

Taima'na Uqamaqattangitlutit, The Polar Bears Can Hear Consequences of words and actions in the Central Arctic

Darren Keith, Kitikmeot Heritage Society, and
Jerry Arqviq, Gjoa Haven, Nunavut

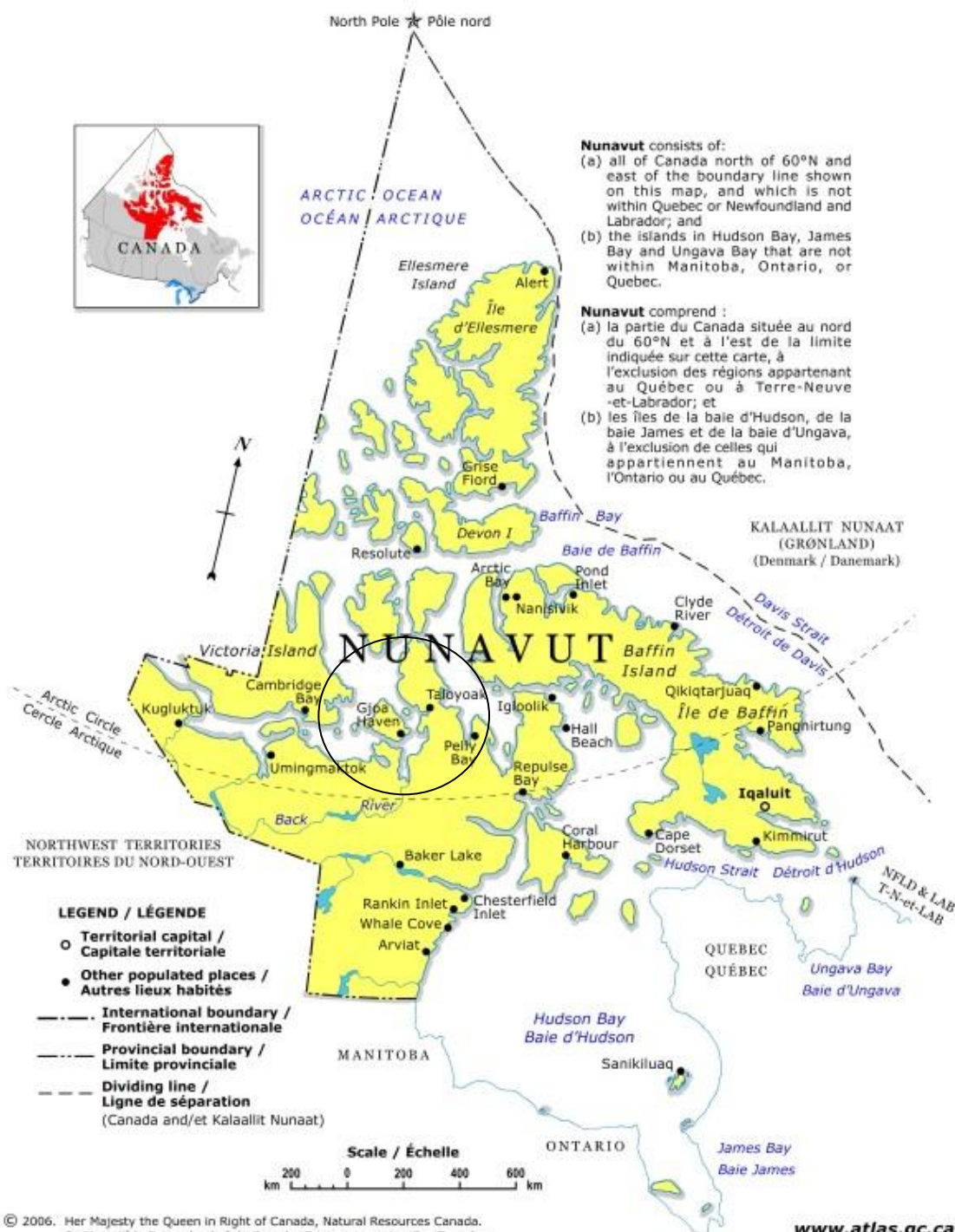
INALCO 2009, *Proceedings of the 15th Inuit Studies Conference, Orality* (Paris, 2006)
B. Collignon & M. Therrien (eds)

