

2016

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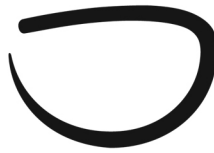
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## Citation of this paper:

Hiebert, B., Power, E. (2016). Heroes for the helpless: A critical discourse analysis of Canadian national print media's coverage of the food insecurity crisis in Nunavut. *Canadian Food Studies*, 3(2), 104–206. doi: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v3i2.149

Canadian Food Studies



La Revue canadienne des  
études sur l'alimentation

Original Research Article

## **Heroes for the helpless: A critical discourse analysis of Canadian national print media's coverage of the food insecurity crisis in Nunavut**

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### Abstract

In northern Canada, the Inuit's transition from a culturally traditional to a Western diet has been accompanied by chronic poverty and provoked high levels of food insecurity, resulting in numerous negative health outcomes. This study examines national coverage of Nunavut food insecurity as presented in two of Canada's most widely read newspapers: *The Globe and Mail (GM)* and the *National Post (NP)*. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) was employed to analyze 24 articles, 19 from *GM* and 5 from *NP*. Analysis suggests national print media propagates the Inuit's position as The Other by selectively reporting on social issues such as hunger, poverty, and income. Terms such as "Northerners" and "Southerners" are frequently used to categorically separate Nunavut from the rest of Canada and Inuit-driven efforts to resolve their own issues are widely ignored. This effectively portrays the Inuit as helpless and the territory as a failure, and allows Canadians to maintain colonialist views of Inuit inferiority and erroneously assume Federal initiatives effectively address Northern food insecurity.

**Keywords:** food insecurity; Nunavut; Inuit; Canadian media; critical discourse analysis

## Introduction

With rates of household food insecurity at 36.4 percent (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2013)—three times the national average—groceries that cost twice as much on average as in the South (CBC News, 2015), and a failing federal food subsidy program (Burnett, Skinner & LeBlanc, 2015; Galloway, 2014), lack of access to food in Nunavut has reached crisis proportions. The high cost of groceries in Nunavut has become a contentious issue, and is the focus of various media stories and internet and social media advocacy campaigns (e.g., [www.feedingnunavut.com](http://www.feedingnunavut.com) and the *Feeding My Family* Facebook page). Inuit living in the Canadian Arctic have the dubious distinction of having the highest documented rate of food insecurity among any Indigenous group in a developed country (Council of Canadian Academies, 2014). The current crisis featured prominently in the Territory during the recent federal election campaign in the fall of 2015.

Alarming high rates of food insecurity among the Inuit in Nunavut are consequences of high rates of poverty and of the transition from a hunter-gatherer traditional diet to a market-based diet, a well-documented phenomenon known as the nutrition transition (Egeland, Johnson-Down, Cao, Sheikh & Weiler, 2011; Huet, Rosol & Egeland, 2012; Kuhnlein, Receveur, Soueida & Egeland, 2004; Schaefer et al., 2011). These radical sociocultural changes are direct results of colonialism and prolonged contact between Europeans and the Inuit (Said, 1994; Smith, 1999). Like other Indigenous peoples in Canada (Daschuk, 2013), the Inuit have suffered massive disruptions, dislocations, and losses under colonialism, including land, language, culture, systems of government, foodways, systems of kinship, and much more (Creery, 1993). The formation of the new territory of Nunavut on April 1, 1999 held the promise of a new era in Inuit self-government. With a population that is 85 percent Inuit, a democratically elected government would ostensibly ensure that Inuit principles, values, and traditions be embedded within the newly created governing structures, providing hope for real change. However, despite the explicit commitment to Inuit traditions, the logic of white, Southern settler society continues to permeate the governance and practices of the Territory (Tedford, forthcoming) and the legacies of colonialism persist in blatant and covert ways.

One of the less obvious ways that colonial discourse is reproduced and perpetuated is in the media. As Cronlund Anderson and Robertson (2011) state, “with respect to Aboriginal peoples, the colonial imaginary has thrived, even dominated, and continues to do so in mainstream English-language newspapers” (p. 3). In this paper, we present the results of a critical discourse analysis of media reports of the Nunavut food insecurity crisis in two national Canadian newspapers, *GM* and *NP*, over a 14-year period between April 1, 1999 and September 1, 2013. Our analysis confirms Cronlund Anderson and Robertson’s thesis that “colonialism has remained intact in the press” (p. 276). The coverage of the Nunavut food insecurity crisis in these two national newspapers during this time period overwhelmingly presented the Inuit as “helpless,” in need of rescue by the Canadian government. Media depictions of Inuit as complacent to their own plight enables Southern readers to distance themselves, setting up a

cycle of neoracist Othering of the Inuit and racial apathy in the Southern settler society that maintains a colonial dichotomy of the white colonizer as superior and the colonized Inuit as inferior.

### Theoretical framework: Settler colonialism and Canadian media

In the following section, we outline some of the methods used by European settlers in the Canadian Arctic to erode Inuit culture. Following this, we provide a brief outline of how such settler colonial processes have become embedded in Canadian national media, reproducing and reinforcing racist attitudes.

#### *Settler colonialism in the Canadian Arctic*

The Inuit have experienced significant cultural changes since initial contact with European settlers and explorers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, changes that accelerated in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Bonesteel, 2006) and formed the basis for the current state of Inuit health inequities. Europeans used political, economic, and cultural imperialist tactics to swiftly establish a cultural hierarchy (Bonesteel, 2006; Said, 1994; Smith, 1999), solidifying the Inuit's position as the inferior Other. The Arctic has remained hierarchized because of implicit settler colonial processes that permeate political and cultural relations (Veracini, 2011a) and underpin modern policy development (Warburton, 2007). Unlike colonialism's aim to maintain separation between indigenous and settler populations (Said, 1994), settler colonialism focuses on the structural elimination of indigenous populations through assimilation into European culture (Wolfe, 2006). Ultimately, settler colonialism will "tame" a variety of wildernesses, end up establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguish indigenous alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity... [It] covers its tracks and operates towards self-suppression" (Veracini, 2011, p. 3). As in other imperial settler colonial conquests (Said, 1994), the establishment of permanent European settlements in the Canadian Arctic was paramount for imperial European governments to guide settler colonialist practices and consequent cultural subjugation of the Inuit. Frequent imposition of a perceived white superiority resulted in Inuit geographical displacement, unequal power dynamics between Inuit and settlers, and the solidification of a settler-controlled cultural divide that enabled the Europeans to dictate most economic partnerships (Veracini, 2011a).

