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## Community Interventions to the Food Insecurity Crisis Inuit Currently Face in Nunangat

Alyssia R. Getschow

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Community Interventions to the Food Insecurity Crisis Inuit Currently Face in Nunangat

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Science, Technology, and Society

Colby College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Alessia Rose Getschow

Waterville, Maine

May 13th, 2022

Dear reader,

My goal with this paper is to alert you to a growing crisis which is being ignored. Like myself, I assume that you have never before heard of the food insecurity crisis faced by many Indigenous populations around the world. This is especially true when considering the specific struggles Inuit are facing and the direct threat to Inuit identity and culture that such extreme widespread food insecurity poses. There are many misconceptions about Inuit which have emerged from non-Indigenous research and media, and I hope to highlight the issues Inuit are facing with as much accuracy and respect for Inuit ideas and experience as possible. Although my goal is to educate and inspire compassion for the struggles that Inuit are facing, I must acknowledge that Inuit prioritize their ability to live self-sufficiently off of their land, and that non-Inuit intervention is not and should not be the desired outcome of learning of these struggles. Yes, I personally believe that Inuit deserve more support in the battle against food insecurity, but I also acknowledge Inuit living in Nunangat's overall desire to remain sovereign and to adapt as they see fit without outside intervention. I hope that you can consider how the systems you interact with on an everyday basis may be contributing to these issues and that you can sympathize with the abundance of accessibility that we, as non-Indigenous people, have in our everyday lives.

Sincerely,  
Alyssia

## Abstract

*Inuit living in Nunangat, a northern territory in Canada, are facing unprecedented rates of food insecurity. The increasing impacts of anthropogenic climate change are rapidly changing the Arctic landscape in Nunangat, posing challenges to Inuit hunters who hunt and live completely self-sufficient off of the land. This lack of access to country foods and the impacts these conditions are having on Inuit communities are forcing Inuit to consider aid propositions from the Canadian government. Due to a long history of conflict with white settlers during the colonization of Canada, there is a feeling of distrust and cultural distaste between Canada and Inuit today. Furthermore, these relations and the processes associated with colonialism have created circumstances over time such as increased grocery prices, decreased hunting capabilities and food storage challenges, which are both damaging to Inuit food security as well as directly linked to colonist actions. Without intervention, food insecurity poses a direct and imminent threat to the survival of Inuit culture in the Nunangat region. Outside aid has proven unsuccessful and insulting to Inuit cultural values. Given this, Inuit are relying on self-representation technologies such as community freezer programs and an increasingly strong presence on social media platforms in order to both educate the world on their culture and current struggles as well as directly address food insecurity within Inuit communities across Nunangat.*

## Table of Contents

<b>Dear reader,</b>	3
<b>Abstract</b>	4
<b>Introduction</b>	6
<b>Methods</b>	9
<b>The Global Food Insecurity Crisis</b>	10
The FIES Scale	11
<b>The Indigenous Specific Food Insecurity Epidemic</b>	12
Inuit Specific Food Insecurity: Data	14
<b>Health Burden of Food Insecurity</b>	15
<b>Inuit Homelands and Foodways</b>	17
Country foods	19
Country Foods and Health	22
Food sharing	23
<b>Settler Colonialism and Inuit Self-Determination</b>	25
Fur Trade	27
<b>The Appropriation of Inuit Culture</b>	27
<b>Food Accessibility in Nunangat</b>	29
Changes to Inuit Hunting Practices	29
Grocery store prices	32
Food Storage and Distribution:	34
<b>Climate Change in Nunangat</b>	35
Climate Change: Analysis on its impact on Inuit	36
Polar bears: a case study	38
Current Inuit relations with settler governments: ICC Alaska	40
Current Inuit relations with settler governments: Nutrition North Canada	41
<b>TikTok Analysis</b>	45
<b>Community Interventions: community freezer programs</b>	52
How community freezers work	53
A discussion of the successes and failures	54
Community Freezers: what is working	54
Community Freezers: barriers	55
Discussion and future improvements	57
<b>Conclusion:</b>	60

## **Introduction**

Food is critical for human survival, and without it, we would only last mere weeks before succumbing to starvation (Barrell, 2020). Many scholars and health practitioners agree on the importance of healthy and sufficient food sources. Jernigan (2021) argues that food security is a basic human right which is a large determining factor when it comes to how well a community is thriving and states that, “*a healthy food system is an indicator of a healthy community; one cannot exist without the other* (para. 4)”. This need has been recognized by governments, NGOs and food policy alike. Having adequate access to quality food is widely supported on a global scale, starting with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and has become so widely accepted and prioritized that there has been a World Food Summit since 1996 aimed solely at combating these issues (Ballard et al., 2013; United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2010). Additionally, food and the practices surrounding food are essential to many different cultures and regions, and the food of a culture is a critical element of many communities around the world. For many Indigenous groups, food is central to the Indigenous identity within their community. This is especially true for Inuit living in Nunangat in the northern Canadian territories.

As I will come to explain, today Inuit living in territories in northern Canada are facing unprecedented rates of food insecurity. Inuit are both lacking adequate access to food due to the inability to access traditional food sources, as well as a general lack of access to grocery store food options. These issues of access stem from a variety of compounding social, economic, historical and environmental sources, and the effects have contributed to significant changes for Inuit hunters. Such changes have resulted in Inuit facing a direct threat to the preservation of

their culture as they continue to struggle to successfully hunt and sustain themselves using the resources available on the land, sea and ice of their ancestral and present day territories.

Given these struggles, the question of Inuit sovereignty has been at the forefront of this research and questions surrounding this issue are inseparable from my discussion on Inuit food security. Many of the drivers of food insecurity for Inuit point to inequalities which have directly resulted from processes related to colonization, which impacts the conversation around initiatives to combat food insecurity in Nunangat, the homeland of Inuit and chosen study location of this research. The conversation includes the question of whether Canada is responsible for supplying humanitarian aid to Inuit communities, what this aid would look like and whether such efforts would impede on Inuit independence and reconstitute colonial habits from Canada.

I approach the Inuit struggles surrounding food insecurity acknowledging that I am not Inuit, nor was I able to be in Nunangat and learn the Inuit experiences associated with facing food insecurity directly from Inuit during the course of this research. Therefore, I have created a unique approach to studying and representing the Inuit food insecurity crisis by utilizing a compilation of Inuit narratives to form my claims and guide my argument. I have relied on Inuit sources, testimony and self-representation in this paper to narrate a history of who Inuit are, introduce how food contributes to their culture and identity and establish the severity of the Nunangat food insecurity crisis. Prioritizing perspectives shared by Inuit, I argue that Inuit interventions focusing on access to traditional Inuit foods are the only viable approach to fight food insecurity in Nunangat while simultaneously maintaining Inuit sovereignty. Similarly, I argue that Inuit self-representation through a variety of platforms and technologies have been crucial to aiding Inuit and increasing food security in Nunangat, due to Inuit increasing self-representation of their own interests in food security efforts. In order to discuss these claims, I



begin with the global food insecurity crisis and discuss how to measure food insecurity as well as introduce the major drivers of food insecurity and the associated health impacts. Following this, I briefly explain the history of Inuit and how they came to live in Nunangat, the Inuit territory of study for this research, as well as the other global regions they live in today. I introduce the concept of country foods, the traditional food staple for Inuit, and how Inuit rely on and utilize the land that they live with for their resources. Afterwards, I explain three significant factors which I believe are contributing to Inuit food insecurity in Nunangat: changes to hunting practices, grocery store prices, and food storage and distribution. I also open a lengthy discussion of the impacts of climate change on Inuit food insecurity and address the issue of the lack of media representation to show the struggles of Inuit food insecurity.

I situate the majority of my discussion of Inuit food insecurity in a history of Canadian settler colonialism. As Canada was founded and expanding, dissonance arose between Inuit and white settlers. The policy created during this time to attempt to take advantage of and remove Inuit from their lands introduced conflict between Inuit and Canadians and set a precedent of prejudice and discrimination against Inuit. This process has led to many long standing inequalities, and perpetuated cultural appropriation of Inuit culture in the media by non-Inuit. To conclude, I dive deeply into the community freezer initiatives, which are the only programs designed and managed by Inuit community members which prioritize lessening the burden on Inuit caused by the food insecurity crisis across Nunangat through increasing community access to country foods. I evaluate the programs and their priorities, and point out where they are successful and also where they are lacking and suggest potential improvements.

With this research, I offer a unique approach to the Inuit food insecurity crisis in Nunangat by compiling a plethora of Inuit narratives and perspectives. The inclusion of Inuit

perspectives allowed me to identify and confirm the severity of the food insecurity issue, understand the true causes attributable to this growing problem, as well as identify shortcomings of previous aid efforts and discuss the community desires and needs for aid in Nunangat.

## **Methods**

In order to approach the food insecurity struggles Inuit are facing in a respectful way, my study relies on direct information from Inuit community members, researchers and policy makers. Due to the fact that I was unable to physically travel to Nunangat to conduct interviews, and many Inuit expressed hesitation towards talking to an outsider about this issue, I utilized social media to help me obtain Inuit perspectives about Inuit relations to food. TikTok was the platform of choice for data collection because it allows for in-depth videos up to three minutes long. Secondly, there is a strong Inuit presence on TikTok, including a strong community of Inuit sharing their culture through explaining their relationship with traditional Inuit foods. I performed discursive analysis on multiple videos chosen based on their connection to food which were posted within the past year, and used factors such as tone, physical environment, people present and language in order to better understand how Inuit are crafting their relationship to food during the current food insecurity crisis (for further explanation of discursive analysis see Gale, 2010). My investigation of this relationship revealed how Inuit are coping with the current food insecurity crisis, as well as provided an Inuit focused narrative which was important for establishing general background information for my research.

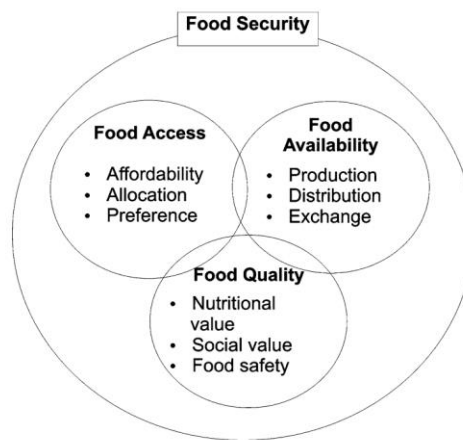
Throughout my research, a common theme that I have come across has been the lack of Inuit voices active in academia and media more broadly. It seems as though authors often overlook the Inuit perspectives, and simply report on the issues from an outside lens, claiming their data to be the living truth of Inuit. I saw this as a major flaw in much of the research I was

referring to, because I never was able to understand how the data was translating to the lived experiences of Inuit. Originally, I had hoped to combat this trend by speaking directly to Inuit in Nunangat, including members of the community freezer programs I am analyzing. Regrettably, the understandable distrust between Inuit and non-Inuit authors created a strong barrier which did not allow me to conduct interviews and include any personally sourced Inuit narratives in my paper. Despite this, I have prioritized Inuit narratives wherever possible, to connect the data regarding food insecurity to the lived experience of Inuit in Nunangat as closely as possible. TikTok aided me greatly in providing direct information regarding Inuit foodways and culture, as well as information regarding struggles Inuit are facing on a daily basis. Though I still rely on non-Indigenous publications throughout my paper, I back up the data through the incorporation of Inuit narratives as much as possible, acknowledging that this paper still comes from an outside perspective and therefore could tell a different story than what Inuit are currently facing.

