Naming, being named, and experiencing atiq[1]
on Qikirtait (Belcher Islands):

An introduction to the meaning of contemporary Inuit naming practices

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Abstract

The namesake relationship or *sauniq* has been well known in Inuit studies for over half a century and yet still holds surprises as a point of contact between the naming system and the kinship system, both of which are undergoing change. A *sauniq* reproduces itself through a personal name being passed down from one generation to the next and is governed by the status of the last person who holds the name. A personal name, or *atiq*, is multidimensional. It involves a series of parenting, economic, symbolic, and emotional practices that are increasingly falling into disuse. During my fieldwork in Sanikiluaq (Belcher Islands, Nunavut, Canada), I investigated the contemporary *sauniq* system by studying the key mechanisms of Qikirtamiut naming. After describing contemporary ontological and mechanical transmission of personal names, I will discuss several cases where an *atiq* has been given, received, or experienced. The naming person is central to defining a "namesake identity" and it is from this vantage point that we may ultimately gain insight into the way name-based kinship currently functions in an Inuit community.

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[1] In Inuktitut, *sauniq* means "bone," and *atiq* "name." In the community of Sanikiluaq, the word "*atituqaq*" is preferred (*atiq*, "name" + *-tuqaq*, "something from past keeping an actuality in the present, contrary to *-viniq*, Michèle Therrien, Inalco Inuktitut courses, 2006).–*tuqaq* is also found in the expression *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* (See "Concerning Inuit Orality, introduction to the Proceedings.")

Résumé

Objet de recherche prisé des études inuit depuis plus d'un demi-siècle, la relation éponymique demeure un étonnant lieu de contact entre un système anthroponymique en mutation et un univers parental mouvant. Liée à la permanence de certaines modalités de transmission des noms personnels d'une génération à l'autre, la reproduction de ce système relationnel régi par le statut et l'aura du dernier porteur d'un *atiq* est empreinte d'un signifié identitaire multidimensionnel impliqué dans un ensemble de pratiques parentales économiques, symboliques et affectives peu étudiées. Ce premier séjour à Sanikiluaq nous permettra de poser les prémisses d'une réflexion sur le sens d'un système éponymique contemporain en interrogeant les principaux mécanismes de nomination qikirtamiut. L'étude ontologique et mécanique de la transmission des noms personnels nous introduira à un certain nombre de rapports parentaux liés à l'enjeu de donner, de transmettre, de recevoir et de vivre atiq. La figure du nommeur ou de la nommeuse, dans ce processus de reproduction du noyau éponymique, sera l'élément central d'une approche susceptible de définir une « identité homonymique » propre à interroger, en dernière instance, la place d'une parenté fondée par le nom dans une société inuit contemporaine.

Keywords: Names, naming practices, Inuit, Sanikiluaq, Qikirtamiut, kinship, parental strategy, adoption

Introduction

This paper was presented in October 2006 to the *15th International Inuit Studies Conference* in Paris and is the result of two months of fieldwork on Qikirtait (Belcher Islands[2]) from May to July 2006. The pictures shown herein have all been authorized for publication. After the initial fieldwork, I twice returned to Sanikiluaq, in 2007 and 2008. I am now beginning a Ph.D. program at Laval University (Quebec) and Lyon 2 Lumière University (France).

Anthropological fieldwork among the Inuit (GUEMPLE 1965, 1966; GESSAIN 1967, 1980; SALADIN D'ANGLURE 1970; DUFOUR 1977; ROBBE 1981) has provided much data on so-called "traditional" naming practices. These practices typically involve frequent homonymy, a high rate of polynomy, and transmission of names from a deceased namesake (*sauniq*) to a newborn. An exception to this pattern prevails in the community of Sanikiluaq[3] on Qikirtait, which lie a few kilometres off Hudson Bay's east coast and have

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[2] Hudson Bay, Nunavut, Canada.
[3] Sanikiluaq is nowadays the only community of the Belcher Islands. The Sanikiluarmiut call themselves Qikirtamiut,

officially been part of Nunavut since 1999. Here, Guemple (1965, 1966) described a quite different system where polynomy was limited and namesakes often still alive. In general, Inuit naming practices have been a neglected field of research since the 1980s, despite many remaining questions on the differences between various Nunavummiut and Nunavimmiut systems in Arctic Canada. Although a few recent studies have noted many changes to naming practices and kinship, they still emphasize the unchanging nature of *sauniq*-naming (OOSTEN & KUBLU 1999; HOUDE 2003).