Economic control allowed the Europeans to divide the Inuit based on selective and disproportionate employment opportunities given to some individuals which further integrated Inuit into European settler culture (Wolfe, 2006). Examples of such employment opportunities include those hired as guides during the whaling and fur trades of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, or those hired to work on the military camps during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bonesteel, 2006; Creery,

1993). Despite opportunities to work closely with European markets, the settlers would never see the chosen Inuit as anything more than The Other (Memmi, 2003), while the Inuit not chosen for employment began to distrust those who worked closely with the white settlers (Bonesteel, 2006). Furthermore, economic control was a key component of settler colonialist expansion and structural elimination of Inuit in the Canadian Arctic, as it enabled mercantilism and its focus on individual economic prosperity (Mcdermott, 1999) to supplant the Inuit's traditional culture of sustenance-based trade and intracommunity support (Healey & Meadows, 2007). For the Inuit, this ideological shift was a monumental moment in their nutrition transition from traditional to more market-based diets, as food became tied to Western market participation and the involvement with settler endeavors.

Despite recent claims stating otherwise (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2008), such ideologies of Indigenous repression persist in modern Canadian culture and have led to the current state of Inuit affairs (Patel, 2007). Compared to their white settler counterparts, Inuit have worse employment, educational attainment, and income when compared to their white settler counterparts (Wotherspoon, 2007). These inequalities in the social determinants of health lead to higher rates of poverty and subsequent food insecurity, as well as higher rates of disease and premature mortality, and have become institutionalized through the development of a culturally discriminatory and racially apathetic nation (Garner, 2010).

#### *Canadian national media supports a racial apathetic nation*

Recent attempts by the Nunavut and Canadian governments to improve dietary behaviors of Nunavummiut<sup>1</sup> have centered on initiatives that improve access to and consumption of market foods, specifically fruits and vegetables, as a way to counteract rising rates of household food insecurity. Consider the following public health initiatives as examples:

- *Canada's Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit and Métis*, which was developed by Health Canada (2007) to educate Canadian Indigenous peoples on healthy market foods that can be used to substitute for traditional foods when they are not available;
- *Healthy Foods North* (Sharma, 2010), which aimed to address high rates of chronic disease by using a labeling system within supermarkets to indicate healthy foods;
- the *Nunavut Food Guide* (Government of Nunavut, 2011), which was redeveloped with community input in an attempt to create culturally relevant educational resources that address knowledge gaps surrounding market food; and
- the *Nunavut Food Security Coalition* (2016), an initiative created and operated by Nunavummiut to promote a diet that combines country, market, and locally produced foods, and promotes the development of skills necessary to prepare healthy meals, the

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<sup>1</sup> Citizens of Nunavut.

implementation of community programs, and the development of policies designed to reduce social inequities in Nunavut.

With the exception of the *Nunavut Food Security Coalition*, these initiatives are manifestations of settler colonial economic and political activities, as each program attempts to help Nunavummiut—particularly the Inuit—survive within a system that has spawned food insecurity and poverty through institutionalized employment and educational inequities. Publicizing such health-promoting programs to the white settler populations in Southern Canada may enable the majority of Canadians to perceive these initiatives as an appropriate and much welcomed means to alleviate the food-insecure Nunavummiut. That is, it allows Southern Canadians to perceive that they and their elected representatives are saving the Inuit out of the goodness of their hearts. As such, these initiatives may create and reinforce cultural discrimination within the Southern population by instilling racial apathy, which is defined as:

... socially produced ignorance or *mis-cognition* that allows people to claim they are nice and have good values, while actively disengaging or de-racing their lives to make their physical and mental surroundings into white places that at best maintain the status quo of racial inequality, and at worst exacerbate it. (Garner, 2010, p. 140)

Racial apathy naturalizes residential segregation and enables the white-settler society to attribute racial inequalities to location and the Inuit's desire to live with their people in their homeland (Garner, 2010). Thus, racial apathy reinforces Inuit Othering and a "North versus South" mindset by making anger or frustration a natural reaction for Southern Canadians when reports of Inuit protests over high food prices (Weber, 2012) are publicized alongside the health promoting initiatives that are designed to "save" the Inuit. Therefore, the media's role in naturalizing racial apathy must not be overlooked due to their position as information propagators and their integral role in the dissemination of information regarding Nunavut affairs.

The majority of Canadians rely on national media outlets for information regarding Nunavut affairs, effectively granting media outlets the power to determine what views of the Arctic, Nunavut, and the Inuit the populace receives. Historically, print media has been a powerful vehicle to proliferate racial apathy and solidify settler colonial ideologies among Canadian settlers (Cronlund Anderson & Robertson, 2011). Print media was particularly instrumental in ensuring white-settler support for the Canadian government's barbaric actions during the settlement of the Canadian Midwest, including culling the buffalo herd and then withholding food from Indigenous populations to ensure compliance with new Indian Act treaties (Cronlund Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Daschuk, 2013). This exemplifies McCombs and Shaw's (1972) "agenda-setting" theory, which contends public mass media does not necessarily tell people what to think, rather, they influence what people think about by selectively reporting social events. In this manner, journalists can systematically determine what

events are deemed socially important (Hjarvard, 2012), thereby inculcating and reproducing a societal way of thinking based largely on the interests of the media industry (Palmer, 2000).