### **The Global Food Insecurity Crisis**

According to Feeding America who stands as the largest charity focused on hunger relief in the United States, food insecurity can be defined as “a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life” (Feeding America, n.d., para. 1). Although this is a general definition, food insecurity ranges in severity on a case by case basis and for many communities, the definition of food insecurity has many facets which are specific to their own community needs. Food insecurity unfortunately plagues the globe at a surprisingly high rate and it is estimated that there were 2.37 billion people facing food insecurity at some level around the world in 2020 (United Nations, n.d.). This number represents roughly one third of the global population. Cases of food insecurity also significantly rose by over 300 million people in 2020 due to the impacts of COVID-19, according to the UN. As argued in Jernigan

(2020), food security is a basic human right. Food security is a significant factor when it comes to determining the extent to which a community is thriving. Jernigan (2020) also notes that diet and the quality of the food that is available is as significant as having access to food, “*diet is the number one risk factor for preventable disease (para. 5)*” (Figure 1). The effects of food insecurity vary greatly based on a variety of circumstantial factors, and the severity of food insecurity among a population has a large impact on the overall health and well being of a community, which I will discuss in depth later in my research.



*Figure 1: A venn diagram defining the three key factors involved in determining food security (Ford, 2009)*

### The FIES Scale

Although it is true that food insecurity is a widespread issue, its impacts can vary greatly depending on factors such as severity and the overall length of time it lasts. The Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) was created by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations by a group of researchers who created a theoretical table of food insecurity which associated lived experiences with presumed levels of food insecurity (Ballard et al., 2013). The FIES scale allows the human experience to be linked to otherwise seemingly lifeless and

unreliable classifications of hunger. This scale was developed with communities facing food insecurity in mind. The scale is intended to serve as a benchmark and standardization system that can be used by non-health experts to develop food security related policy and other capacity building efforts and the intent is for the FIES scale to be integrated into future policy, health and academic discussions alike in the near future. Although this scale has yet to be applied universally, it introduces the lived experiences of hunger, which will be important to keep in mind throughout this research with regard to Inuit food insecurity.

In the FIES scale table, food insecurity is broken down into three major categories of severity: mild, moderate and severe. Mild food insecurity often presents as the insufficient access to quality food. Life experiences associated with facing mild food insecurity include feelings of anxiety surrounding having access to enough food, worrying about where the next meal will be found, being unable to eat healthy and nutritious foods and/or being restricted to a small group of foods due to a lack of money. Moderate food insecurity, according to FIES, often presents as consistent inadequate food quantity. This may include skipping one or multiple meals a day due to the lack of funds or resources. Severe food insecurity, in comparison, often causes severe hunger and can include skipping multiple days of meals due to a general lack of resources. All of these levels of food insecurity carry a variety of health risks, which I will expand on shortly after I introduce the rates of food insecurity specifically among Indigenous populations.

### **The Indigenous Specific Food Insecurity Epidemic**

With the classifications of food insecurity identified in the FIES scale in mind, it is confirmed that Indigenous populations experience higher rates of food insecurity compared to non-Indigenous populations (Blue Bird Jernigan et al., 2021). This phenomenon is seen on a global scale. Yet, ironically, many Indigenous food systems and food practices are also most

often sustainable, self-sufficient food systems. Inuit are confident in their relationship with their land and its ability to sustain their needs. Interestingly, many white ‘elitist’ organizations are beginning to implement certain aspects of Indigenous food systems into global foodways to aid the currently failing white-settler systems. Claims supporting Indigenous self-sufficiency have been promoted by several major non-Indigenous organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, who state indigenous food practices hold invaluable health benefits which the rest of the world could benefit from knowing, and serve as means to reduce global food insecurity due to the sustainable nature of Indigenous food practices (Lugo-Morin, 2020; Institute for the Future, 2018). Despite this acknowledgement of sustainability, Indigenous communities around the world have been struggling to sufficiently support themselves due to the impacts of colonist efforts. This struggle is felt worldwide, by all Indigenous populations. For example, in the United States, Native American families are four times as likely to be food insecure when compared to the average American household (Move For Hunger, n.d.). Additionally, a 2019 study revealed that 70% of Native American families are unable to get food that they want, which as previously discussed in relation to the FIES scale, may classify as mild food insecurity (Sowerwine et al., 2019; Ballard et al., 2013). In Canada, food insecurity is also disproportionately prevalent for Indigenous communities - such as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations. One study found that Indigenous individuals living in Indigenous territories in Canada experience roughly four times the amount of food insecurity when compared to Canadian families (Redding, 2021). According to the same source, 54% of First Nation people living on Indigenous lands in Canada are food insecure, representing a major difference in food accessibility between First Nation families and non-Indigenous Canadians.

### Inuit Specific Food Insecurity: Data

Inuit are no exception to the global food security disparities between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people around the world. Shockingly, it is estimated that over half of Inuit in Nunangat live with severe food insecurity (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2021). According to Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2021), which includes data directly from the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey conducted by Statistics Canada, 76% of Inuit over the age of 15 years of age living in Nunangat are estimated to be experiencing food insecurity. This includes 43.9% of Inuit over 15 years of age reporting 'moderate' food insecurity and 32.4% reporting 'very low' food security. Although the language used in the FIES scale has not been universally established and implemented in all conversations regarding food insecurity, given the previous evaluation of the FIES scale produced by the UN, this may mean that almost half of Inuit are skipping meals on a daily basis due to inadequate resources. These numbers indicate that the food insecurity crisis is both severe and widespread across communities in Nunangat, signifying a high need for action. Despite contentions between Inuit and the Canadian government, this issue is becoming increasingly apparent to the Canadian government, which has prompted some conversation on the issue. As the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Minister has famously stated in response to the Canadian government discussing the severity of the Inuit food insecurity crisis in Nunangat with regard to how fast a solution must be made, *"I don't have a timeline for you, but I know it's urgent"* (C.B.C News, 2017). It seems clear from these statistics that the food insecurity crisis in Nunangat is severe. Given this, it is important to understand how this crisis is actively impacting Inuit in Nunangat. One way to conceptualize these impacts is by investigating the health impacts caused by food insecurity in Nunangat. There is limited data discussing health impacts of food

insecurity for Inuit specifically. However, using a broad discussion of the health impacts of food insecurity more broadly, I will break down the known impacts on Inuit in Nunangat.

### **Health Burden of Food Insecurity**

Without country foods, there are clear health disadvantages to Inuit solely consuming grocery store foods. However, this being said, of course there are various health impacts which go beyond the loss of country foods and are caused by food insecurity for Inuit communities, all of which raise significant concern for Inuit health. As established, not only are the implications of food insecurity severe, but this issue is incredibly widespread among Inuit in Nunangat. In Pirkle et al. (2014), researchers found that in Nunavik, 50% of children were considered food insecure and as a result, almost 19% of the population were considered to have short stature linked to stunting from poor nutrition. Stunting, a common health impact caused by inadequate nutrition and more specifically a low height to weight ratio, has long term impacts and poses a serious risk to Inuit in the context of food insecurity. Diminished cognitive development as well as poor or slow physical development are both concluded to be direct results of stunting (Weise, 2014). Other health issues such as anemia and general iron deficiencies were found, indicating that children were not able to get adequate nutrition from their current diets. In addition to stunting, Inuit are facing other health impacts that are arising due to food insecurity. For example, due to the high costs of grocery store foods, when Inuit face food insecurity and are forced to seek alternatives to traditional foods, Inuit have access to unhealthy processed foods (De Meulemeester, 2018). Due to this, adult Inuit are facing issues such as obesity and diabetes. Some studies are suggesting that as many as 35% of Inuit are suffering from obesity, while diabetes levels appear to be comparable to Canadians (Egeland, Cao, et al., 2011).

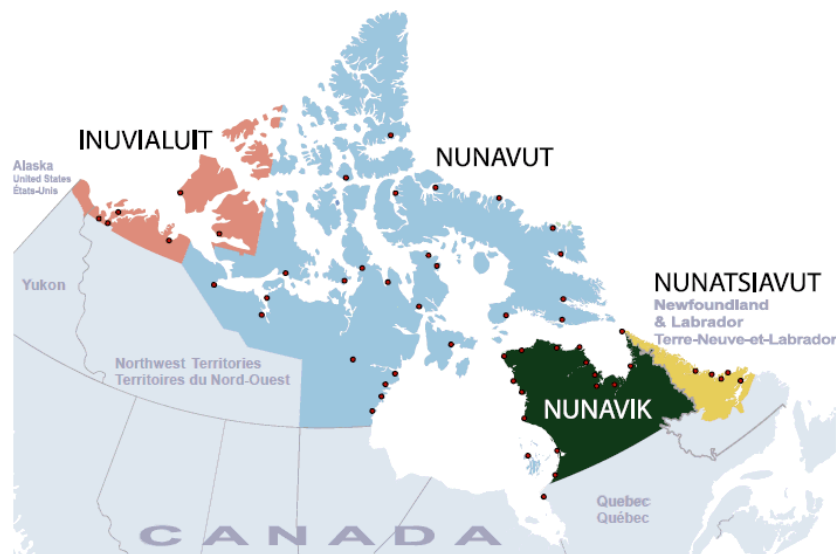


Not only are Inuit suffering greatly physically from the lack of access to food, but they are also facing serious mental health impacts from food insecurity. As I will continue to discuss, food is undoubtedly central to Inuit culture and identity. But, the Inuit relationship to food has to do with having adequate access to country food sources in order for them to constitute the majority of the Inuit diet. Due to the fact that country food sources are becoming less accessible and as a result, continue to make up less of the Inuit diet. Because of this, in a very literal sense, Inuit are watching their culture fade away despite tireless efforts to try to salvage it. The pressure to preserve Inuit traditions and continue to maintain a strong relationship with the land through country foods has been growing. Historically, Indigenous populations have some of the highest suicide rates in the world (Ansloos, 2018). Based on the factors listed, Inuit have been seeing declining mental health in recent years, meaning that Inuit now have some of the highest suicide rates in the world (Affleck et al., 2020; Young et al., 2015). In Nunangat, suicide rates are highest for Inuit men where cases of suicide are over **fourty times** the Canadian average (Affleck et al., 2020). Inuit narratives have reflected these trends. According to an Inuk journalist Ed Ou, who also does photography around Nunavut, *“trauma has been passed down from one generation to the next...Alcoholism is high, drug abuse is high, suicide rates are high. It’s a very traumatized place”* (Ou, 2014, para. 5). Utilizing Inuit conducted health studies, Affleck et al. (2020) confirmed that suicidal tendencies among Inuit tend to result from what Affleck (2020) describes as social suffering. Although social suffering may stem from a variety of things, conditions previously discussed such as stunting from inadequate food, the inability to hunt, lack of access to country foods, inability to share food, and a disconnect from cultural identity could all be contributing factors. These health outcomes seem to indicate that inadequate access to food, as well as the inability for Inuit to participate in core Inuit traditions such as food sharing

all have significant health impacts among Inuit. These findings continue to emphasize the importance of country food access for Inuit. They also emphasize how the impacts of colonialism are continuing to have compounding negative effects for Inuit. Not only this, but they also create tension between addressing the food insecurity crisis as fast as possible and whether this would require non-Inuit interventions.