This short paper describes contemporary naming practices among the Qikirtamiut. During my Sanikiluaq fieldwork, I first looked at the persistence of the namesake system in order to answer several questions. What is the current significance of *sauniq*-naming in Sanikiluaq? Why is it still important to these contemporary Inuit? To this end, I drew on data from my participation to the *Traditional Inuktitut Personal Names*[4] project (directed by the anthropologists B. Saladin d'Anglure and L-J. Dorais, Laval University, Quebec, 2006) and from about fourteen interviews that I conducted with local elders, adults, and young people.

I will first address the main changes to Qikirtamiut naming practices before describing the links between names and relationships among the Sanikiluarmiut. I will then focus on relationships created by names within the local community, and on the name as a relationship in itself. Finally, I will interpret kinship in terms of the two-way interaction between new forms of naming and remaining older practices.

The present-day naming system

An increasingly complex typology

Three types of personal names are mostly used in Sanikiluaq: the Inuktitut or English nickname, the Inuktitut name and the Christian name. The Inuktitut name is usually called *atituqaq*. It is a very old and traditional name given by a namesake, or *sauniq* (literally "bone"), and passed down from one generation to the next within the community or family. Before the Anglicans evangelized the islands in the late 19th century, the *atituqaq* was the only naming category. Nowadays, it is given with the Christian name, also called by many Sanikiluarmiut qallunaatitut *atiq* ("[like] White people name"). But the link between *atituqaq* and qallunaatitut *atiq* is hardly obvious. For example, some Sanikiluarmiut do not

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from "*qikirtait,*" "islands".

[4] The *Traditional Inuktitut Personal Name* project aims at recording the current names of the Inuit of few Nunavimmiut and Nunavummiut communities. Directed by the anthropologists B. Saladin d'Anglure and L-J. Dorais (Laval University, CIÉRA), we collected in Sanikiluaq between 2006 and 2007 more than 700 names for about 850 inhabitants of the population. The data concerning a proportion of the population from Sanikiluaq is as a consequence as precise as possible.

know the *atituqaq* associated with their Christian name.

Consequently, naming a newborn is sometimes complex, as shown in this account by an elder explaining how she named her adoptive son:

> When the biological mother came with him she named him John after a guy whose plane crashed. … Since that boy was given to me, I named him after my father Jack Amagoalik. Since his name was already John when he arrived, I just put Jack. (Sanikiluaq, 2006)

When asked whether the *atituqaq* Amagoalik was her adoptive son's *atituqaq*, she answered:

> I don't think so… I think so… Is that meant that he's going to have 4 names? Oh yes, yes, that is his *atituqaq*, Amagoalik…His has lots of names: Jack John Ippak Amagoalik! (Sanikiluaq, 2006).

This leads to an important feature of Sanikiluaq naming typology. Each name may or may not be on the newborn's birth or baptismal certificate. What Sanikiluarmiut would call in English a "first name" may be the *atituqaq,* or more generally the *qallunaatitut* name officially entered on the birth or baptismal certificate. The others are called "middle names." These categories are all the more important inasmuch as they create a new kind of typology that uses English terms.

Forty years ago, Guemple (1965, 1966) defined the middle name as a single *atituqaq* given with the first Christian name. He described a system characterized by the transmission of one Christian name and one *atituqaq* only, from a living namesake to a newborn. The difference was then slight between naming practices in Sanikiluaq and those among the Nunavummiut and the Nunavimmiut[5]. Many changes have since occurred on the Qikirtait since Guemple's study, and one of them has been a growing use of middle names. The main changes to naming practices are summarized below.