Since news is a social construction of reality, examining Canadian national media coverage of Nunavut food insecurity can help explain how cultural discrimination has caused racial apathy toward Nunavut health concerns in a “decolonized” Canadian society. We therefore sought to analyze the Canadian national discourse surrounding Nunavut food insecurity as a function of socially constructed and culturally discriminatory ideologies. We conducted a critical discourse analysis to understand Canadian national media’s contribution to and maintenance of institutionalized Inuit Othering amidst a racially apathetic settler colonial state.

## Methods

For this study we conducted a critical discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) of Canadian national print media’s portrayal of Nunavut food insecurity, and the extent to which settler colonialism and cultural discrimination are present in the national discourse. Our approach was informed by a Foucauldian understanding of discourse as a product of social power and dominance (Foucault, 1972) and by the production of media texts as crucial sites of struggle for control over how reality is portrayed (Fairclough, 1995; Schroder, 2012; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). As such, we view discourse as a manifestation of power (van Dijk, 1993) that serves the interests of dominant groups. Our critical discourse analysis of Canadian print media therefore focused on two nationally circulated newspapers that cater to relatively well educated social elite, *GM* and *NP*, due to determine how modern power is used to influence the national discourse around Nunavut food insecurity. Both sources were readily accessible through Factiva, a news-based database available online with articles dating to 1977.

Articles from *GM* and *NP* were selected for analysis following three rounds of inclusion criteria. The first round selected articles based on their publication date, and included articles containing the word “Nunavut” in any context published between April 1, 1999 (the official first date of Nunavut’s separation from the Northwest Territories) and September 1, 2013.<sup>2</sup> This primary sample contained 4478 articles, with 2804 from *GM* and 1674 from *NP*, the majority of which were published after 2005. Articles were included in the second round if they contained the following terms in any combination: Nunavut, food, security/insecurity. This criterion yielded 30 unique articles, 19 from *GM* and 11 from *NP*. A supplemental set of search terms was also applied to the primary sample to capture articles that discussed food insecurity in terms of its health outcomes, and included articles if they contained the following terms in any combination: Nunavut, health, nutrition. This supplemental criterion yielded an additional 19

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<sup>2</sup> Since the conclusion of this study there have been additional articles published in *GM* and *NP* on the state of Nunavut food insecurity. Such articles level staunch critiques against federally operated programs such as Nutrition North, which is included in this analysis as an effort by the Harper administration to alleviate Northern food insecurity. For examples of such public critiques consult Hill and Fitzgerald (2015), Peritz (2014), and Woo (2014).

articles, 16 from *GM* and 3 from *NP*. The total number of articles included from the secondary inclusion criteria was thus 49 (35 *GM*, 14 *NP*), with no articles appearing under both sets of inclusion criteria.

The final set of inclusion criteria involved providing structural descriptive codes to each article to gather information about the text, including: the set of inclusion criteria under which the article falls; date, headline, author, word count, and section in which it was published; whether there is reference to an existing Nunavut health promotion/policy initiative; and whether individuals were interviewed, and if so, what positions they hold that make them authority figures on the article's subject matter. Any article that did not have an explicit focus on Nunavut was excluded. The resultant study sample included 24 articles (19 *GM*, 5 *NP*), with all but three articles being published between 2007 and 2013. Each of the 24 articles in the study sample was subjected to in-depth thematic analysis. This process involved the first author manually adding descriptive codes to each article, which were then analyzed collaboratively with the second author to create thematic codes. After initial thematic coding, 12 themes emerged. The first author then re-analyzed the descriptive and thematic codes, and in collaboration with the second author the 12 initial themes were condensed into two overarching themes to characterize the sample in its entirety: social inequalities and food insecurity.

## Results & thematic analysis

Thematic analysis revealed two overarching themes present in *GM* and *NP* articles that discuss Nunavut food insecurity: social inequalities and Nunavut food insecurity. Both themes appeared to have a common segregationist tone and reinforced a divide not only between Nunavut and Southern Canada, but also more importantly between the Inuit and white settler society. Social inequalities are often presented as population health statistics followed by an iteration of the phrase, “worse than anywhere else in Canada”, and such information is rarely supplemented with current public health efforts to address the issue. Food insecurity is discussed in terms of food cost, which may serve to shock Southern Canadians into paying attention to the story. Unfortunately, once a story hooks the reader with statistics and monetary figures, the inconsistent portrayal of the Inuit as either helpless or resourceful creates a vague depiction of their culture, while simultaneously casting white settlers as heroes to the North. The following will present an in-depth textual analysis of the study sample and will outline the aforementioned themes of social inequalities and food insecurity.

### *Social inequalities*

In this sample from *GM* and *NP*, writers relied heavily on statistics to discuss Nunavut's social determinants of health in terms of population demographics, income and education levels,



chronic illness rates, housing issues, and violence and crime rates. As previously stated, statistics can be used to stress the issue's magnitude and allow the audience to make a meaningful evaluation of the content (Randolph & Edmondson, 2005). Nunavut's population was described as being, "80 percent Inuit..." (White, 2011) whose "life expectancy...is 10 years less than the national average" (Picard, 2008). With regards to Inuit income, writers reported: "The median income is below \$20,000" (White, 2011); "ITK says half of Inuit adults earn less than \$20,000 a year" (Weber, 2012); and, "half of the residents qualify for social assistance" (White, 2010b). Nunavut's educational attainment was described as "abysmal high-school graduation rates" (Stackhouse, 2011); "...dropout rates sit at 75 percent. Those who do graduate receive an education that falls well short of standards in the South. Thanks to an unofficial policy of 'social promotion'...graduates can possess both a high-school diploma and functional illiteracy" (White, 2011).