### **Inuit Homelands and Foodways**

Inuit have been co-existing with lands in the Arctic region for over 5,000 years. Originally, Inuit territory spanned over what we know today as the Easternmost point of Asia in the Chukchi Peninsula, all the way across Alaska, Northern Canada and parts of Greenland (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2004). Today, Inuit living in Canada represent a relatively large portion of the Indigenous populations in Canada.



*Figure 2: Inuit Nunangat Territory with all four regions identified (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2015)*

In Canada, Inuit live in the Nunangat territory. “Nunangat” is said to roughly translate to ‘the place where Inuit live’ in Inuktitut, the native Inuit language, with ‘nuna’ also said to translate to ‘a shared place’ with an emphasis placed on the partnership between Inuit and the land and animals (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, 2009; Sansoulet et al., 2020). Across Nunangat, there are a total of 53 communities which are split into four major regions: Inuvialuit, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut, and Nunavut (*Figure 2*). Through thousands of years of coexistence with northern climates, Inuit have developed a kinship relationship with the land. This sustainable relationship has been built on a foundation of respect for the resources that Inuit rely on to survive, with a connection specifically to the ocean for hunting traditional food sources such as fish, whales and seals among other uses (Sarmiento, 2019). These same values have been preserved and passed down over many generations as Inuit continue to live self-sufficiently throughout the Arctic region. In recent years, Inuit have been watching their homeland change beneath their feet due to the impacts of climate change (*figure 3*)



*Figure 3: Inuk child jumping over melted ice gaps (Baraniuk, 2021)*

These changes have led to a drastic increase in food insecurity among Inuit. There are a variety of circumstances which have led up to these drastic numbers, which I will continue to elaborate on later in the paper. The impacts of climate change, prevalence of conditions stemming from colonization and lack of accurate Inuit representation across media, academia, and policy among

other channels, are all major factors which have played a major role in the rise of food insecurity for Inuit in recent years. In this paper, I argue that many of the root causes of these contributing factors can be linked back to colonization and the actions and attitudes of white settlers, both in the past as well as currently. This being said, a lack of general attention to the issue has allowed the impacts of it to grow rapidly. Inuit populations are growing while at the same time Inuit are losing their traditional landscape due to rising temperatures caused by climate change, which has both increased the levels of poverty and reduced the access to traditional food sources - a key component of Inuit culture (Egeland et al., 2009). This has created an overwhelming demand for food, while the environment around Inuit is becoming depleted of the traditional resources that Inuit rely on (Oceans North, 2022).

### Country foods

In order to investigate the issue of food insecurity that Inuit in Nunangat are facing, it is important to consider the question of, what foods are Inuit in need of that they cannot access? This question is largely referencing the Inuit desire to consume traditional, self or community caught foods over processed grocery store foods (Borré, 1991; McElroy, 2006; Parker, 2016; Sansoulet et al., 2020).

Country foods, the traditional foods of Inuit as well as the ability to be self-sustaining in their environment are core values associated with Inuit identity (Parker, 2016; Robinson, 2018). Therefore, Inuit must be able to catch their own food from their own natural resources for their culture to survive. In the Arctic landscape of Nunangat, this means eating Arctic char, seal, whale, polar bear and caribou (Sarmiento, 2019) (Figures 4-7).



*Figure 4: Arctic Char drying after being caught (angusandersen900, 2019)*

*Figure 5: Mattaq (Frozen Narwhal blubber) being prepared  
(Kayuulanova, 2021)*



*Figure 6: Seal meat caught during the summer being hung dry before storage (Boyчук, 2020)*

*Figure 7: Cooked polar bear meat (\_\_goose\_72, 2020)*



Access to country foods represent a major issue that must be addressed when considering efforts to reduce food insecurity among Inuit (Furgal & Seguin, 2006; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2021; Parker, 2016). Not only must country foods be considered, they *must* be at the forefront of any efforts made to reduce food insecurity among Inuit. The majority of Inuit prefer country food, and the consumption of country food and food practices surrounding these traditional foods serve as a defining factor of Inuit culture.

Although Inuit are beginning to rely more heavily on grocery store foods because they are not able to access country foods, among Inuit, it is strongly believed that food from the local grocery store is a poor substitute for country food, and does not carry the same health benefits as traditionally hunted Inuit food sources (Parker, 2016). Infact, it has been concluded in multiple studies that, “*the dietary composition of country food likely provides invaluable health benefits, as suggested by early observations of the heart-healthy Inuit diet* (p. 11)”, which has gone on to inspire research regarding the health benefits of fatty acids for non-Indigenous diets (Egeland et al., 2009). The incorporation of the Inuit diet into non-Indigenous dietary supplements should emphasize the true health benefits of country food, as confirmed by non-Indigenous nutritionists, scientists and medical experts alike. Inuit are well aware of these benefits, because they have been reliant on them for thousands of years. One Inuk elder stated their opinion on the lack of nutrition of grocery store foods by saying, “*white man's food makes you weak because it's white, like white bread, white noodles, white rice. Our food is dark red, like blood. It makes you strong. Our children grow better on our own food*” (McElroy, 2006, p. 165). Culturally, it is believed that those who are particularly vulnerable such as children and elders have a higher need for country foods and specifically wild meats, “*when the body is warm with seal blood, the soul is also protected from illness*” (Borré, 1991, p. 54). This trust in the health that country food can

provide is also key in regard to understanding how Inuit go about their daily lives. Due to the harsh reality of the Arctic climate, it is profoundly difficult to ensure that hunting during the winter seasons is possible. One Inuit reported that country food is key to finding the energy to survive outdoors during hunts, *“if I eat seal it is going to last a very long time. If I go around during winter time, I am not going to be cold faster, because there is blood in the seal meat. Before I go out I want to eat seal meat, because I am going to survive more, I will be warmer”* (Sansoulet et al., 2020, p. 5). Therefore, the trust that Inuit uphold with regard to their traditional foods is truly irreplaceable and invaluable. Based on these narratives, it is understandable that when elders or other members of the community are unable to hunt and there is not enough country food for the community to share, those individuals feel as if they are left to waste away with illness and ostracized from their community members (Borré, 1991). Traditionally caught country foods are strongly associated with being important to their physical, mental, and spiritual health.

In addition to providing the necessary nutrients and fats to help Inuit survive in the Arctic, animals that are taken for food also provide materials like furs and skins which can be used to make various items to sell for profit. This means that country food not only is beneficial to the health of Inuit as well as essential to Inuit identity, but also allows Inuit to maintain a circular economy and helps them stay financially and materially self-sufficient (Wenzel, 1987).

### Country Foods and Health

Although Inuit are clearly suffering from the impacts of food insecurity, many grocery store options accessible to Inuit are also damaging to Inuit health, and Inuit feel very strongly that grocery store food options are a poor substitution for country foods which are rich in nutrients and hold a lot of cultural value. This phenomena was explored by Egeland et al. (2011)

in a scientific study conducted by non-Indigenous scholars which published data from a biomonitoring study of Inuit who ate country foods and compared the health impacts to Inuit who ate mostly grocery store foods. The authors took blood samples from almost 2,000 Inuit across 33 communities and compared nutritional panels of Inuit who had either consumed traditional foods the day before, or not. Over half of the participants were from food insecure households and a little over half of the participants had consumed traditional foods the day prior to the testing. The study found a plethora of food-caused illnesses, including cases of obesity and anemia, directly related to the consumption of grocery store foods. In a related study by Seligman et al. (2010), researchers confirmed that food insecurity was directly linked with the development of diet sensitive chronic illnesses. In addition to being a key component of Inuit identity, country foods offer a multitude of health benefits for Inuit.

While using non-Indigenous research to confirm Inuit knowledge can be problematic, I think it is important to include in order to make the point that Inuit knowledge should not be underestimated, and that Inuit are experts on the relationship between themselves and the land they live with. If anything, these findings further emphasize the importance of prioritizing Inuit created community efforts to end food insecurity, with country foods being at the forefront of any food security initiatives.

### Food sharing

A crucial aspect of Inuit foodways and culture more broadly is the process of food sharing (Egeland et al., 2009). For Inuit, food sharing is more than an act, but instead an integral aspect of how they connect to country foods as well as how they share and celebrate Inuit culture on a daily basis. Not only do the vast majority (over 82%) of Inuit share their food, but it is a vital aspect of Inuit culture and Inuit identity (Egeland et al., 2009). Not only this, but food



sharing is a practice which emerged out of realistic practicality. This is because not all Inuit hunt, so it is natural for food to be distributed throughout the community to ensure that those who are not able to hunt, such as elders or young children, have ample access to country foods (Kishigami, 2004). Traditionally, food sharing occurs within the family, although as I will go on to explain, this network is expanding which is resulting in the overall amount available to each community member seeing a major decrease compared to previous decades as country foods continue to become more difficult to obtain (Organ et al., 2014). Food sharing occurs on multiple different scales and timepoints after animals are harvested (Kishigami, 2004). Hunters may share organs of large animals such as seals at the site of the hunt, as well as distribute furs and other non-edible animal parts, in celebration of the combined efforts required to hunt an animal. A significant aspect of food sharing includes sharing meals both with direct family members, as well as neighbors and friends. The act of food sharing creates a social atmosphere around food for Inuit with a strong emphasis on enjoying and celebrating the foods and resources available from their lands, as well as to celebrate their ongoing successful kinship with all aspects of their environment.

As Wenzel (1987) states in the title of their report of the Inuit economy, “we (Inuit) were once independent”. Food sharing and the preservation of Inuit culture are tightly bound to the concept of Inuit food sovereignty. Food sharing and the ability for Inuit to subsistence hunt for themselves also has historically promoted a circular economy within Inuit communities, resulting in Inuit not needing to partake in the Western market-style economic format (Wenzel, 1987). As quoted by Natan Obed, the president of Inuit run organization Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *“Inuit culture is rooted in a ‘circular economy,’ where our prosperity is dependent on our wise and equitable use of renewable resources. Our knowledge of a minimal-to-zero-waste life is part of*

*the living memory of our elders*” (Obed & Oceans North, 2021, p. 4). Preserving the transitional foodways which are central to Inuit culture as a whole requires Inuit to be able to successfully subsistence hunt and share food in addition to ancestral knowledge of these practices among their community through food sharing practices.