Evolution of present-day naming practices

In their accounts, Qikirtamiut elders shed light on a discrepancy between current practices and those existing when they were children. One of them explained:

> I don't agree with [this]: children are given their names by their parents now, and they choose very long names [in the sense of "many" names]. We, the elders, don't know how to pronounce them. And sometimes, one child is given 10 names, which makes me wonder why are there so many names" (Sanikiluaq, 2006).

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[5] This distinctness has yet to be properly explained. Some researchers attribute it to the insular cultural environment (FLAHERTY 1918; DESGOFFES 1955; TRUDEL 1968, 1971) or to early evangelization by Anglican missionaries (Saladin d'Anglure, personal communication, 2006).

In contrast, young parents are proud to give their children one or more names, like this forty-year-old mother:

> When the father called me there right after she was born, we had to choose a girl's name, and I told him to go through the baby book, and when he was going through the names, it just came out: "Shirley" just came out, and I was looking at my baby at that time and… She looked like a Shirley, she… When the baby is born, I guess sometimes you just know… (Sanikiluaq, 2006)

This account reveals changes to the timing of naming (quite late, just after birth in this case), new participants in the choice of names (the newborn's parents instead of the grandparents, who traditionally chose the name), and new reasons for naming (a kind of feeling). The new entities in the naming system are non-*sauniq* names that are chosen for their originality, meaning, or influence. They have different origins, and may be from baby books, hockey players, or TV actors[6].

Interestingly, if the parents choose a non-*sauniq* name for a baby, they will still feel the need to choose a *sauniq* name. Indeed, if the first name is non-*sauniq*, there are usually more than two names. This is the case with Mary's adoptive youngest daughter, a four-year-old named Tina Mina Elisabeth Iruaqsiaq[7]. This is how Mary talked about Tina's naming:

> (Tina, because) I'm crazy for the book. I read them over and over, and Tina is a pretty name. (My oldest daughter) Jennifer named her Mina ….Mina was Jennifer's babysitter, a Cree babysitter who was part of our life. Elisabeth is my niece, my cousin's daughter, and Jennifer decided that she wants to name the baby after Elisabeth as well. Well, Elisabeth is the reason why we got Tina. … Tina comes from Northern Quebec [Nunavik]. We were let known by Elisabeth that a baby was homeless …. And then, she has another name, Iruaqsiaq …. And Iruaqsiaq is the name that her biological mother gave her. Named after an elder who passed away. (Sanikiluaq, 2006)

This very condensed quotation brings together a book's hero, a Cree babysitter, a cousin from Nunavik, an adoption, and a more traditional way of giving names from an elder to a newborn. The *sauniq* is still important in naming practices, despite the introduction of new entities in the naming system. We will have to wait a few more years to see whether these new non-*sauniq* names are being passed on to coming generations, just as *sauniq* names are now being passed on.

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[6] For more details, see DUPRÉ 2006.

[7] As requested by the informants, all names have been changed.

Research's year Relationship to the namesake	1965	2006-2007
Grandparent or siblings	36%	35,8%
Great-grandparent or siblings	7%	11, 3%
Oncle, aunt	13%	9,5%
Cousin (first degree)	2%	1%
Other consanguine	4%	13%
All affine	17%	7,45%
Unknown genealogical relation	21%	6%
Friends and other no kinship members	0%	15,95%

Comparative table of the relationship to the namesakes
according to data reported by Guemple in 1965,
and data gathered in Sanikiluaq by myself between 2006 and 2007
(Personal data from 2006 and 2007, *Traditional Inuktitut Personal Name* project)
Taken from DUPRÉ 2007: 64 Bis

In Sanikiluaq, another way to modify names is to transform the *atituqaq* or Christian name. Jasonie[8], an elder in the community, named his son 'James' (after the apostle and presumed author of the *Epistle of James*) instead of using the first name of his father Jimmy Ittuq. But he still named the child after his own grandfather by choosing the *atituqaq* Ittuq.