In Nunavut, "half of the territory's population is under 25, with a birth rate that leads the nation..." (White, 2011), "the rate of teenaged pregnancy is five times greater than the national average" (Wente, 2012), and Arviat, a town on the western shore of Hudson Bay, is "home to Canada's highest birth rate (roughly 35 per 1,000 people, compared to a national average of 10.3), has no permanent doctor, no hospital, no midwife, no public health nurse" (White, 2010a). To accompany Canada's highest birth rate, White (2010a) reports, "The infant mortality rate in Nunavut is the highest in the country, at 15.1 deaths for every 1,000 live births, compared with a national average of 5.1," which means, "an Inuit baby is 3½ times more likely to die before its first birthday than a non-Inuit newborn" (White, 2010a). Andre Picard (2008) reports Nunavut's infant mortality rate as "four times the Canadian average" and claims the discrepancy "is a testament to Canada's shameful neglect of aboriginal peoples."

To compound Canada's highest birth and infant mortality rates, writers reported high morbidity rates for a variety of chronic conditions. According to Patrick White, "Around 40 percent [of Inuit children] report chronic illness" (2010a). Citing a recent study, Jill Mahoney (2001) explains: "Canadian Inuit babies have among the world's highest rate of lung infections...nearly one in two infants under six months of age required hospital admission for respiratory illness on Baffin Island, Nunavut. Of those, 12 percent had to be placed on life support systems." Anna Banerji (in Mahoney, 2001), the cited study's lead author, explained that such hospitalization rates are, "comparable to a rate that you would expect in the developing world, not in Canada," and calculated an Inuit infant's risk of being hospitalized due to a lung infection to be "484 in 1,000 infants, which is significantly higher than the rate for the average general population: about 10 in 1,000" (Mahoney, 2001). Articles indicated that rickets has resurfaced, given that "thirty-one new cases of rickets were discovered in the first five years of Nunavut's creation" (Minogue, 2007). As Minogue (2007) explained, increased incidence rates are linked to the recent nutrition transition:

...the Inuit got a healthy dose from traditional foods that happen to be rich in vitamin D: the skin of Arctic char; seal liver; the yolks of

bird and fish eggs; and seal, walrus and whale blubber. But as the Arctic has changed, so have eating habits. While seal and char are still staples in Nunavut's isolated communities, walrus and whale consumption have been in decline for 30 years.

Tuberculosis, preventable with modern remedies, was reported to be on the rise: “Nunavut recorded its 98<sup>th</sup> case of tuberculosis in 2010, the most logged in the territory’s 11-year history... Nunavut’s infection rate is now 62 times the national average, adding to the territory’s standing as one of the world’s worst places for respiratory health” (White, 2010b); and “Nunavut is experiencing its worst TB outbreak in a decade, with at least 100 new active cases last year, a population rate 62 times the Canadian average” (Stackhouse, 2011). Health officials attribute the resurgence of tuberculosis in Nunavut to “abysmal living conditions” (White, 2010b) and “overcrowded houses with poor ventilation” (Stackhouse, 2011), a territorial problem that has been well documented in the national media.

*GM* and *NP* writers typified Nunavut’s housing as dilapidated and overcrowded, often resulting in domestic violence. According to Patrick White, “half of all homes are overcrowded or in serious need of repair” (2010b) and there is “a never-ending shortage of shelter in the area” (White, 2011). In Iqaluit, “Nunavut’s bridge to modern Canada, one in five houses is overcrowded and one in 10 families use their living room as a bedroom. Hundreds of homes need major repairs” (White, 2011). As White describes, overcrowding creates problems that compound the aforementioned chronic health concerns. According to a study investigating the human impacts of overcrowding, “one in four [households] brought up anger. About one in five [households] said depression and violence” (White, 2011). Nunavut households are reported to have a “rate of child sex abuse 10 times the national average” (Wente, 2012) and an RCMP officer stationed in Iqaluit believes children are “safer to be on the street than at home” (Shane Pottie in White, 2011). High rates of domestic violence mean that Nunavut ranks amongst Canada’s most violent jurisdictions.

Writers often concomitantly discussed Nunavut’s territorial crime rate and alcohol abuse problems. For example, “the rates of suicide and murder are also more than 10 times higher than in the south. Thirty percent of people over 12 are heavy drinkers” (Wente, 2012); “...the [suicide] rate for 15- to 24-year old men is 28 times higher than the national one” (Stackhouse, 2011). Additionally, in Nunavut, “the rate of violent crime per capita is seven times what it is in the rest of Canada. The homicide rate is around 1,000 percent of the Canadian average. And the number of crimes reported to the police have more than doubled in the dozen years since the territory was formed” (White, 2011). Patrick White frequently used narratives such as the following to depict scenes of violence: “Someone had plunged his knuckles through the hallway drywall again and again and again, from the kitchen all the way down to the bedrooms. The blood had been washed away, but the tale of murder, outlined in felt-pen evidence markings, swirled beneath Ms. Qaumagiat’s snow boots” (2011). His narratives link Nunavut’s violence to

alcohol abuse issues while respectively framing Inuit and police as the archetypical villains and heroes, as in the following excerpt from his article *The trials of Nunavut: Lament for an Arctic nation*:

Constable Pottie fishtailed around a corner and headed down an alley until his brake lights burst red against the snow. Thirty metres ahead, barely visible at the edge of his high beams, someone in socked feet leaned unsteadily against a house. Constable Pottie drove close, jumped out and drew the nine-millimetre gun from his holster.

Another squad truck charged in from the opposite direction. Two Mounties jumped out, nine-millimetres up. The young man was cornered.

“Get down on the ground!” one of the other officers yelled. “Drop the knife and get down now.”

The guy’s eyes darted about until three blurry gun barrels came into focus. He couldn’t have been more than 15.

He glanced down at his two-inch blade and then at his socks. For a moment, he seemed to think he would test his knife-at-a-gunfight odds, and lunged forward.

The three Mounties raised their guns. In the midst of his lunge, the kid lost his footing, stumbled and, finally, fell, belly against snow. One young Mountie leaned his knee against the man’s back. There were convulsions, then vomit – the rage all gone.

