really not worth the environmental and the health (risks) and the loss of our traditional hunting areas," argued Terry Rice of Makkovik.[51] Others felt that the use of land for the sustenance of future generations did not preclude resource development, as long as the environment is not ruined:

> We're not against development—we see development as providing economic opportunities for beneficiaries that's greatly needed and we see need in communities for infrastructure, for housing, for other projects and maybe revenue from mining can allow us to deliver these programs. But if our environment is contaminated then these things don't really matter. You know, we need to ensure that, first and foremost our land is protected for future generations and the onus is on the Assembly to ensure that we do this.[52]

On the other hand, some Inuit argued that mining could "help to protect our people" by allowing them to remain in their home communities and "learn their culture by living near the land instead of moving away for work."[53] Many people on the coast were worried that young people would have to leave the community in order to make a living elsewhere if mining were not permitted. One woman connected this out-migration with the loss of culture, as young people would not have the opportunity to experience and learn their culture by living in Nunatsiavut and being taught by elders:

> It's a sin if our children have to move away because they can't get anything here. They're not going to work at the fish plant if there's something better somewhere else . . . If all the young people have to leave the communities for work, there'll be nothing left to govern. Everything will just die out! Yes, there will be land, but there will be nobody there.[54]

The idea of "protecting our people" included providing the means by which they can remain in Nunatsiavut. According to this perspective, people in Nunatsiavut should be "using the land to its fullest" and using Nunatsiavut's resources to "sustain ourselves in perpetuity."[55]

Some Inuit also argued that people should adopt a stronger sense of individual responsibility so that they gain the education and develop the skills needed to take advantage of potential mining jobs. "There's more to life than 420 hours of work to get EI. The young people need to get educated, and then come home to get work in the mine, if it goes ahead. We need to take control of our lives."[56] In some ways reminiscent of Brinex's claim that people could "choose their own level of participation" in the mine, these comments illustrate how some people have now internalized the desire for "self-improvement," and how modernization themes are reappearing as hegemonic neoliberal values. Arguments for increased responsibility over one's future were echoed by government and industry campaigns encouraging people to train for jobs and to seize mining-related opportunities. Although these perspectives were quite widespread among both Inuit and industry representatives, other Inuit countered these arguments by stating that the role of the Nunatsiavut Government

should be to provide compensation or jobs to those who might be hurt by a moratorium.[57]

Neoliberal calls for individual responsibility and self-improvement are also evident at the governmental level. The land claim agreement's fiscal structures strongly encourage the Nunatsiavut Government to sustain itself and its programs through revenues that it raises itself. In general terms, the agreement states that the Nunatsiavut Government would gain a 25 per cent share of provincial royalties from development on Labrador Inuit Lands, while it would only see a 5 per cent share of royalties from development on other lands in the settlement area.[58] Because the Michelin site is on Labrador Inuit Lands, the prospect of a 25 per cent share of royalties from a mine was a serious consideration for many, especially given the huge financial pressure of funding a new government.

The land claim agreement therefore puts Inuit in a new relationship with the land, one that is determined by formal economic agreements. Inuit no longer stand in direct opposition to industry or to a government intent on facilitating resource development; as the "landlord," the Nunatsiavut Government now has a vested interest in development, as well as the responsibility of protecting Nunatsiavut beneficiaries.[59] The pressure on the NG to develop its resources is therefore quite high, and the decision to prevent any uranium mining for three years was made by some members of the Assembly only for administrative reasons—not because they opposed the development of a uranium mine in the future.[60] One politician described the pressure on the government to finance itself in this way: "We need economic development and in a government where we're all aware that the finances are not that great and we will be facing some hard times in the next few years, to delay any process that may give us a light at the end of the tunnel could be extremely detrimental to our success as a government."[61]

As a product of the alignment between Inuit goals of self-determination and neoliberal state goals of increased regional self-sufficiency, the land claim agreement promotes particular ways of conceptualizing Nunatsiavut land and resources.[62] One candidate for the position of NG president in 2008 illustrated the framing of resources as commodities:

> As our North Coast tax base is significantly smaller than what we need to run our self-government, the Nunatsiavut government will be dependent on extracting its natural resources in order to have the funds necessary to sustain our communities and the running of our government. The generation of own source revenue is essential, and right now, mining seems to be the short-term answer. So, even though I am not a mining advocate, I still have to consider it strategically as an income source for government, a source of employment and opportunity for Beneficiaries, and a way to utilize one of our most important assets.[63]

The Nunatsiavut Government should therefore keep this new economic relationship in mind, he continued, as "there is no sense in negatively affecting the reputation of our potential business partner [i.e., the exploration company] or the value of our asset" by establishing a moratorium.[64] Government and corporate interests are aligned, in this perspective, and actions that have a negative impact on industry will likewise have a negative impact on Nunatsiavut.