Such preservation is becoming increasingly difficult due to compounding environmental pressures, many of which I argue stem from a long history of colonialism during the creation and throughout the expansion of Canada. The continuous impacts resulting from colonization are having lasting effects specifically on Inuit foodways and the ability for Inuit to continue to participate in key cultural traditions related to food. Though the relationship between Inuit and what is now Canada are perhaps not as blatantly conflict ridden as in the past during the early 1900s, the actions during that time period have been harming Inuit communities and foodways continuously over time.

### **Settler Colonialism and Inuit Self-Determination**

In order to understand the current challenges Inuit are facing with food security, it is vital to highlight the past and ongoing Canadian settler colonization efforts which have ultimately led to the conditions such as occupation, resource expropriation, cultural appropriation as well as racism, which have created and continue to reinforce food insecurity conditions for Inuit today in Nunangat.

The relationship between Inuit and white settlers in what is not known as Canada has been long and tumultuous. Inuit living in Nunangat experienced a massive shift when Canada began to colonize throughout the 1800s (Anderson & Bonesteel, 2013; Wilcox, 2006). In 1976, the Indian Act tried to force Inuit assimilation into Euro-Canadian culture and set strict rules on Indigenous governance on reservations as well as land use (Parrott, 2006). In 1905, the North-

West Territories Amendment Act created the North-West Territories Council (NWT) named the North-West Territories, the Inuit homeland, the first official territories of Canada and sought to further manage the development of the area (*Figure 8*).



*Figure 8: Map depicting the North-West Territories discussed in the North-West Territories Act*  
(Wilcox, 2006)

However, the North-West Territories Act did not originally specifically include Inuit in the language, and therefore gave the NWT no real way for Canada to formally manage or dictate Inuit affairs like they desired (Anderson & Bonesteel, 2013). By 1924, Canada had not formally decided where Inuit stood in relation to Canada's government (Dunning, 2016). They amended the Indian Act in 1924, which ultimately categorized Inuit and other Indigenous groups as Canadian citizens, creating a distinct hierarchy between white Canadian settlers by stating white superiority over Inuit. Understanding the concept and severity of cultural appropriation and white superiority which Canada has unkempt through its history is relevant when considering the hesitancy among Inuit to rely on the Canadian government for food aid. This tumultuous relationship has been forming since Canada began establishing and colonizing when settlers and Inuit first began to interact.

## Fur Trade

Until the mid 1930s, Inuit had a strong economic relationship with Europeans through their supply of fur into the European fur market. As we are seeing today, the decline in country foods also is tightly linked to the Inuit economy. Infact, the fur trade with Inuit was said to be a significant push for European colonization to Canada as the bounty of resources was very appealing to Europeans trying to profit from the fur trade (Royal Canadian Geographical Society et al., 2018). However, Inuit relations with Europeans quickly began to decline as settlers began taking advantage of Inuit pelt sellers to rob more pelts from Inuit hunters for little to no money. Inuit hunters were largely uneducated about the value of European items which were being offered by settlers in exchange for pelts, leaving them vulnerable to be scammed when trading with Europeans (Condon, 1994). Throughout the settler attempts at colonization in Canada, Inuit began to realize that white settler culture did not support or share the same food values as Inuit. During the time of the decline in the relationship between Inuit hunters and white settlers, Inuit began sheltering their foodways due to the racism and settler desire to convert Inuit to settler cultural beliefs such as Christianity, *“When Christianity was adopted in the early 20th century, Inuit came to be more discreet about these traditional beliefs”* (Sansoulet et al., 2020, p. 6). Missionary settlements throughout the mid 1900s also forced Inuit relocation, disrupting their ability to hunt, forcing Inuit into wage based labor for the first time and uprooting them from their territories (Organ et al., 2014). It was actions such as these examples which further ostracized Inuit from settler Canadian society and introduced a sense of distrust between the two.

## The Appropriation of Inuit Culture

After years of disrespect towards Inuit culture by white settlers, trends of racism have always laced the public interpretation of Inuit culture. One example is the continued use of the

term 'Eskimo' to reference Inuit people. This term was widely used until fairly recently, when it was recognized to be offensive. The term 'Eskimo' has long been associated with Inuit, but calling Inuit 'Eskimos' is not the only case of cultural stereotypes manifesting themselves through offensive nicknames that has been seen throughout history (Kaplan, n.d.). This concept in itself is very true to the patronizing and dehumanizing ways of settler colonization on a broad scale. It is estimated that 'Eskimo' could have emerged long before white settlers, however, Inuit translators have said that the settler explanation of 'Eskimo' translating to 'raw meat eaters' makes the term especially offensive. This is because that translation likely is not correct and the fetishization of Inuit food systems through the use of this definition shows a poor attempt to respect Indigenous cultures (Alaska Native Language Center, n.d.; Nunatsiaq News, 2013). It is important to note that the translation of 'Eskimo' is used to racialize Inuit, but is firmly rooted within their food practices. Not only was the term 'Eskimo' an example of white dominance throughout colonization. However, its continued use for years shows how Inuit and other Indigenous groups globally have failed to be respected and accurately represented. One study published in 2018 suggests that this is particularly apparent when evaluating both historical movies and modern pop culture representations of Inuit in music videos (Glennie, 2018). The study highlights how the public is thought to be educated about 'the other' through these forms of media, while in reality, they are completely incorrect representations of Inuit which have caused misinformation to be spread and enforced stereotypes in regards to attributes such as physical appearance, clothing and foodways. The authors suggest that as a result, non-Inuit interpretations of Inuit culture create stereotypes which serve as a master narrative, a concept where the group in power creates a narrative of how a concept is accepted by society (Syed et al., 2017; Glennie, 2018).

An important point to note is that the stereotypes depicted in the media of Inuit are completely out of the control of Inuit, because they are never given the opportunity to give input on how to properly represent themselves and their culture in the media created by non-Inuit people. The analysis of music videos and movies shows how video media has the unfortunate potential to reinforce colonization-like stereotypes of Indigenous populations. However, there are cases where Inuit are able to redefine Inuit culture online.

### **Food Accessibility in Nunangat**

From this history of cultural appropriation of Inuit and Inuit culture, it is plainly visible that past and present settler colonialism have greatly impacted not only the perception of Inuit and Inuit culture, but it has also had lasting impacts which continue to perpetuate the current food insecurity crisis which Inuit face today in Nunangat. Now, I will move into a conversation regarding a few major conditions which directly associate with white settler actions in Canada and colonialism more broadly. Although food security encompasses many different factors and can be caused by any combination of conditions, I have pinpointed three major conditions which are significantly contributing to the food insecurity crisis for Inuit in Nunangat. Changes to Inuit hunting practices, grocery store prices and changes in food storage and distribution all appear to be exacerbating the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in different ways. However, a common link between them appears to be the underlying origins tied to colonialism.

#### **Changes to Inuit Hunting Practices**

A major dilemma that Inuit hunters have encountered is the increasing pressure to hunt in a shorter amount of time and be more successful to secure resources (Robinson, 2018). This pressure is largely due to climate change changing the Arctic landscape, which has caused many

hunting regions to no longer be accessible or safe. Animal migrations are also being impacted by climate change, which is changing the length and duration of hunting seasons. Inuit hunters rely heavily on the use of ice shelves over frozen bodies of water to hunt for many country foods. With warming temperatures, Inuit hunters are finding it difficult, dangerous or impossible to hunt successfully. This has been putting pressure on the need to expand hunting resources. The core of Inuit food practices involves working with the materials that the land, sea and ice provide, and the utilization of water has always been central to Inuit hunting techniques. Nunangat spans around 16,000 square kilometers, but Inuit territory extends an additional 49,000 square kilometers due to the significance of water for Inuit subsistence hunting (Oceans North, 2022). During the months of summer and early fall when the earth is thawed and days are longer, Inuit hunt Caribou typically by “umiak” which are traditional handmade boats (Kuhnlein & Humphries, n.d.). In the winter, Inuit venture onto the thick ice to drop nets into the water to catch fish and launch boats into the water to hunt for larger sea mammals like whales and seals. With the impacts of climate change, Inuit hunter knowledge regarding the months that it is safe to venture onto ice shelves to throw nets or hunt are becoming unreliable. As a result, and in an attempt to sustain country food resources, many Inuit hunters are introducing different technologies to help make hunting season more efficient and safer. It is important to note that these changes are deeply linked to colonialism due to the fact that the anthropogenic causes which are significantly contributing to climate change are not due to the actions of Inuit or other Indigenous groups, but rather the result of industrialization throughout the expansion of nations which were also formed through colonization for hundreds of years (Funes, 2022; Martinez & Irfan, 2021).

Given the tumultuous nature of the ice sheets in Nunangat due to climate change, Inuit hunting ways have been forced to adapt over time. The use of snowmobiles, rather than traditional dog sled teams, along with increase in accessibility to scopes and other tools has allowed Inuit to hunt to a capacity which has never been possible before. This is beneficial, due to the change in animal migration patterns as well as the shortened hunting seasons due to unstable ice shelves. However, clearly these new measures are proving not to be sufficient enough to supply Inuit with adequate access to country foods, as food insecurity and inadequate access to country foods are both significant conditions which continue to impact Inuit communities. However these changes are allowing Inuit to continue to access country foods in a changing landscape, but such changes come at a cost. Inuit hold the value of a circular economy within their communities close to their hearts and as a priority in their foodways. In the past, when Inuit would rely on dog teams to transport them to their hunts, their hunting process would be completely fueled by the animals they were hunting and therefore left a limited trace on their environment (Sansoulet et al., 2020). The dog teams were fed by the seals that were hunted, the hunters would be dressed in the skins from previous hunts and the shelters would be Igloos made with little environmental destruction and only using the materials available. However, due to the increased reliance on technology, there also has been an increased reliance on non-sustainable resources such as fuel and other monetary needs in recent decades (Wenzel, 1987). As a result, the hunting process as a whole requires more supplies, more reliance on grocery store foods due to the inconsistent nature of hunting as a result of climate change, as well as an increased monetary cost to hunters to go out and hunt. Many of them then distribute their hunt to the community without any monetary gain. As a result, even though technologies exist which make it possible or at least easier to hunt given the changing conditions, the costs associated with these



new approaches to hunting, including the costs associated with the maintenance of equipment, often are a barrier or even act as a deterrent, creating further barriers to accessing country foods (Hoover et al., 2016).

### Grocery store prices

With the Arctic landscape undergoing drastic changes every day and country foods becoming less accessible, Inuit have been forced to enter the capitalistic workforce at numbers higher than ever recorded to be able to afford the replacements for traditional food sources as well as other products made from hunting (Sansoulet et al., 2020). This has resulted in major changes for how Inuit culture is represented in Nunangat. Traditional fur coats and accessories are being replaced with more expensive, lesser quality store bought alternatives due to an overall lack of access to hunted food sources. Although Inuit would prefer to rely completely on country foods as they once were, they are being forced to rely on grocery store options more than usual due to a variety of factors, including declining wildlife populations and shrinking hunting seasons related to climate change (Ford, 2009; Hilleary, n.d.; Parker, 2016).