The officers took turns comforting him, patting the back of a teenager who had threatened them with a knife moments earlier (White, 2011).

While violence and alcoholism are common in Nunavut, reporting them in this fashion reinforces cultural hierarchies established during colonization. The Mounties are portrayed as dominant protective figures and, therefore, their violence is justifiable. In contrast, Inuit are depicted as submissive and disorganized alcoholics who terrorize the town, making them appear malicious to the reader.

In this section we have highlighted the underlying tone present in *GM* and *NP* news articles that embed Nunavut food insecurity in broader Inuit social issues such as poverty, limited education, or substance abuse. While authors of such articles often rely on statistics to convey an issue’s magnitude to the reader, their use of narratives may have more impact in establishing white settlers in Nunavut as “heroes” to an otherwise “helpless” Inuit population. These colonial undertones of white-settler superiority over the Inuit have been present during much of the discourse. However, a subtler settler colonial tone that focuses on the Inuit’s failure

to fully integrate into Western culture begins to dominate the discourse in *GM* and *NP* articles that focus explicitly on Nunavut food insecurity.

### *Food Insecurity*

In this article sample from *GM* and *NP*, food insecurity was commonly discussed in terms of household hunger caused by exorbitant food prices. The articles also discussed the role of Northern retailers, the Canadian government, and Nunavummiut in the situation. Paradoxically, despite discussing causes and effects of food insecurity, there were few attempts to define it. However, in one article, Canadian news conglomerate Canwest News Service (2010) cited Grace Egeland's definition of food insecurity as "a shortage of food that is safe, nutritious and meets the requirements for a healthy and active life."

Other articles did not define food insecurity but quantified it: "Among Inuit families with children aged 3 to 5, household food insecurity is 70 percent" (Wente, 2012); "[A report by Nunavut territorial nutritionist Jennifer Wakegijig] found nearly three-quarters of Inuit preschoolers live in food-insecure homes. Half of youths 11 to 15 years old sometimes go to bed hungry. Two-thirds of Inuit parents also told a McGill University survey that they sometimes ran out of food and couldn't afford more" (Weber, 2012); and "seven in 10 preschoolers in Nunavut live in homes where there isn't enough food to eat, with some obliged to skip meals or even go a whole day without food..." (Canwest News Service, 2010).

While other authors did not explicitly describe food insecurity rates and subsequent hunger as the examples above attempted to, they do implicitly outline the severity of the problem by describing widespread hunger throughout the territory. For example: "70 percent of kindergarten pupils go to school hungry; half of the residents qualify for some form of social assistance..." (White, 2010b); and "seven in 10 preschoolers grow up in houses without adequate food" (White, 2011). As a result, Inuit are growing "concerned over widespread hunger in their communities" (Weber, 2012), and as Leese Papatsie (in Weber, 2012) explains, "every Inuit in Nunavut knows someone in their family or in their community that is hungry that day." The discourse included the intertwined nature of hunger and food insecurity and pointed to food cost as a significant contributor: "The roots of the problem are deep and tangled. Cost is one of them" (Weber, 2012).

Food insecurity's discursive arena was flooded with reports of high food prices from across Nunavut, to stress both the severity and breadth of the situation to Southern Canadians. As Bob Weber (2012) describes it, Northern markets have "food prices that would shock southerners." Nunavut food prices are often compared to those in the south to make the issue relatable for readers in the south: "...in Pond Inlet on the northern tip of Baffin Island [they] sell two-litre jugs of milk for \$7.39... When the boats come in, the price of soda pop drops from \$3.50 a can to \$2—cheap by northern standards and for some, tastier than healthy foods" (Minogue, 2007); "Common foodstuffs often cost twice what they would in a grocery store in a city in southern Canada" (Canwest News Service, 2010); "...[in] Arctic Bay—a standard jug of

cranberry cocktail sells there for \$38.99, eight times more than it would in Southern Canada... \$28.99 for Cheez Whiz, \$27.79 for a tub of margarine, \$19.49 for a brick of cheese” (Wingrove, 2011a); “Healthy food is also already far more expensive in the North. A head of lettuce costs \$6.75 in Arctic Bay, while a small bag of baby carrots costs \$8.89, both about triple the rate paid in major Canadian cities” (Wingrove, 2011a); “The high cost of food is also a problem... Ocean Spray cranberry juice on sale for \$38.99, a tub of margarine for \$27.79 and a block of cheese for \$19.49” (Stackhouse, 2011); “Brought in by plane, the food carried staggering prices—\$27.79 for margarine, \$8.29 for four tomatoes, \$38.99 for Cranberry cocktail juice and \$19.49 for Cracker Barrel cheese” (Wingrove, 2011b); “\$13 bag of spaghetti, a \$29 jar of Cheez Whiz, a \$77 bag of breaded chicken and a \$38 bottle of cranberry juice...” (Windeyer, 2011); “A head of cabbage for \$20. Fifteen bucks for a small bag of apples. A case of ginger ale: \$82” (Weber, 2012); and “Heads of cabbage for \$28 aren't going to cut it any more” (Paperny, 2012). Writers created perspective for the readers by comparing Northern and Southern Canadian food prices, enabling the readers to develop sympathy for the Inuit’s plight. Writers continued to cultivate their readers’ responses by describing how the interplay between Northern retailers and federal programming has an impact on Nunavut’s food prices. Writers appear to rely on this strategy of engaging their readers’ sympathy for the Inuit before discussing the limited, but valiant efforts of the government to subsidize Nunavut’s food prices.