A hunter and a researcher

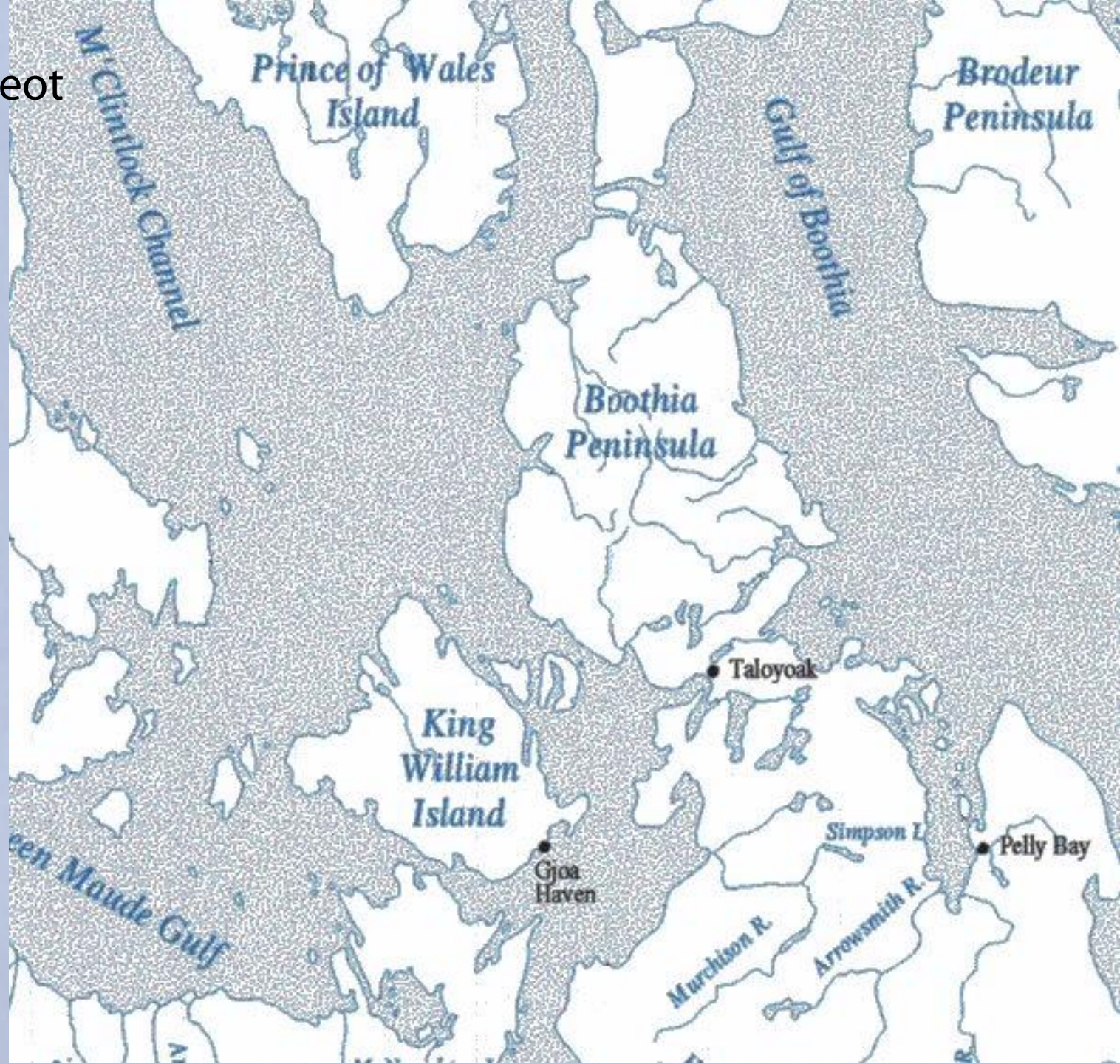
- **JERRY:** [First in Inuktitut] My name is Jerry Arqviq and I am from Gjoa Haven, Nunavut. My father was a polar bear hunter. I am a polar bear hunter, and I now I am teaching my son. I started hunting when I was 6 years old and I caught my first polar bear when I was 14 years old.