Thus, naming practices continue to reflect vertical, ancestral identification. They still matter to both the name giver and the named through the parental, symbolic, and ontological meanings they evoke (OOSTEN & KUBLU 1999; HOUDE 2003), despite the emergence of new non-*sauniq* names.

Names and kinship: experiencing the naming relationship

The second part of my paper will address names as a desired social relationship. I will structure my analysis around two ideas: first, to name an *Inuk* is to identify and recognize him or her through a new frame of reference; second, it enables the kinship group to place the child within a very tight network of kin relationships that are recreated and affirmed through naming practices.

Nalunaikkutaq: "to be recognizable"

Despite the introduction of new names from TV programs or books, the Sanikiluarmiut I met usually agreed on the importance of the *atituqaq* as a means of identification. In a community that has frequent homonymy and many people called Caroline, Louisa, Noah, or Annie, the *atituqaq* is a good way to tell apart two, three, four, or sometimes five namesakes. An elder explained this function to me through the Inuktitut word *nalunaikkutaq*:

> Because it's *nalunaikkutaq:* because it's something which can be remembered, recognized by everybody, because they will know exactly who the ancestors were. (Sanikiluaq, 2006).

The same desire to be recognized led Jennifer[9], a 22 year-old, to use her middle name 'Jennifer' instead of her first name Annie because "there are five, no six, Annie Eyaituk in the community" and only one Jennifer (Jennifer, Sanikiluaq, 2006). For the same reason, the younger Shirley was given a non-*sauniq* name and Jasonie changed his son's name from Jimmy to James. These practices largely meet a need to tell an Inuk apart from others within a kinship and community network that identifies people through *sauniq*-naming. This network is thus increasingly resorting to middle names or the addition of new names. Many Sanikiluarmiut say these current practices are replacing an older one of
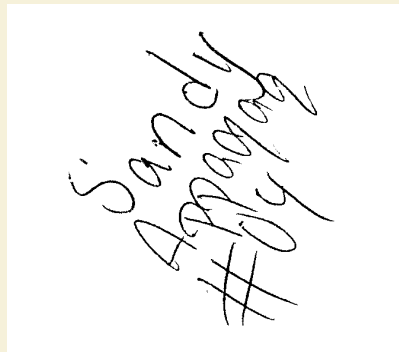
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[8] *Ibid*.
[9] *Ibid*.

telling same-named individuals apart by adding a number (for example 'Annie the second') or a word like 'Junior', 'Middle', or 'Senior'.

Since the 1980s, an original intragenerational system has become increasingly important on the Qikirtait. Teenagers and young adults are adding their favourite hockey player's number to their name. They sign with this number and sometimes tattoo it onto their bodies (see figure 1). This is creating a new means of identification that is both inclusive, since the meaning of the number is known to local young people, and exclusive, since this reference is not obvious to parents, grandparents, or qallunaat. This Inuit/Canadian system provides them with a source of physical and emotional identification.
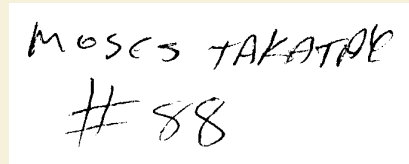
Thus, *atituqaq*/Christian-naming cannot satisfy current needs for identification that are coming from the South. This identification is horizontal or intragenerational. It is not vertical or intergenerational, as with the traditional model of identifying a child with a namesake. The new naming systems are not simply a fashion. They meet needs for self-identification that are due in part to increasing homonymy and in part to Canadian administrative and cultural models. Current naming practices are thus moving toward the model of a relational identity that is both horizontal and vertical.
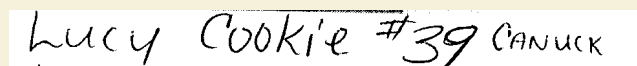
Fig. 1

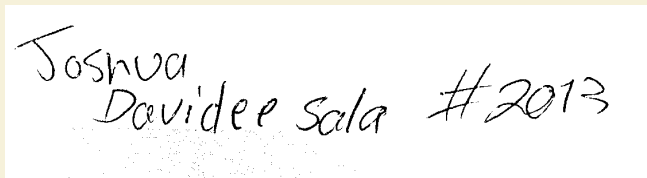Some examples of young Sanikiluarmiut Signatures
(Sanikiluaq, 2006)