In an attempt to rationalize Nunavut’s exorbitant food prices, *GM* and *NP* writers highlighted food shipping costs, and how Northern retailers and the federal subsidies such as Food Mail (later re-launched as Nutrition North) can have an impact on in-store prices. As John Stackhouse (2011) explained, shipping costs can account for over half the food costs: “Shipping \$200 worth of groceries costs \$500.” These fees can be avoided when stores enrolled in Food Mail since it “... allowed a long list of eligible foods and hygiene products to be shipped at 80 cents per kilogram. The unsubsidized price is now \$13 per kilogram to ship to Arctic Bay...” (Wingrove, 2011a). According to The Northern Store, however, “air freight price has gone up sixfold [*sic*] in some cases” (Wingrove, 2011a), which causes fluctuation in prices beyond the store’s control. In April 2011, the Canadian government launched Nutrition North—a re-designed Food Mail program focused on healthful foods—in an effort to promote healthful eating. However, *GM* and *NP* writers were skeptical that it would meet Nunavut’s needs, and used the program to introduce ideas about federal and corporate blame. For example, Nunavut’s food prices were often framed as resulting from a poorly implemented federal initiative: “...the new program would lead to price drops of 5 to 7 percent in healthy foods, significant though likely not enough to offset increases elsewhere” (Wingrove, 2011a); “Ottawa has a new northern food subsidy program, designed to encourage people to eat healthier foods. Why then does a head of lettuce cost \$6.75?” (Stackhouse, 2011); “...personal care items, such as diapers, feminine hygiene products, toothpaste and toilet paper, for which the subsidy had been cancelled... subsidizes the air freight for priority items, such as fresh meat, eggs and fruit, by about 90 percent, down to 80 cents per kilogram. The subsidized cost is still double the unsubsidized rate of barge shipping” (Wingrove, 2011b). Furthermore, Nutrition North’s

introduction is causing some retailers who had previously been involved with the Food Mail program to “simply stop participating due to excessive cost and administration work” (Wingrove, 2011b), while others “are worried that Nutrition North, which allows retailers to negotiate costs directly with Southern suppliers, will favour larger companies that can negotiate their own lower prices” (Windeyer, 2011). Additionally, a store’s participation in Nutrition North does not guarantee food will remain affordable: “...officials with the North West Co. acknowledged the high prices weren’t caused by Nutrition North. Instead, they said prices spiked when the Arctic Bay store ran out of items shipped on last year’s sealift and had to bring in fresh supplies by air” (Windeyer, 2011). Claims such as the previous statement prompted Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq to defend Nutrition North and support an Inuit call for action against high food prices. By highlighting that Nunavut’s food prices remain prohibitively high even after government subsidies are applied to transportation, writers naturalize the issue as a way of life in Nunavut, which allows their readers to begin to shift their sympathetic response to racial apathy (Garner, 2010). As previously described, racial apathy enables Southern Canadians to view the federal government’s attempts to provide affordable food to the Inuit as a noble effort to provide for their citizens. This transition from sympathy to racial apathy is promoted by stories that focus on Inuit protests in response to high food prices.

Nunavummiut have recognized a failure in the northern food delivery system and, as *GM* and *NP* reported, have taken to public protests against retailers to effect change: “Faced with a public outcry over recent spikes in the price of food in remote Northern communities, the federal government is blaming retailers and backing off on planned changes to its Northern food subsidy system” (Wingrove, 2011b); “That site [Feed My Family] is now the nucleus of an unprecedented protest across Nunavut... Ms. Papatsie wants Inuit in every community in Nunavut to stand together outside their local grocery store Saturday afternoon. A similar event is being organized in Ottawa” (Weber, 2012). Ms. Aglukkaq was positioned as the Inuit’s voice in office and sympathetic to their territory-wide protests. She accused retailers of being responsible for the spike in prices stating, “if retailers planned accordingly on sea lift, we would not be seeing those outrageous prices in our stores” (Wingrove, 2011b). Additionally, “she insisted her government ‘listened to northerners’ in deciding to delay the new program and ‘is committed to bringing fresh, healthy food to northern homes” (Wingrove, 2011b). However, simply providing an opportunity to purchase affordable fresh food does not guarantee its consumption. As Jennifer Wakegijig explains in Weber (2012), “there’s just been a whole shift in the food supply for people that are now living in communities. And that shift in food supply didn’t necessarily bring with it knowledge about or how to prepare Southern types of food. Even if that cabbage cost \$2, there’s no guarantee the Inuit mother would buy it”.

Embedded within reports of government and corporate efforts to ineffectively alleviate Nunavut food insecurity, writers highlighted territory-wide protests about high food prices as the Inuit’s primary approach to solving to the problem. This depicts the Inuit as:

- intellectually inferior—according to the media they cannot create an initiative as ‘integrated’ as Nutrition North;
- helpless—they must rely on government assistance if they wish to participate in a Canadian market (which they were forced into); and
- ungrateful and rebellious—despite supposed efforts from the Canadian government and retailers to keep food affordable, Inuit were protesting at each organization’s doorstep.

The Inuit and Nunavut have, however, taken a multi-faceted approach to alleviating food insecurity through the development of culturally appropriate, nutrition-centric public health initiatives designed to target all aspects of the colonial legacy that contribute to food insecurity.

Nunavut’s public health strategy targets all aspects of population health and acknowledges colonialism’s lasting impact on the Inuit. For example, to treat early Inuit encounters with tuberculosis, the Canadian government “...snatched one in every seven Inuit from their homes and placed them in southern sanitoriums, where it was thought a combination of rest, good nutrition and good hygiene would cure the illness. Many never returned. Their families rarely found out how they died” (White, 2010b). As a result, “there remains a lot of residual negativity against the health-care system... There was a lot of grief and trauma associated with the disease” (Isaac Sobol, Nunavut Chief Medical Officer, cited in White, 2010b). The colonial legacy could undoubtedly cripple Nunavut’s healthcare delivery and public health initiatives, which is what the majority of the media coverage of Nunavut’s food insecurity persuades the reader to believe. However, Andre Picard (2008) provides an alternative perspective that seeks to erode such a stance and acknowledge the capabilities of Nunavut and the Inuit to effectively provide for themselves:

Nunavut's public health goals explicitly acknowledge the important role that poverty, education, and family and community supports play in health. The social problems that plague the territory—alcoholism, sexual abuse, astronomical rates of traumatic injury, babies born with fetal alcohol syndrome and birth defects caused by poor nutrition—all have their roots in the breakdown of social structures, and rebuilding those links is also stressed. Finally, Nunavut's public health goals speak of the “prerequisites for success”, including the need to build more public health capacity at the local level and to reconfigure organizational structures so that public health, sickness care and social services can work together.