When the Nunatsiavut Assembly voted to ban temporarily uranium development in 2008, this prediction proved correct, at least initially. As uranium exploration company stocks plummeted in the days after the vote, many Inuit watched with either trepidation or quiet cynicism about industry's flair for melodrama. As one woman told me, "They're just riling people up and getting them to support mining. Give them a year or two years and they'll be back with more support—just before the three years is up."[65] For its part, Aurora Energy Ltd. offered a measured response, intended to quell environmental concerns about uranium mining and to minimize the perceived distance between the company and the Inuit communities: "Aurora shares the goal of careful stewardship of the land that Labrador Inuit have been a part of for over 5,000 years . . . In light of a growing world demand for clean, safe energy, Aurora is looking to the future benefits of moving forward in the spirit of co-operation with the people of North Coast Labrador."[66]

The political, economic, and social ramifications of Aboriginal self-government within a neoliberal context are thus multiple and often contradictory. While the provincial government has an increasing

appetite for regional self-sufficiency and, therefore, the settlement of Inuit land claims, the lands and resources on which the Inuit are expected to subsist are extremely limited. In the midst of this debate, mining and exploration companies offer consistently positive information and images about the solution that uranium mining offers to individuals, families, and governments, and the role that Inuit can play in decision making.

The consistent focus of industry, government, and many individuals is on the ability of the Nunatsiavut Government and Labrador Inuit to control the outcome of the uranium issue. In this view, Inuit are now "empowered" to engage in decision-making processes and to decide what their own futures will hold. Yet, as Shore and Wright argue, this focus on new-found "empowerment" can obscure many underlying issues that the new governance structures have not resolved.[67] The ideal neoliberal citizen—self-managing, self-governing, and self-sufficient—is empowered to work as a partner in management and to take responsibility for his or her own success. In this "project of self-improvement . . . any discussion of poverty as inequality or disadvantage has been erased from the discourse."[68] Larger issues such as the lingering inequalities created by the 1950s relocations of Hebron and Nutak, for instance, are overshadowed by talk of individual choice and self-governance, responsibility to improve oneself, and job training.

While many embrace the opportunity to engage in "self-improvement" and development projects, many others feel further alienated by this emphasis on empowerment, as a woman from Nain told me:

> Most [Inuit] live in too much depression to really do anything, can't understand English most of the time and do not benefit from programs and services. It's sickening . . . The Inuit population always seems as though [they] are always in the position of a high price chip: worth a lot but never really benefiting from all what is happening. People say they want the money instead [of programs], they say the leaders don't listen and they only take care of their own family and many don't like it, including me.[69]

The forced relocations from Hebron and Nutak in the 1950s, as well as the more general social and economic impacts of centuries of colonialism, have caused lasting social divisions and inequalities among Inuit in

Nunatsiavut. Some have benefited from the land claims settlement and new economic opportunities, but others have felt further marginalized.

THE POWER OF THE PROSPECT

The relationship between uranium and Inuit self-government is still evolving. In 2011, Aurora Energy Ltd. was purchased by the giant Australian uranium producer Paladin Energy Ltd., and in March 2012, the Nunatsiavut Government lifted its moratorium on uranium mining, but the development of a mine in Labrador has not progressed to formal deliberation. As the global market for uranium continues to fluctuate at the time of writing (early 2013) with the impact of the 2011 Fukushima disaster, the development of a uranium mine in Nunatsiavut remains uncertain, and the ultimate influence of the deposit is yet to be known.

For over fifty years, the prospect of a uranium mine in Nunatsiavut has highlighted the complex and often contradictory correlation between Inuit self-governance and mining development. Speculation about the uranium deposit has fuelled many of the advances in Inuit self-government, but the relationship has not been straightforward. Over the years, the Inuit and provincial authorities have used the crises surrounding uranium both as a catalyst to solidify their political goals and as an opportunity to launch a different future. In many ways, however, the anticipation of a mine has also deepened social inequalities and constrained the range of economic possibilities.

The history of the debate about uranium in Labrador illustrates the entwined connections between Inuit and global dynamics. In the 1950s, following the worldwide propensity for modernization schemes, governmental authorities assumed that the Inuit harvesting economy should be converted into a wage-earning economy, and that Inuit would adapt to enforced (yet inevitable) social and economic transformation. The potential for jobs at a mine was therefore one of the justifications used for the massive relocation and dispossession of northern Inuit from their lands, an event that has caused pervasive social trauma and inequality in the region. In the 1970s, the Brinex proposal was a catalyst for Inuit and Kablunângajuit to join forces and to fight for their rights as Aboriginal

people, as national and international debates about local and Aboriginal participation in resource governance were challenging state domination. The Brinex experience also illustrates the emerging influence of neoliberalism in community-industry relationships, both in the autonomy that Brinex granted individual citizens to "participate only to the extent they wish," and in the increasing autonomy that the new political context granted to local voices such as the Labrador Inuit Association to express their own concerns.

In the early twenty-first century, uranium plays a central role in highlighting the contradictory neoliberal engagement with Aboriginal self-governance. With the creation of Nunatsiavut, Inuit are now "empowered" to control their own government and region, but as such, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith says about another indigenous situation, the Inuit are perhaps "made responsible for their own oppression and freedom."[70] They have taken advantage of the space offered by neoliberal policies to advance their claims, and now have extraordinary authority over some aspects of governance in Nunatsiavut, including the freedom to make many of their own decisions about issues such as uranium mining. But hand in hand with this authority comes pressure to achieve economic self-sufficiency. The limited Inuit land base, diminished through historical dispossessions, relocations, policies that discounted the significance of the harvesting economy, and, finally, the land claims negotiations, must now support the needs of the Nunatsiavut Government and its beneficiaries. Inuit may therefore have the authority to ban uranium mining, but, within the neoliberal framework of the land claim agreement, they face significant pressure to develop their limited resources.

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