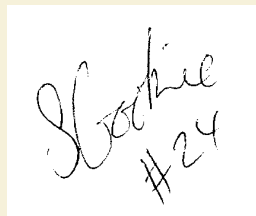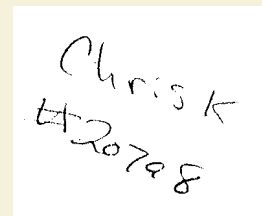source: DUPRÉ 2007: 71 Ter

NB: some teenagers create combinations of two player's numbers (Joshua, Chris)

Fig. 2
A young Sanikiluarmiut's room dedicated to his favourite hockey team
(Sanikiluaq, 2007)

Source: Dupré 2007: 72 Bis
Parental interests

A second characteristic of naming relationships is to introduce a newborn child into a tight network of kinship interests:

• Transmission of parental authority

Sauniq names bestow parental authority. This is illustrated in an account that reveals a young girl's parental role, as described by her mother:

> When she was about three or four, or five, but that was when she was in the talkative stage, sometimes she used to scare me, because she used to talk about the past, even before she was born. Then when I talked to the elders that sometimes I think that something is wrong with my *panik* ["daughter"], that she was possessed or something, … the elders just tell me "just accept

> that your mother kind a came back, that you've named your daughter after your mother, just accept that your mother had a very short life, and she wanted to go on, continue to live". … she talked about some bad things I used to do before she was born, and she used to tell me that she's really happy today that I don't do that stuff anymore, and that was before she was born. (Sanikiluaq, 2006)

Shirley has much authority. She has the right and power to lecture her mother because of her *sauniq*'s position in the relational network: Shirley is named after her mother's mother.

- Parental strategies

Choosing a name is consequently central to parental strategies. We have mentioned the changes affecting name-givers (going step by step from the grandparents' generation to the parents' generation). As Julie[10] sees it, this progressive transformation may deprive elders of their "power to say no." Currently, naming practices reflect parental authority, as shown by the power to link a baby to an ancestor and to transmit memory by passing on the ancestor's life story and social/affective status within the community and family. Again, actual practice is not so clear. If the parents give their baby a new first name, the baby will likelier have more middle names, which will likelier be chosen by the grandparents' generation (see next table). There are many strategies that each generation uses to retain its authority and power.

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[10] As requested, the name has been changed. Julie is a 40-year-old woman from the community and a mother of three young girls.

Naming	Proportion of the population
Transmission of a Christian name and *atituqaq* from a unique namesake	**61,5%**
Two namesakes at least	**14,9%**
More Precisely: Two namesakes at least without « no *sauniq* name »	13,3%
And: Two namesakes at least with one or more than one « no *sauniq* name »	2,6%
One « no *sauniq* name » at least	**26,5%**
More precisely: Transmission of a Christian name and *atituqaq* from a unique namesake, plus one "no *sauniq* name"	22,9%
Naming without namesake at all	**0,7%**