Traditionally, Inuit share food among community members who do not hunt. The inclusion of technologies bring on added costs which can be assumed to have decreased food sharing among community members and overall food access. Additionally, without country foods readily available, Inuit have been working nine to five jobs to try to afford the costs of groceries (Canadian Research Data Centre Network, 2017) (Figure 9). In Nunangat, grocery stores fly in products because of the remote location. Supplementary to this fact, it is important to note that Inuit face disproportionate rates of poverty compared to non-Indigenous populations in Canada. This further perpetuates the food access barrier for many Inuit. As a result, the process of flying in resources to grocery stores comes at a steep monetary cost to Inuit, further

increasing the rates of food insecurity among Inuit communities, almost half of which live below the poverty line (Canadian Research Data Centre Network, 2017).

Although it is a barrier for many Inuit, this reality is not only shared among Inuit, however, it is an experience faced by many Indigenous communities around the world indicating a larger trend of the exploitation of Indigenous populations by white economies. Cecily (2017) discusses one individual's experience in a grocery store on the Crow Creek reservation in South Dakota, where the meat available to the community is old and not edible, however, transportation to better options often is not feasible. Common findings such as these identify that, for Inuit, when traditional foods are not available due to conditions such as unsuccessful or limited hunting seasons, the only alternatives available may actually be directly harmful to the health of Inuit. This is not only because of poor food quality and limited access to food due to the monetary costs associated with grocery stores in Nunangat, but also because the cheapest foods in the grocery store tend to be the least healthy options and white run grocery stores have no intention of lowering prices and decreasing their profits to aid Inuit food security efforts.

Item	Size	Nunavut Average (CAD\$)	Canada Average (CAD\$)
Milk, 2%	1L	3.16	2.34
Butter, Salted	454g	7.20	4.59
Eggs	Dozen, Large	3.94	3.34
Frozen French Fries	650g-1kg	6.66	2.66
Evaporated Milk	385ml	3.33	1.88
Instant Coffee	200g	12.30	6.52
Tea Bags	72x227g	8.22	4.47
Soda Crackers	450g	7.09	2.80
Canned Baked Beans	398ml	4.30	1.30
Canned Tomatoes	796ml	5.29	1.62
Macaroni	500g	4.39	1.57
Cooking Oil	942ml-1L	9.17	4.18
Flour, All Purpose White	2.5kg	13.58	5.03
Sugar, White	2kg	8.72	2.81
Orange Juice	1L	5.57	2.07
Tomato Juice	1.36L	9.16	2.48
White Bread	675g	5.01	2.81
Bananas	per kg	4.61	1.73
Oranges	per kg	7.94	3.28
Carrots	per kg	6.17	1.98
Celery	per kg	9.26	2.57
Onions	per kg	4.12	1.68
Potatoes	4.54kg	12.15	5.56
Sirloin Steak	per kg	32.06	21.86
Stewing Beef	per kg	29.17	15.99
Whole Chicken	per kg	10.36	7.42
Sliced Bacon	500g	12.13	6.75

*Figure 9: A comparison of the cost of a variety of groceries in Nunavut (a territory within Nunangat) and Canada (Hoover et al., 2016)*

#### Food Storage and Distribution:

When considering challenges presented to Inuit in regards to food security, it is important to emphasize that not all Inuit hunt (Organ et al., 2014). Parker (2016), a masters scholar within the University of Guelph in Canada, utilized sociological methods such as participant observation and interviews in order to gain an inside perspective of the Inuit relationship to food. According to this research, the hunting role is usually assigned to the male head of the household. Rather than having every family member hunting, one or a select few family members will hunt on behalf of their family and distribute the food afterwards. However, a major barrier to this system is the assumption that those who are not hunting will have adequate freezer space to receive enough country food in the summer to sustain them throughout the winter. As stated in this research, “*food storage is an important pillar of Inuit food security* (p. 64)”. To have adequate country food access, Inuit must be able to store their catch for months at a time because hunting has distinct seasonal periods and most forms of country food are available year round. The increased levels of poverty experienced by Inuit, as well as the rise in the cost of

importation to Nunangat and the limited hunting seasons due to climate change, freezer space is oftentimes not adequate in many households. This is both a barrier for non-hunting family members because they are not able to receive enough food during hunting season, as well as hunters who may end up with too much food with no place to distribute it to. Luckily, as I will come to discuss shortly, community freezer programs offer a supportive role to help lift this barrier to accessing country foods and adapt to the pressures leading to food insecurity. Although food storage may seem like a surface level issue, the need to increase the length of time which country foods are stored can be linked back to anthropogenic climate change. Furthermore, the limitation of Inuit to physically find the time to hunt due to an increased reliance on a market style economy with nine to five jobs as well as increasing economic pressures associated with increasing food insecurity in general are all contributing factors which are directly linked to colonization.

### **Climate Change in Nunangat**

Although food security and insecurity can be caused by many factors, it is worth highlighting that food insecurity has been noted to be more prevalent and severe in locations where there are food systems that are sensitive to climate change (Ford, 2009; Lugo-Morin, 2020). This leaves Inuit naturally vulnerable to facing food insecurity, due to their geographic location in the Arctic and reliance on their environment for resources. While climate change is a global issue, it is clear that its impacts vary greatly on a local level, and that Arctic communities are especially vulnerable to the negative effects. Furthermore, climate change is not caused by Indigenous populations but rather industrialization by colonized countries (Funes, 2022; Martinez & Irfan, 2021).

Due to their geographic environment, Inuit never have relied on crop growth or consumption (Boychuk, 2020). Although this is the way Inuit have always lived and is how Inuit prefer to eat, climate change has meant that relying solely on animal sources of food adds an increased level of variability to the food available to Inuit. Inuit food access relies heavily on local knowledge of animal behavior, which can be altered greatly by environmental changes and is proving to be more of a problem as the impacts of climate change continue to severely impact the Arctic landscape.

The deterioration of ice coverage has had catastrophic effects on the ability for Inuit hunters to successfully hunt during the winter months. Due to the changes in ice coverage, Inuit hunters have been finding it increasingly difficult to determine when it is safe to travel on ice to hunt. This has resulted in Inuit having to make life or death decisions based on their overall need for food, which could potentially result in hunters falling into the frigid Arctic waters (National Snow and Ice Data Center, 2020). Inuit are noticing that there has been a significant decrease in how long stable ice coverage is present. Rather than having eight months of ice coverage, the new normal has become only three or four months of ice coverage per year. This decrease in ice coverage means that traditional hunting seasons are shortened, making winter marine hunting seasons shorter and shorter. The winter conditions in the Arctic mean that hunting may not always be possible when planned and shortened hunting seasons means that food may become scarce due to the decrease in hunting time.

#### Climate Change: Analysis on its impact on Inuit

With such drastic changes completely uprooting the entirety of Inuit ancestral hunting knowledge, and as a result, Inuit culture, it is shocking that these issues are not more broadly acknowledged in media sources, academia or by non-Indigenous aid efforts. I have since realized

that Inuit have largely been ignored by non-Indigenous media and even academic publications which focus on themes such as the Arctic and climate change. A major theme that identifies this trend is in the advertisement and education surrounding climate change on a global scale have been through the circulation of dramatic Arctic photography. Much like when Smith (2020) states “the Arctic acts as a barometer for the pace of climate change” (p. 158). Media representations of climate change that highlight to the world that changes to the Arctic should be a point of realization which identifies that climate change is severely damaging our planet. Inuit have been completely ignored and disregarded by excluding their struggles when discussing this issue. Rather than using the loss of Inuit culture, the media has chosen to focus on the polar bears because they will (ironically) likely get a more sympathetic response. Portraying images of starving polar bears and dramatic videos of melting glaciers have been the face of climate change, because watching the Arctic disappear is the most dramatic way to portray the global crisis that we as humans are experiencing. Designed to surface human emotions associated with the loss of precious scenes of nature on our earth, it seems especially wrong that animals are being used to surface sympathy and emotions, when in reality Inuit are facing the same struggles. But, apparently the media recognizes that human suffering will not gain the same amount of sympathy as a helpless, starving animal. Although it is important to note how the impacts of climate change are affecting the environment on a broader scale, and how climate change touches all levels of the food chain, I find it completely unbelievable, yet very in line with the white-centric settler thinking, that the human narrative has been completely left out of this approach because Indigenous suffering doesn’t elicit the same level of empathy as a polar bear.

### Polar bears: a case study

Polar bears have long been associated with the image of climate change to the global public through the media representations of starving polar bears who are rapidly losing their icy habitats (Ou, 2014) (*Figure 9*). However, what is not advertised to the public is that polar bears and Inuit share much of the same environment in both Northern Canada and Alaska and have co-existed on these lands for thousands of years by sharing the same food sources (Polar bears International, n.d.). While polar bears have received massive public attention due to their struggles with food insecurity, specifically through the use of dramatic photography, Inuit have largely been ignored in the media (*Figure 10*). Knowing that polar bears and Inuit are facing the same food accessibility issues should only draw attention to the Inuit struggles, rather than ignore them. This is just one example of how Inuit have been forgotten and had their struggles ignored by the lasting settler mindset and remnants of colonialism.



*Figure 10: A starving polar bear photographed by a conservation group (CBC Radio, 2017)*

As stated by Vaudry (2016), “*melting ice reduces access to food*” (p. 147). If polar bears are struggling so much and their struggles are gaining massive sympathetic media attention, how is it that their Inuit neighbors are struggling alone? The starvation of polar bears in the Arctic is not the only example of the changing landscape. The decrease in resources across the Arctic has affected every species, as the Arctic ecosystem is closely intertwined (Furgal & Seguin, 2006).

When looking at the factors that are driving these massively damaging changes, the topic of climate change is a major driver. The warming temperatures have been thinning ice sheets, which is an important factor in the ability for predators to hunt for aquatic species like fish and seals.

This decrease in food source availability has not only had an impact on both polar bear populations and Inuit alike, but it has also had a direct impact on the relationship between Inuit and polar bears. The way that the relationship between Inuit and other Arctic predators such as polar bears is changing certainly is representative of the changes and challenges that Inuit face in everyday life. In recent years, Inuit have been pushed to increase the amount of polar bears they hunt for food. However, many Inuit have been quick to correct researchers that the threat of polar bears entering Inuit neighborhoods and stealing their food is not necessarily a bad quality which makes Inuit resent polar bears and want to eliminate them by hunting them. Instead, Inuit admire the adaptability of polar bears, as most of the time they are able to adapt to the loss of seal availability and find other sufficient food sources (Vaudry, 2016). Infact, one Inuit elder reflected on this growing relationship by saying, *“polar bears seem to be learning from Inuit too. We’re learning from them and they’re learning from us. For that, polar bears are incredible species...[They’re] just like community members, they know you, they will recognize you”* (Sansoulet et al., 2020, p.5). This comment is reflective of the deep understanding and respect that Inuit hold for their environment. Regardless of the fact that Inuit hunters have historically hunted polar bears, the overall consumption of them has been rising due to the shared loss of access to major food sources such as seals (Canadian Department of Environment, n.d.; Dowsley, 2007; Vaudry, 2016). Although climate change is certainly a contributor to the food



insecurity crisis, the loss of ice coverage and changes to animal habits are just a portion of the struggles which are contributing to the rising cases of food insecurity among Inuit.