One program positively regarded by writers—perhaps due to its foundation as a federally conceived health initiative—is designed to offset nutritional deficiencies caused by food insecurity. Nunavut’s adaptation of Canada’s Prenatal Nutrition Program provides “vitamin D supplements to all pregnant and nursing mothers, babies and children under 2” (Minogue, 2007).

In Nunavut, the program not only focuses on increasing dietary intake of vitamin D, but also acknowledges barriers new mothers may face and develops skills to structure a well-balanced diet: "... health representatives lead lessons in cooking healthy food, emphasizing basic nutrition and using traditional recipes for foods such as bannock, seal stew and fish soup. New mothers also get lessons in thrifty shopping at the local grocery store" (Minogue, 2007). For other community members, "free vitamin D supplements in tablet form are available... [with] pamphlets describing different vitamins and their uses... translated into Inuktitut" (Minogue, 2007). Apart from vitamin D supplementation, the media coverage includes only one other Nunavut-led initiative targeting food insecurity: a food security coalition described by a paltry two lines at the end of an article describing Inuit-led protests: "Poverty and food security are now at the centre of the territorial government's agenda. A food security coalition has been formed with representatives of six different government departments, as well as Inuit organizations" (Weber, 2012). Seemingly included as a side note, this quote describing Nunavut's Food Security Coalition epitomizes the media discourse about food insecurity in Nunavut. It highlights Inuit-led efforts only after paying due diligence to the dominant "government as hero" and "Inuit as helpless" cultural motifs. By *choosing* to stress themes in this order, *GM* and *NP* writers reinforced colonial hierarchies to Southern Canadians, which can contribute to national racial apathy, neoracism, and the maintenance of a settler colonial Canada. The following discussion will describe how the two discursive themes outlined above—Federal involvement in the Arctic and social inequalities—coalesce to solidify the "government as hero" and "Inuit as helpless" cultural motifs.

### Discussion: Food insecurity and Inuit othering in a settler colonial Canada

As the media discourse focused on social inequalities and Nunavut's determinants of health, *GM* and *NP* writers emphasized an "Us versus Them" mentality and effectively compartmentalized Canada's worst life expectancy, educational attainment, employment rates, teen pregnancy rates, and morbidity rates due to chronic conditions eradicated in the rest of the nation. Such tactics follow discriminatory print media practices that have contributed to Othering of Canadian Indigenous populations since the country's inception (Cronlund Anderson & Robertson, 2011). Writers frequently use rhetoric such as "compared to the national average", "highest rate in Canada", and "worst in Canada" to position Nunavut as having the least desirable outcomes for population health measures. These phrases enable readers from across Canada to compare their own conditions to Nunavut's and establish themselves as superior, a common settler colonial strategy (Cronlund Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Said, 1994; Smith, 1999). Most population statistics were reported in articles that focus on risk factors and morbidity rates associated with a specific health condition or social issue, and failed to contextualize the Inuit's efforts to alleviate their own problems. This ultimately misrepresents Nunavut and the Inuit as complacent about their own issues, and mimics media coverage of tuberculosis outbreaks in the Canadian Midwest



during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Cronlund Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Daschuk, 2013). Doing so has created a two-stage self-strengthening loop between Othering and racial apathy.

First, depicting the Inuit as complacent in their current circumstances is a manifestation of national racial apathy (Garner, 2010), as it grossly misrepresents reality and enables the settler population to naturalize Nunavut social inequalities as a result of the Inuit's supposed helplessness. This depiction of the Inuit then perpetuates an "Inuit as helpless" motif, as it implies the Inuit are unable to solve their own problems and that a settler colonial approach (Veracini, 2011b) provides the best resolution to such social inequalities by continuing to assimilate the Inuit into Western culture.

Reporters also described Nunavut's social determinants of health with narratives that depicted Nunavut as a lawless territory, a tactic that print media relied on during the settlement of the Canadian prairies to justify withholding food and shelter from Indigenous populations (Cronlund Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Daschuk, 2013). Patrick White (2011) implicitly reinforced the government's position as "hero to the helpless" when he outlined a scene in which RCMP officers chase down a violent and intoxicated Inuit teen and then comfort him after he is apprehended. He depicted the young Inuit boy as disruptive and unorganized, traits that align with the territory's reported alcoholism abuse issues, and effectively vilifies the Inuit by contrasting him with the heroic RCMP officers who "save the day." Positioning the officers and Inuit boy in this manner reinforces Nunavut's cultural hierarchization, as the RCMP—and by extension settler society—are seen as a necessity to maintain order in an otherwise chaotic state. The "Inuit as helpless" motif remains at the forefront of discussions as discourse shifts to focus on Nunavut's food insecurity.

Food insecurity-focused stories were saturated with statistical proof of Nunavut's deplorable social conditions as writers attempted to define it. Stories focused on childhood rates of food insecurity and its manifestation as childhood hunger. While they capture the problem's endemic nature, reporters skimmed over food insecurity's impact on adults. However, drawing attention to childhood hunger and food insecurity may elicit a strong emotional response from reader, since children's health is often viewed as a Canadian social priority, and children are seen as "innocent victims" no matter whether parents or governments are held to be responsible for the problem. Therefore, framing food insecurity's effects on children creates a moral dilemma for Southern Canadians (Fairclough, 1995), as they may become conflicted between concern for Inuit children's well-being and the racially apathetic stance toward Inuit food insecurity fostered by Canadian media. This conflict may make it difficult for readers to cognitively distance Nunavut's social inequalities, due to their concern for the Inuit children's health, making them more likely to be affected by reports of high food prices.