Table 1: Main trends of contemporary naming
   (Personal data from 2006 and 2007, *Traditional Inuktitut Personal Name project*)
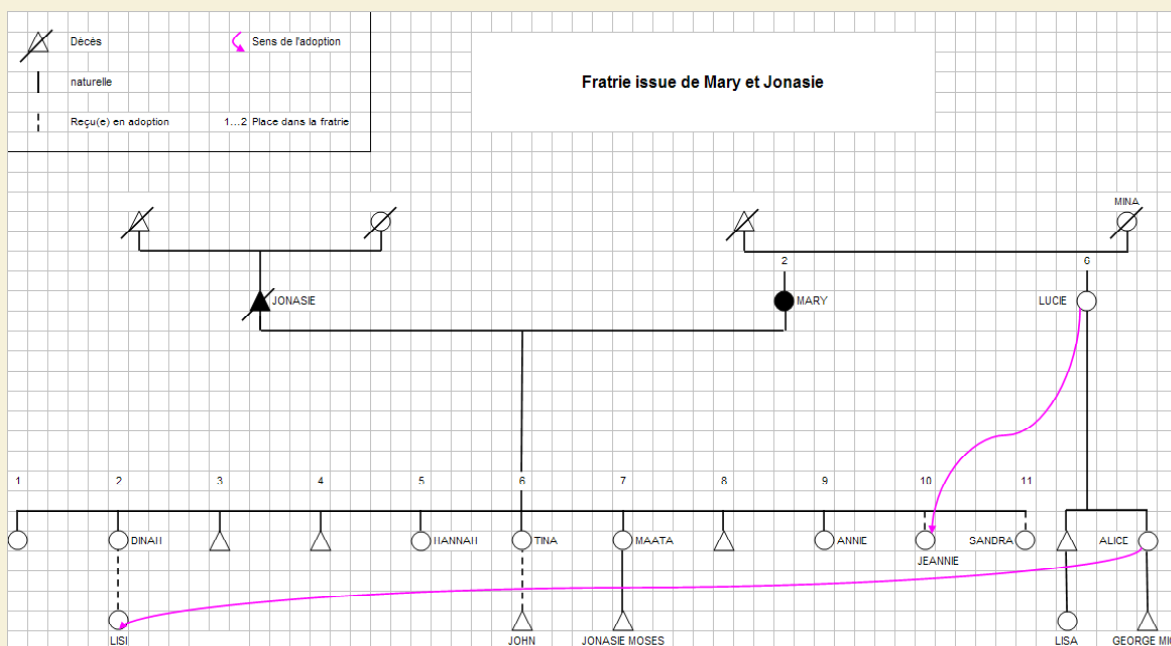Source: Dupré 2007: 65 Bis

One strategy concerns the interests of families related by marriage. Some naming practices seem to strike a balance between the baby's paternal line and maternal line (VERNIER 1995, 1998). In Sanikiluaq, I have observed a kind of "cross-naming" where one parent chooses the newborn's name from the other parent's family. Cross-naming is thus a means to recognize the parent's marriage symbolically, by sharing the *sauniq*'s voice and status. It may prove impossible, though, if there is conflict between the two families. For example, Julie's three daughters are named after maternal *sauniit*. She explained that her parents-in-law never recognized their son's second marriage with her, as well as the children from the marriage. Therefore she could not cross-name her children by giving them names from the paternal line. This account shows how the *sauniq* relationship is experienced within the broader context of kin relations.

- Circulation of names, circulation of children: Introduction to the kinship network

Finally, let me address the strategies that parents use when adopting. In Sanikiluaq, over 30 percent of children live with adoptive parents. The adoptive child may be named by both the biological parents and the adoptive parents. Interestingly, there is a certain parallelism between the circulation of names and the circulation of children. This may be seen in one local family (see next figure)[11]:

Fig. 3
Circulation of names and circulation of children

Source: Dupré 2007: 78 Bis

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[11] All the names have been changed as requested by the participants. We tried to find names that fall within the same category and are as close as possible to the actual names.

> Mary and Lucy are two sisters. Jeannie, Lucy's last child, was given in adoption to Lucy's oldest sister: Mary. Many years later, Lucy's first daughter, Jeannie, had a baby boy. One of Mary's biological daughters, Dinah, asked at that time to have the right to name the baby after her deceased boyfriend. Two years later, Jeannie had a baby girl. But the young mother could not take care of the newborn and asked her mother Lucy to find a solution. Dinah explained to me that since she named the first baby of her cousin Jeannie, she could not refuse to adopt the second baby. That is why one generation later, a second baby was given in adoption from Lucy's family to Mary's family.

In this case, the children circulate unilaterally from the youngest sister's descendants to the oldest sister's descendants. We can draw a parallel between the circulation of names and that of children. When Dinah named her cousin's baby boy, she took on an obligation to adopt her cousin's next baby. This case is not the only one that links the circulation of children to that of names. Further investigation may reveal a system of circulation whereby giving a name may create an obligation to give away a child[12].