#### Current Inuit relations with settler governments: ICC Alaska

Although there exists a complicated relationship between Inuit and white settlers, there have been several attempts to reach a mutual agreement which have proven unsuccessful and perhaps even further damaged the relationship between Inuit and settlers. For example, Alaskan Inuit and the U.S. government have had a tumultuous relationship much like Nunangat Inuit and Canada. With issues involving hunting restrictions put on Inuit by the U.S. government and Inuit having their political voice restricted causing an inability for Inuit to voice their concerns, Alaskan Inuit have been feeling the pressures of food insecurity much like Nunangat Inuit. As a result, Alaskan Inuit have formed the Inuit Circumpolar Council-Alaska (ICC-Alaska) which provides Inuit a platform to collectively identify and promote Inuit interests. The ICC-Alaska released a white paper declaration with regard to their contention with the U.S. government and food insecurity (ICC Alaska, 2016). In this call to action, Alaskan Inuit voiced their concerns following hunting restrictions on native lands and how such restrictions were amplifying food insecurity for Inuit across Alaska. Inuit provide a call to action to the U.S. government, calling for the current hunting and fishing regulations to be lessened, better managed and to include more Inuit voices when decisions regarding Inuit lands are at stake. Furthermore, Alaskan Inuit are requesting a continuous discussion regarding how their land is managed and protected which would involve more Inuit voices and respect for Inuit ideas.

### Current Inuit relations with settler governments: Nutrition North Canada

In comparison, however, Inuit living in Nunangat have been unable to successfully communicate with the Canadian government in a similar fashion. Infact, when concerns are brought up regarding food insecurity for Inuit in Nunangat, the Canadian government seems to have their own, one size fits all approach to the issue which has no Inuit insight and is not flexible to the needs of Inuit community. One example of this, which I will now introduce, is Nutrition North Canada, a food insecurity intervention proposed by the Canadian government to combat Inuit food insecurity.

Despite a contentious relationship between Canada and Inuit which spans back to the time of colonialism, there have been some efforts made by the Canadian government which attempts to aid the blatant struggles Inuit are facing. However, these steps appear to simply be acts of sympathy for show, rather than efforts to genuinely aid Inuit and increase food security for Inuit. Nutrition North Canada (NNC) is just one example of this. NNC is a subsidy program run by the Canadian government which aims to reduce the cost of food “more affordable and accessible in northern communities” (Canada, 2014). It does this by mainly supplying subsidies to the freight companies, so that the costs of transportation to remote areas does not become overbearingly high compared to the worth of the items being shipped. There are a total of 122 locations where groceries are subsidized across Canada and Nunangat (*Figure 9*). Although it seems like a well intended gesture, I believe that Canada could greatly reduce the burden of the cost of food if they felt as though they were responsible to do so.



*Figure 11: A map of all stores subject to Nutrition North Canada subsidies (Canada, 2014)*

These subsidies help reduce the cost of freight into Nunangat. However, the Inuit consumers are still seeing grocery store pricing that is over three times as expensive as grocery stores outside of Nunangat because the subsidies do not cover the entire freight cost (Hoover et al., 2016) (*Figure 11*). This compounding problem is especially problematic when Inuit would prefer country foods over any grocery store alternatives available. Additionally, Northmart, the only grocery store currently operating in Inuit communities, has a complete monopoly on the grocery market for Inuit. Because of this, they can set their own prices meaning that even if freight costs were to be significantly reduced by Canadian aid efforts, the price of groceries would not necessarily decrease for Inuit (Wendimu et al., 2018). Inuit state that there is a clear disconnect between Inuit and the Canadian government, because Canada is not able to sympathize with the struggles that Inuit face (Murray, 2018). This trend seems to highlight the fact that Canada generally refuses to acknowledge the impacts of their actions during the colonization and expansion of the country, and the lasting impacts this process has had for Inuit communities. Although it is not particularly surprising that white settlers are not keen to admit that their actions against

Indigenous communities are wrong, Canada's attempt to lessen the food insecurity burden for Inuit is particularly shocking given the lack of impact it is truly having for Inuit.

It is clear that Inuit face unreasonable food costs, especially when country foods do not function in the same capitalist market way by comparison. It is also not difficult to see how ineffective the NNC program has been for Inuit due to the fact that its contributions have only covered a small portion of the cost of groceries, resulting in the cost of groceries remaining unsustainably high. Many Inuit living in Nunangat have expressed serious frustrations with the costs of living and specifically groceries. For example, one TikTok user created a duet to a video discussing the costs of groceries at Erewhon, one of the most prestigious grocery stores in the country. Erewhon is well known for being an elite grocery store in Los Angeles, California, where you can find super rich individuals and celebrities alike shopping the insane collection of niche superfoods like blue almond milk and imported fruits. In response to the original video showing the outrageously expensive food options and claiming that it is the most expensive grocery store that the original poster had ever heard of, Colleen M (@iniquanaq) who I will formally introduce later in the paper, ironically compared grocery prices from her local grocery store, Northmart. The video compares prices of average grocery items between Northmart and Erewhon as well as the general shopping experience at both stores (@iniquanaq, 2021). While Erewhon boasts a luxurious shopping experience with features such as free valet parking, niche items like blue almond milk, aesthetically pleasing mason jars of granola and unique vegan offerings, this is not the experience at Northmart according to @iniquanaq. Northmart offers unplowed parking lots, thirty dollar fruits, a stench in the store so foul that it made the local news, thirty five dollar gallons of Sunny D, eighty four dollar packs of bottled water, and non-perishable staples such as soup for almost five dollars a can. In the comments of the video posted

by @iniquanaq, users who also shop at Northmart highlight that the local slogan for the store is ‘ripping people off since 1994’ while users who have never been to Northmart are commenting their true disbelief by stating things like ‘I can’t imagine the stress’ and ‘are they serious, no food should cost this much’ (@iniquanaq, 2021). Northmart has a monopoly in @iniquanaq’s community, forcing her among many other Inuit to face the unfairly high price points in order to get by given the recent struggles to access country foods.

Seeing content like @iniquanaq’s post online highlights how programs such as NNC clearly are not providing the relief that Inuit communities require to survive. As a result, many Inuit are reaching for the cheapest options at the store, which certainly are not fresh meats and produce. Many of the drivers of food security, as I have discussed above, are unrelated to the actions of Inuit, but have happened at the hands of settlers in the past and non-Indigenous polluters. This dynamic introduces an additional sense of frustration towards the reality of Inuit struggling with unrealistically high grocery prices, when so much has been taken from them throughout history already by settlers. Much like many Inuit have stated in media reports, the Canadian efforts to lower the burden of food costs for Inuit seem to be a public flash of sympathy, rather than a legitimate effort towards lessening the food insecurity burden (CBC News, 2017; Murray, 2018). Inuit have largely given up on finding a meaningful relationship with Canada for aid, and stand by the fact that “[*The Canadian*] Federal Government has not taken this issue seriously” (Murray, 2018, para.17). In fact, this discordance can be sensed based on how Nutrition North has responded to Inuit removing themselves from the Nutrition North program by removing representatives from the program. In response, NNC representatives stated, “*well, if you guys don't want to be at the table, it's going to move forward anyhow*” (Murray, 2018, para.14). There is continued conflict and disagreement between Canada and

Inuit. Even when Inuit are hopeful that the Canadian government can be of aid to Inuit, it appears that both are unwilling to listen to the other side and reach an agreement. This may be indicative of the remaining strife and Inuit suffering which has resulted from the process of colonialism. Despite these conflicts, Inuit are determined to take meaningful steps towards increased food security. One method of doing this which I have examined is self-representation, specifically through the publication of social media videos showcasing Inuit culture and foodways.

### **TikTok Analysis**

In order to investigate how Inuit are taking steps themselves to self-advocate and increase food security, I looked at Inuit produced media posts. I choose to evaluate video media created and published by Inuit throughout my research in order to gain a better understanding of Inuit culture, attitudes towards food and food sharing systems. This was largely due to the fact that I could not travel to Nunangat myself, and there was too much distrust regarding non-Inuit representing Inuit in the media to find Inuit who wanted to discuss these issues with me in interviews. But, I also wanted to know the extent to which Inuit were attempting to define their culture to the rest of the world. As a result, I decided to utilize TikTok content from a variety of Inuit users to learn as much as possible about these questions. Although I watched and evaluated countless TikToks, their comments and the users who posted the videos, I have decided to share just two TikTok posts in this paper to demonstrate some of the themes surrounding food systems that I have discovered in my analyses. TikTok is the perfect social media platform to share intimate cultural experiences and details. This is because TikTok allows for videos up to three minutes long. Although TikTok content can be edited, it cannot be edited as in depth as other platforms such as YouTube, and all of the content has to be edited on a phone, further deterring editing. I was generally surprised to find that Inuit held a strong presence on TikTok.

The first video I chose to analyze was created by an Inuit user who goes by the username @polarstorm1992. I found his approach to TikTok very helpful in my understanding of Inuit cultural practices. In the video I chose to analyze, which was posted in December of 2021, there are a few aspects about the video which are particularly interesting to note. Firstly, before even starting the video, the hashtags used are interesting. Although most of them are related to Inuit such as #inuittiktok, #inuit, #caribou, #beluga, #frozen, and #meat, not all of them are (@polarstorm1992, 2021). I find these hashtags interesting because Caribou and Beluga meat are main staples of the traditional Inuit diet, therefore it would seem that this video would be targeted towards an Inuit audience who may be searching for content related to those foods. However, the other hashtags indicate the opposite and a general desire for his videos to reach a non-Inuit audience. For example, the other hashtags listed in the caption of the video include #spotifywrapped and #viral as well as four different variations which mention the ‘for you’ page on TikTok, indicating a strong desire for this content to show up on non-Inuit TikTok feeds. Spotify wrapped was trending during the month of December on the platform, and even though the video did not include content related to that event, users would have had a higher chance of seeing this video due to the use of that hashtag. This trend of trying to reach an audience beyond Inuit is carried on throughout the video.