Admittedly included to "shock most Southerners," writers saturated Nunavut food insecurity articles with reports of prices two to four times higher than most Canadians would experience. The media positively frames Northern grocery stores as they attribute such exorbitant food prices to high shipping costs, while the Inuit are framed as helpless to enact change, and foolish for remaining in the north instead of relocating to the south where

commodities are more affordable. Similar to the Inuit's relationship to Hudson's Bay Company representatives during the fur trade (Bonesteel, 2006; Creery, 1993), the modern Inuit-Settler dyad affords the Inuit little negotiating power to dictate the price of goods. Additionally, as writers describe Nunavut's food insecurity and high food prices, they effectively compartmentalize the issue using the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel—Nunavut's southern border—as an imaginary line that contains the territory's poverty and high food prices. Rhetoric such as “Northerners” and “Southerners” are frequently used to emphasize the hardships Nunavummiut face and sufficiently equate “North” with social disparity and “South” with prosperity. This stylistic choice to reduce Canada to two compartments allows the majority of Canadians to distance themselves from the issue, and fuels racial apathy as it naturalizes high food prices as Nunavut's cultural norm. Doing so diminishes the shock Southern readers may experience when writers compare food prices in the “North” and “South.”

The media ostensibly buries proof of Inuit-led endeavors in order to publicize federal projects and ensure they are perceived, at the very least, as “the hero that tried.” The media frame the federal government's Nutrition North program (Government of Canada, 2013) as a noble failure: it attempted to alleviate food prices for healthy food and cut costs by removing subsidies for other essential personal care products, however, it was implemented too quickly and failed to produce the desired results. By following reports of the failed Nutrition North program with details of Inuit protests, the writers allowed the government to retain its “hero” status, while propagating the “Inuit as helpless” motif through their portrayal as stereotypically angry natives, which has been a theme in Canadian newspapers since the country's inception (Cronlund Anderson & Robertson, 2011). Writers use the Inuit's reaction to high food prices to distract from the government's failed attempts, which if reported on their own would challenge the cultural hierarchy by portraying the government's efforts as a failure. Instead, the media frames the Inuit's efforts as substandard while those of the Canadian government are portrayed as feasible, reasonable, and responsible attempts to support its Northern populations.

Food insecurity discourse in the media has slowly begun to provide Inuit their due credit. Between 2011 and 2012 writers began including details about effective Nunavut- and Inuit-based public health interventions that apply a multi-faceted approach to absolve nutrition deficiencies caused by food insecurity. However, they are only ever included after the “hero to the helpless” theme appears to be exhausted. Therefore, since the main concepts for Nunavut's food insecurity discourse are mainly constructed in articles focusing on other aspects of the territory, it is evident that the reporting on food insecurity is a small part of a broader Othering discourse that has become disguised in Canada's post-colonial era.

## Conclusion

In this study, we used a critical discourse analysis to examine Nunavut's food insecurity as a function of socially constructed, culturally discriminatory ideologies and its representation in two

of Canada's largest print media sources: *The Globe & Mail* and the *National Post*. In doing so, we found two overarching discursive themes that categorized the sample: social inequalities and food insecurity. Within these discursive themes we have identified two recurrent cultural motifs, "Inuit as helpless" and "government as hero," which indicate the maintenance of a culturally hierarchized North. It became apparent that these motifs represent culturally discriminatory ideologies embedded in Canadian national media.

Throughout its coverage of the crisis, these Southern media outlets established and reinforced the dominant position of the Canadian government and its representatives, as well as the passive and submissive position of the Inuit in Nunavut. Stories consistently frame the Inuit as inept, incapable, and helpless to come to their own assistance or to hold the federal government to account for the ongoing repercussions and consequences of colonialism. Social issues were often misrepresented and naturalized to either the Inuit culture or the Northern locale, allowing Southern Canadians to cognitively distance themselves from social injustices that exist within our nation as a result of settler colonialism. The Southern media's construction of Nunavut's food insecurity discourse represents just a small part of a greater Othering discourse that has become disguised in settler colonial Canada. By choosing to frame Nunavut's food insecurity in this manner, it is evident that *GM* and *NP* propagate settler colonialism and are key actors in both the proliferation of national racial apathy toward the Inuit and the institutionalization of cultural discrimination.

This study is not without its limitations. First, restricting our search to *GM* and *NP* limited the potential range of perspectives included in our analysis. Additionally, this limited our examination of the national discourse regarding Nunavut food insecurity to sources targeted to *GM* and *NP* audiences, which are relatively well educated individuals from the middle class and above. Another limitation is the frequency with which Patrick White is included in the discourse; his 2011 article was substantially longer than all others included in the sample at 7,730 words. Its omission, however, would have been irresponsible since a discursive element's weight should not be decided by word count.

Further research is needed to analyze additional newspaper outlets, especially those published by and targeted to Nunavummiut, and other forms of news media to determine the full scope of the institutionalization of cultural discrimination and racial apathy regarding Nunavut food insecurity. Since different news outlets and sources target different audiences, such studies would provide insight into the true scope and depth of racial apathy in Canadian society, including the ways in which it manifests itself in different sources, given the target audience. Further studies should also seek to uncover different aspects of Nunavut's Othering discourse, with the ultimate goal of uncovering how these discourses inform federal and territorial policy decisions. These studies should examine how discourses are taken up into and are produced by policy. Certainly a daunting task, this research would more fully expose the cultural hierarchy that remains in Canada's north, and would provide Canadians with a full picture of Nunavut's relationship with Canada. It would act to dispel national racial apathy by exposing all counts of misrepresented social situations. We anticipate that our research will illustrate how a public

health issue such as food insecurity can be dissected using discourse analysis to reveal deeply rooted discriminatory cultural norms and hierarchies.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank James Ford, PhD, McGill University, whose ArcticNet research grant helped support the first author's Master's studies.

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