Preliminary conclusions: naming and appropriating newborns

In this paper, I have tried to summarize current Qikirtamiut naming practices as clearly as possible. I have two preliminary conclusions:

* First, a name creates desired relationships within the community. There are new strategies that seek to combine, on the one hand, vertical, ancestral identification through *sauniq*-naming and, on the other, horizontal, intragenerational identification that is more modern and comes from the south (new names, association with letters and numbers: see DUPRÉ 2006).
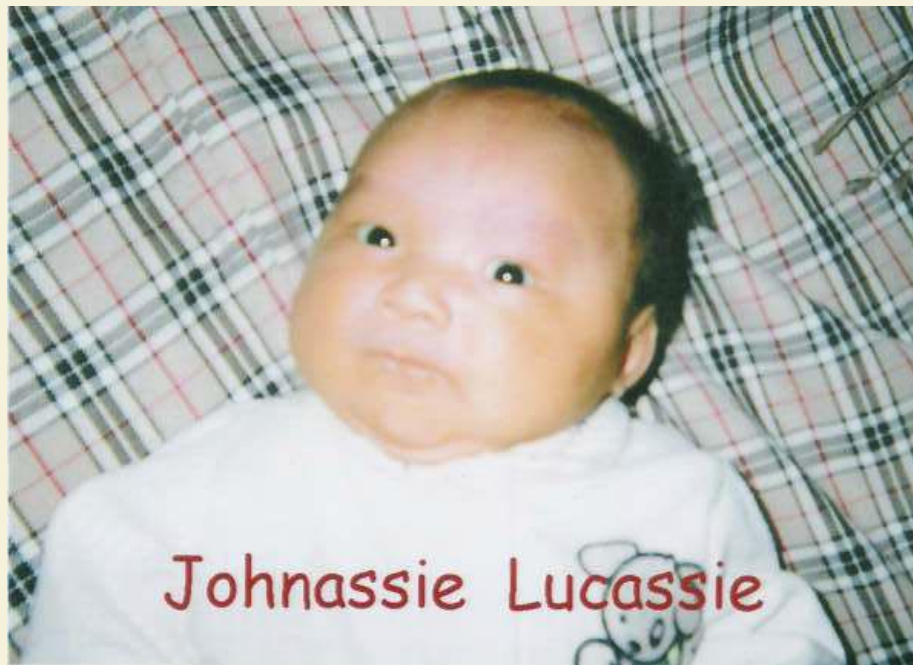
* Second, naming practices are central to parental interests. These may be vertical, intergenerational interests that exist within the name-giver's category or may be horizontal interests between families joined by marriage. Along Saladin d'Anglure, I am not really convinced that a dualistic approach is appropriate. Adoption is an interesting link between vertical and horizontal parental interests. Giving a name may be, as Vernier (1995, 1998) has proposed, a symbolic way for adults to appropriate the newborns of a community. This may be the reason why, despite the new identification needs of the 21st century, the *sauniq* system remains more important than ever: without the transmission of atiq from an elder, the Inuit newborn still remains, as many Sanikiluarmiut underlined, out of the community and family.

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[12] This hypothesis was discussed and modified during the second year of my master's degree. See DUPRÉ 2007. It is now part of my Ph.D. dissertation work.

In conclusion, I am led to the hypothesis by Houde (2003) that adoption and *sauniq* naming form an indestructible heart of Inuit culture, despite all of the changes that have occurred in recent times. Nonetheless, to understand change and continuity in Inuit culture, we need to investigate more than just naming. We should reinvestigate the entire kinship system as revealed in a network of relationships that may be biological or non-biological and symbolic or real-life. The next step will be to analyze the networks of circulation created by names and children, and to observe how different parental relationship interrelate on the Qikirtait.

Picture of Johnassie Aullajuuk Lucassie Taliru Arragutainaq, 2 months old (Sanikiluaq, June 2006). His mother Sarah let print the first names of his two namesakes: Johnassie Lucassie.

Johnassie Lucassie is named after his mother's father Johnassie Aullajuuk, and his own deceased father Lucassie Taliru.

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