Figure 12: Screenshots from @polarstorm1992's TikTok

Generally, it seems as though this video, along with other videos on this user's page, seem to be educational in motivation. This TikTok is only 45 seconds long, yet shows a typical family meal including where it is eaten, what is eaten and who is eating. The video starts off by the user briefly acknowledging his young son and wife as well as his cousin who are sitting with him on the floor in front of a piece of cardboard that is acting as a table (Figure 12). Then, he narrates as he introduces each food sitting out during the meal including “*Caribou fat, Caribou meat (wrapped in Caribou stomach), fresh Arctic Char, and applewood smoked ‘Eskimo Sausage’*” (@polarstorm1992, 2021). From this short video, it is clear that family is a large part of meals and foodways more broadly in Inuit culture. It is also clear that the relationship to food seems to be very casual, as people are cutting their own pieces off of the animals on the table as they please and continue to eat as the video is being filmed, ignoring the camera completely. It is important to note the fact that this user has reclaimed the term ‘Eskimo’ on their own terms when describing one of the foods - a trend that has been utilized among oppressed communities around the world throughout history. Based on this user's content more broadly, I think that this user in particular takes a lot of pride in his meals, because he is able to hunt for the food that his family



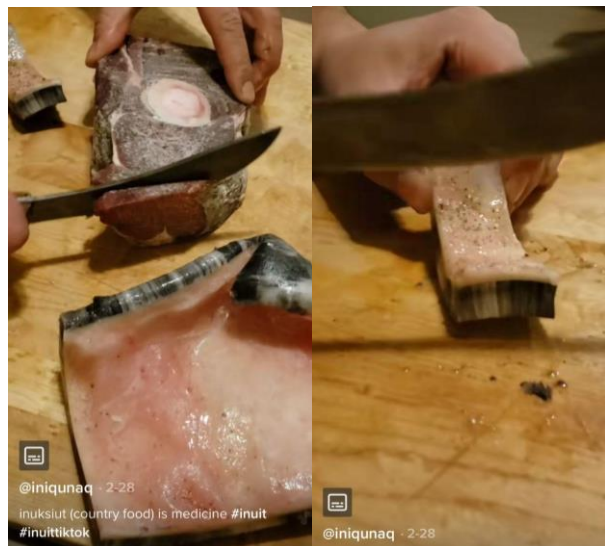
eats himself, which is established in other videos on his page (@polarstorm1992, 2021). Based on this one video, the ability to provide for his family a very diverse and satisfying meal is the central theme which this user wishes to share with his non-Inuit audience.

Although it is impossible to determine the motives completely without getting directly in contact with this user, which was not possible, there are a couple of indications which may suggest this. Firstly, although this user follows a lot of fellow Inuit, a large portion of the people that he follows are influencers or news outlets. Following accounts which give updates on specific situations such as the Ukrainian/Russian conflict along with other big news accounts and influencers who keep their fingers on the social pulse of the world suggests that this user may be trying to educate himself on issues that are not directly related to him through TikTok content. Therefore I think that it would be likely that his content would mirror these intentions. This idea is supported by the general content and nature of his videos. The fact that the user narrates the foods that his family is eating, but does not make any kind of attempt to make claims or comments about the foods. Instead, he just explains what they are in the natural setting that he is eating them in (@polarstorm1992, 2021). Interestingly not all of his videos are in English, but instead in Inuktitut, the native Inuit language. He does not always provide an English translation to his commentary. The majority of his 175,000 followers are not Inuit, and therefore would not be able to understand exactly what he is saying. Based on details like this, it seems as though he does not worry about explaining every aspect of his culture to anyone who may not understand, but rather just wants to show the day to day raw aspects of his life with a larger audience. I found this approach to be confusing at first glance, but ultimately it illuminated how the Inuit community is closely linked and showed a lot of inside details of the day to day practices of Inuit. For example, something I noticed in this video was how he and his family are eating off of

cardboard on the floor. I was wondering the reason for this, particularly in regard to whether this was to ensure everyone visiting can fit together. However, many Inuit in the comments chimed in to explain that this is actually just a practice that derives from practicality, because the meat is often frozen and requires a lot of force to break apart into servings. The comments which highlighted this were from other Inuit, which showed a unique aspect of community. Many non-Inuit users commented asking questions about details like this in the video, and it seemed that other Inuit were excited about the interest in their culture in the comments. Most of his videos get a high volume of commentary from both non-Inuit and Inuit users alike. For most of his videos, this user takes time to like the comments which are complimenting his cultural practices, and sometimes even responds to negative comments hating on his content. For example, users would comment sarcastically on a variety of details within the video with comments like “*no tables over there huh?*”, “*I’m good i’ll take a bowl of cereal*”. The user @polarstorm1992 responded to some comments trying to reason with these kinds of commentary, but it was surprising the amount of hate that the video got from users who simply did not understand Inuit culture.

Overall, I think that the use of hashtags as well as the fact that he promotes his other social media platforms such as YouTube on his page often and in the bio of his page suggest that there is an aspect of wanting to get famous using his content (@polarstorm1992, 2021). Whether the true intentions are to bring attention to modern Inuit cultural practices, create income through social media or just to be famous remains unclear. But, I think that through the use of TikTok and sharing his relationship with food does Inuit a service by creating awareness and an appreciation for their culture, potentially increasing the global empathy for Inuit food insecurity and indigenous struggles more broadly.

The second TikTok I am choosing to highlight was produced by @iniquanaq, an Inuk who has over 113,000 followers on TikTok who posts using the username @iniquanaq. There are many similarities between @iniquanaq and @polarstorm1992's TikTok content. Firstly, the majority of @iniquanaq's content also is centered around education surrounding Inuit food practices. Her content, however, is more obvious about this intention. This is shown through the fact that she goes further in depth about each topic, has plans about what to talk about and replies to questions with entire videos explaining and showing curious users. Although this is the case, @iniquanaq also has content which is not about food at all, as well as content similar to @polarstorm1992 which just shows a normal meal or how food is being prepared with little explanation.



*Figure 13: Screenshots from @iniquanaq on TikTok*

For this TikTok specifically, I found both the visuals and the narration to be very interesting. Firstly, the video shows an overview of the food that is being eaten including dried Arctic Char, narwhal Maktaaq and muskox meat (@iniquanaq, 2021). Then, the camera comes closer to show exactly how someone else in the video is preparing different meats and then specifically how to eat the Mattaq (*Figure 13*). It shows how the person is cutting it into portions

and scoring the top layer to make it easier to eat. @iniquanaq also describes some of the condiments which are preferred with these meats, including salt, pepper and soy sauce. Both of these details are not discussed in any of @polarstorm1992's content. In the background, not much detail is given about each food, but rather the viewer is able to see all of the details for themselves as the food is being prepared. However, @iniquanaq does explain in the background how 'we' had been feeling lethargic throughout the past week and how this was likely caused because she had been 'eating out' for most of her meals, rather than eating country foods. As a result, she states, "*we realized that we need some country food to get our energy levels back up*" (@iniquanaq, 2021). It is clear that Inuit are well aware of the health benefits of country foods, not only through the science, but also through the way it interacts with their bodies. In addition to this, the caption of the video is "Inuksiut (country food) is medicine" (@iniquanaq, 2021). Although the majority of her followers are not Inuit and likely find it hard to relate to her relationship with country foods, I found it compelling how she is using her platform to try to emphasize the importance of food in her culture to the rest of the world. Interestingly, unlike @polarstorm1992's content, @iniquanaq does not get much hate in her comments section. I could not find a disrespectful comment on this video, nor her last three recent videos. I wonder if this has to do with the hashtag usage and who is seeing these videos on their 'For You' page. @iniquanaq only uses related hashtags, such as 'inuit' and 'inuittiktok', which were the only two on this post (@iniquanaq, 2021). Although I am not sure exactly how the TikTok algorithm works, I can assume that this would draw less attention from users who aren't actually interested in learning about Inuit culture compared to @polarstorm1992's hashtag choices which are meant to reach as wide of an audience as possible.

Whether users intentionally come across this content on TikTok or stumble upon it by accident, both @iniquanaq and @polarstorm1992 are clearly successfully utilizing TikTok in order to take back the narrative surrounding Inuit culture and spread the truth of their food practices to the rest of the world. TikTok as a platform is proving to be a successful way to do this, based on the amount of views and followers each of these users have. Although viewing a TikTok is not the same as being able to travel to Nunangat myself or talk to Inuit one-on-one about their food practices, it is clear to see that TikTok provides a uniquely personal introduction to Inuit culture. The fact that these users are willing to share their food practices to a wider audience emphasizes the importance of food to the Inuit identity.

Self made videos allow Inuit to control the narrative surrounding their culture, even outside of Nunangat. As previously discussed, Inuit culture has long been associated with niche stereotypes held by non-Indigenous people. TikToks' growing social media presence has allowed Inuit culture to be brought to the attention of non-Indigenous people around the world with a new level of truth and education which Inuit have never had the opportunity to have in the past. Both the footage shared in the videos as well as these users' (among others) willingness to share their culture with the internet illuminates how a huge part of the culture surrounding food is firmly rooted in the ability for Inuit to share their food. Both with each other, as seen in these videos, as well as with the rest of the world to redefine the narratives surrounding Inuit.

### **Community Interventions: community freezer programs**

As established, the ability for Inuit to eat and share country foods is central to the Inuit foodways and overall identity. There is no feasible way to replace country food access in a way that would not result in the abandonment of Inuit culture in a much broader sense. The act of hunting off the land, the circular economy associated with country foods, the health benefits of

country foods, the aspect of community which are derived from food sharing and the overall cultural significance of country foods are all irreplaceable. From my discussion on Nutrition North Canada, it is also clear that outside interventions proposed and enacted by the Canadian government to combat food insecurity in Nunangat fail to offer the resources and aid that are required to reduce the burden of food insecurity for Inuit in Nunangat. The failure of outside aid attempts has highlighted the resilience of Inuit. With the specific need of country food access in mind, Inuit communities have embraced locally managed initiatives called community freezers in order to increase access to country foods despite the many barriers Inuit have been experiencing for decades.

#### How community freezers work

There were 57 community freezers across Nunangat in 2014 when Organ et al. (2014), the only study conducted which collected data on the programs, was published. These freezers exist all throughout Inuit communities and all function with the same aid model, although there is no evidence suggesting that they are overseen by any single entity. Community freezers offer a unique approach to combating food insecurity because it keeps Inuit cultural practices and desires at the forefront of its aid model. While Inuit traditionally share food among friends and family, as established, not all Inuit have that social network available to them for a variety of reasons. Community freezers act in a way which extends the traditional food sharing networks across a broader community, connecting Inuit across Nunangat despite having no personal connection to those that are participating in the program. Furthermore, the fact that anyone can donate meat helps replicate the circular economy which Inuit have lived in historically. As a result, I argue that community freezers are both a mutual aid program which aids with increasing

food insecurity among Inuit, but also acts as a modern approach to traditional food sharing, offering hope for the future of Inuit culture.

### A discussion of the successes and failures

Utilizing an in depth study conducted using participatory case study approach in partnership with the Nunatsiavut Government, Organ et al. (2014) conducted one of the first and only ever close analyses of the community freezer programs in Nunangat. In this study, they found that community freezers both lifted food access barriers, as well as created food access barriers. First, I will introduce the discussed successes of the freezer programs, as each factor discussed in regard to the freezer programs' effectiveness is important to note given the severity of food insecurity for Inuit and general importance that these programs thrive in the future. I will then present the major barriers present in community freezer programs to open a discussion regarding the future of community freezers in the current food insecurity circumstances.

### Community Freezers: what is working

As previously mentioned, not all Inuit hunt. This means that when hunting seasons are not successful for a variety of factors, it is not only the hunters who are feeling the pressure of not harvesting adequate food for themselves, but also the network of family members who rely on the hunting members of the family are also directly impacted. Those individuals, as well as the elders, disabled and other members of the community who are unable to hunt, are most reliant on community freezers for access to country food. There also exists a number of Inuit who simply do not have the family network available to them which would be able to provide them access to country foods when they are unable to hunt. Although there is no qualification or status needed to access community freezer programs, those in the community who are unable to

access any country food independent from the program are the members of the community who frequent community freezers the most. In this sense, community freezers certainly seem to act in a way which allows food sharing beyond typical food sharing networks for many Inuit. Additionally, one user named Toby confirmed that community freezers extend the food sharing networks, because increased consumption to country foods is always embraced, *“When they have wild foods in there, I’m more able to have food for us...I usually get enough for three of us to last for a few days or so, for a few meals so it helps a lot”* (p. 255). Not only is country food able to reach more community members if they choose to utilize the resource, but it also acts as a natural extension of traditional food sharing networks because Inuit are able to redistribute the food from the freezers among their family and friends. Community members have commented on this feature, by calling community freezers a *“handy hunting ground”* (p. 257). Those who are aware of the program frequent it as often as needed, because there is no formal limit on how often someone is allowed to go or how much food is allowed to be taken, *“Me and [my partner] go probably seven times a month ...because we don’t hardly get any [wild foods] and nobody...tell[s] us where to get some wild meat [on the land for ourselves]”* (p. 255). As Inuit continue to be forced into the market economy over the circular economy that hunting offered in the past and as the climate changes the landscape, there is an overall decrease in knowledgeable and skilled hunters. This has made it even more difficult for Inuit to access country foods, increasing the need for the expansion of food sharing which the community freezers seem to try to compensate for.

#### Community Freezers: barriers

Community freezers offer significant benefits to the community by providing access to country foods to many individuals who otherwise would have insufficient or no access at all to



country foods. As discussed, country foods have significant health and cultural importance to Inuit. However, there are a variety of barriers which stand currently that are inhibiting the effectiveness of the programs. The main concern voiced by community freezer managers and users alike is a general concern of users becoming overly dependent on freezers. Although there are members of the community who are unable to access country foods all together, the programs are meant to serve as an emergency supply, not a constant source of country foods. With access to country foods as a whole decreasing over time, the number of community members who are in need of country foods is rising, meaning that there is a risk that it would be possible for individuals to become dependent over time. Also, due to the same reason, community freezers only are supplied by donations from hunters within the community. If hunting success overall is decreasing, then the supply to community freezers likely will also begin to decrease and will not be able to serve all community members who rely on community freezers. There are also barriers surrounding who is able to access community freezers as they stand now. Community freezers operate largely through word of mouth. Although there is some community advertisement, donation times are not set in stone and therefore the accessibility of foods is unpredictable, *“some community members were entirely unaware of the freezer and suggested that: ‘a community freezer would be a dream come true’”* (p. 255). Freezers operate on a first come first serve basis, meaning that if community members need food, they must be able to drop everything and travel to the nearest freezer. This requires consistent transportation and flexibility within their schedule, a luxury that many who are in the nine to five workforce cannot afford. Additionally, users reported a general sense of anxiety due to the need for transportation into town to access resources, even potentially when road conditions are poor, along with anxiety with being “stuck in town” too often (p. 256). However, it is often those who are working all

day, who cannot find the time or are unable to hunt themselves, creating a repetitive cycle of inaccessibility for those in need. Due to the fact that there is no formal qualification or status required in order to access food in the community freezers, nor is there a limit on how much can be taken at a time, community members have reported feeling a sense of guilt when taking food because they are unsure whether their need is big enough to take resources from others. In this sense, the community freezer program does not operate in the same way as open food sharing relationships naturally would for Inuit. One user, Frances, stated that, *“I wanted it (seal) though because I didn't have any for a long time so I took it, but I felt a little bit guilty”* (p. 255).

Hunters who supply the country foods also have stated that they feel frustration that there are no qualifications because sometimes members of the community who are physically able to hunt on their own are using the community freezer programs out of convenience, rather than need. The pressure on hunters to both successfully hunt in such a surplus that they feel they can contribute to the community freezer, as well as the added burden of preparing the meat, going through the process of formally making a donation and then transporting the food to the freezer adds a lot of additional stress to the members of the community who are able to hunt.

### Discussion and future improvements

Objectively, community freezer initiatives are more effective than any non-Inuit interventions. Without living through the struggles Inuit are facing due to food insecurity and experiencing the conditions and frustrations surrounding food access in Nunangat, outside interventions simply cannot understand how to best support those living with food insecurity. Therefore, Inuit have created a system through the widespread implementation of community freezers which can increase country food access and fight food insecurity more generally through these efforts. Despite these efforts, food insecurity is still a severe problem despite many of the

barriers discussed being formally addressed by Inuit government, which raises concerns about whether the scale of community freezers will ever be functional enough to begin reducing the food insecurity crisis in Nunangat.

Community freezer programs offer an important resource not only to Inuit health, but also the preservation of Inuit culture in light of the food insecurity crisis in Nunangat. The study conducted by Organ et al. (2014) highlights many successes within the program. However, there are multiple serious failures within the organization and overall function of the program which are preventing it from truly reducing food insecurity across Nunangat.

In response to the current shortcomings of the program, I believe that the most worrisome (and difficult to confront) aspect of the current freezer program is the consistency of resources. Unfortunately, a large part of the failures of hunting are attributable to conditions such as climate change, which cannot necessarily be fixed. There may be potential to aid with the consistency of resources if there were better access to technologies which aid hunting efforts. One example of this would be decreasing the financial burden of snowmobiles to hunters who intend to donate to community freezers. I do not think that the program would not stand the same in terms of cultural impact if hunters were to be paid directly to donate to the freezers, because it would lose the aspect of food sharing and become part of the market economy. Nor do I think that introducing new technologies to Inuit hunting efforts would hold the same values as traditional hunting efforts. However, decreasing the cost of technologies that hunters already use to hunt and would potentially increase the yield of hunts could offer even a slight increase in donation consistency. A similar idea would be to decrease costs of hunting by decreasing gas prices, however, since Inuit do not drill their own gas this option would have to come from the Canadian government and seems less feasible and fast acting. Although funding from the

Canadian government towards the cost of snowmobiles may be possible, I wonder if there might be a way to incorporate the cut in costs into the circular economy where community members are able to pitch in other resources to offset the costs by coming together and trading other resources (related to hunting, or not) to those able to hunt for freezers.

Similarly, it is clear that although community freezers are open to all members of the community, the general lack of consistency and human interaction built into the community freezer locations seems to be promoting a sense of confusion and even guilt among community members who are utilizing the freezers. Although a hierarchy within the freezer programs may help reduce confusion and establish a feeling of fairness for users, a strict hierarchy determining who is worthy of receiving invaluable county food resources would not function with the food sharing values which are so vital to Inuit culture, nor the mutual aid model of the community freezer programs. I think one solution to this issue would be more organized timing for food collection so that community members in need have the opportunity to interact with each other and solidify each member's role as contributor and taker. While Inuit often receive food from their friends and family members, as previously discussed there is a sense of a circular economy where sometimes someone is the recipient of resources and other times they are the giver. Clearly, if community members only feel as though they are independently taking from the community freezers, then that sense of community and contribution to the community is lost.

Consistent communication about the availability of resources to the community is also creating a major barrier for community members. While some members have clear insight to the availability of resources due to their social circles, others have no indication of the resources available to them. Although pushing the involvement of communication online would be practical in most situations, I do not believe that it makes sense to introduce further technologies

into Inuit communities. Freezer programs should, however, attempt to be as consistent in their communication efforts as possible. This may include distributing information in a physical format such as hours and locations. Furthermore, having a standby phone number which anyone can call at any hour to inquire about how the program works, who is eligible and what users can expect would also be beneficiary for spreading awareness throughout the community about the programs. Identifying patterns in donations, such as what foods are most prevalent and which seasons are often lower in resources and publishing the information to the community may help community members better prepare throughout the year and understand how community freezers may pose useful or not necessary and avoid community members becoming overly reliant on the programs.

It is clear that community freezers provide invaluable resources to Inuit communities across Nunangat. However, it is also important to realize where these programs may be lacking in order to help increase overall community access to country foods. In Organ et al. (2014), researchers paired with Inuit government in order to address a variety of issues identified within their study of the community freezers in Nain. Although they did not state directly what changes were made following their study, communication and general advertisement through the use of websites and incorporation of customer service phone numbers both seem to be significant improvements to help relieve the information gaps regarding the freezer programs.

### **Conclusion:**

This thesis uncovered the food insecurity crisis in Nunangat, the Arctic landscape of Inuit. This research unveils the requirement to examine the cultural ties to food when considering food insecurity on any scale as well as when considering interventions to increase food security. While exploring this issue, it became clear that the negative impacts of colonialism and the

lasting discordance between Inuit and Canada more generally has led to a variety of inequalities for Inuit. Combined with the fact that Inuit desire to remain starkly self-sufficient from Canadian interventions, Inuit are facing systemic issues within their communities which are greatly contributing to the food insecurity crisis. The impacts of these inequalities as well as food insecurity has resulted in unreasonably high suicide rates, hunger and malnutrition, poor health due to lack of alternatives to country foods, and the loss of Inuit culture through the loss of traditional foodways among Inuit in Nunangat.

I investigated the current attempts to help relieve the food insecurity burden for Inuit in Nunangat both from the Canadian government and Inuit run community freezer programs. It is apparent that Inuit established and managed interventions are the only viable approach to food security for Inuit right now because of the avenue they provide for Inuit to prioritize access to country foods and therefore represent Inuit culture. I also found that community freezers preserve the essential food sharing practices which define Inuit identity and culture. However, there are major flaws with the programs including an overall lack of communication and transportation barriers which prevent Inuit from accessing the resources offered. Additionally, community freezer programs are entirely reliant on community donations, resulting in an inconsistent flow of resources available to the community. The major takeaway from these critiques is that community members who are contributing to community freezers need to be better supported in order to ensure the supply of traditional foods can continue to grow

I also interpreted multiple methods of self representation in the media through the analysis of two TikTok videos posted by Inuit users. These videos identified that self-representation in the media and positive cultural representation specifically of Inuit foodways was a priority for Inuit users. Through showing country foods and other food practices online,

Inuit have been able to begin reclaiming the narrative surrounding their culture, perhaps opening a space in the future for further support for the food insecurity crisis Inuit are facing in Nunangat. Despite this potential call for action to a larger non-Inuit audience, I still believe that the Inuit priority seems to be utilizing Inuit run interventions in order to fight food insecurity in order to keep the emphasis on access to country foods.

Overall, I believe that improving on these programs is possible, and appears to be the most sustainable approach to combating the effects of food insecurity for Inuit in Nunangat. I also would like to acknowledge the fact that encouraging outside intervention is not the purpose of sharing the Inuit food insecurity crisis. Rather, if anything, it is most important to acknowledge the resilience of Inuit communities and identify the systematic inequalities caused by colonization which have led Inuit to face such severe food insecurity in the first place so that more attention is placed on addressing the actual drivers of food insecurity, so that Inuit can continue to adapt on their own and live self-sustainably in Nunangat in the future.

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