- **DARREN:** My name is Darren Keith and I am the Senior Researcher for the Kitikmeot Heritage Society which is based in Cambridge Bay.

Jerry and I would like to thank some people who made it possible for us to be here in Paris: Canadian North Airlines who sponsored a portion of Jerry's travel, World Wildlife Fund Canada, the organizing committee of the 15th Inuit Studies Conference, and a special thanks to Professor Beatrice Collignon.



Eastern Kitikmeot



Study Area: The Eastern Kitikmeot

- **DARREN:** The area we will be discussing is the Nattilik area of the Kitikmeot Region of Nunavut.

For the Inuit of the central Arctic, who live in the communities of Gjoa Haven, Taloyoak and Kugaaruk, Nunavut polar bears have always been an essential part of an Inuit or Inuktitut way of life based on hunting animals.

Our paper will discuss some aspects of the relationship between Inuit and polar bears, and the sensitivity of polar bears to the statements and actions of human beings.



Iqalungmiut, 2005

Gjoa Haven continues to live off the land

- JERRY: [talks about his community and the continued importance of country food to the people including polar bears – explains picture of young people fishing at the weir at Iqalungmiut last year, as they do every year.]



ek



Gjoa Haven Hunters and Trappers

- **DARREN:** This paper draws mainly on interviews with Elders conducted during a project for the Gjoa Haven Hunters and Trappers Organization of Gjoa Haven Nunavut. The report for this project is published under the title *Inuit Qaujimaningit Nanurnut: Inuit Knowledge of Polar Bears*.
- **DARREN:** In the winter 2002/2003 when the Hunters and Trappers were faced with a moratorium on hunting polar bears and they became concerned about how Inuit knowledge of polar bears and polar bear hunting could be maintained and passed on with no one going out polar bear hunting. Therefore they initiated a research project to record Inuit knowledge of polar bears in Gjoa Haven.

ፈጣሪ ልሳን ልሳን ልሳን



Inuit Qaujimaningit Nanurnut

Inuit Knowledge of Polar Bears

A project of the Gjoa
Haven Hunters' and
Trappers' Organization

Prepared by Darren Keith
with Jerry Arvviq, Louie Kamookak,
Jackie Ameralik and the Gjoa Haven
Hunters' and Trappers' Organization



This book can be ordered through the Canadian Circumpolar Institute Press
www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/polar/nav01.cfm?nav01=40630

Sea Ice based fieldwork

- **DARREN:** During the project I traveled to Gjoa Haven three times.
Twice Jerry and I did interviews with Elders and polar bear hunters in their homes. We also did a 12 day field trip in April 2002. This is one of our camps north of King William Island or Qikiqtaq during the fieldwork.



Our research team



Left to right:

George Kamookak, Darren Keith, Jerry Arqviq, Ben Kamookak,
Paul Puqignak and Bob Konana.



Tiriguhuktuq: Living by the rules

- **DARREN:** Inuit life has always been dependent on the unpredictable factors of weather, environmental conditions and the availability of wildlife.

This remains true today as bringing in wildlife is necessary to provide affordable and healthy meat for families and these factors continue to influence the success of the hunt and the safety of the hunters.

In traditional Inuit belief these unpredictable factors in life are associated with spiritual and sentient forces in nature that require that human beings live life correctly and observe specific rules or *tiriguhuktuq*.



Proper treatment of animals

- **DARREN:** Tiriguhuktut apply to many aspects of life including the proper treatment of the land and the animals. Ivaluardjuk explained to Knud Rasmussen in 1922:

“The greatest peril of life lies in the fact that human food consists entirely of souls. All the creatures that we have to kill and eat, all those that we have to strike down and destroy to make clothes for ourselves, have souls, like we have, souls that do not perish with the body, and which must therefore be propitiated [appeased] lest they should revenge themselves on us for taking away their bodies.”
(Rasmussen 1929: 56)
- **DARREN:** The rules of life dictate that animals must be treated respectfully or there will be consequences for the transgressor and his relations. As beings with souls, animals are aware of the behaviour and speech of human beings.



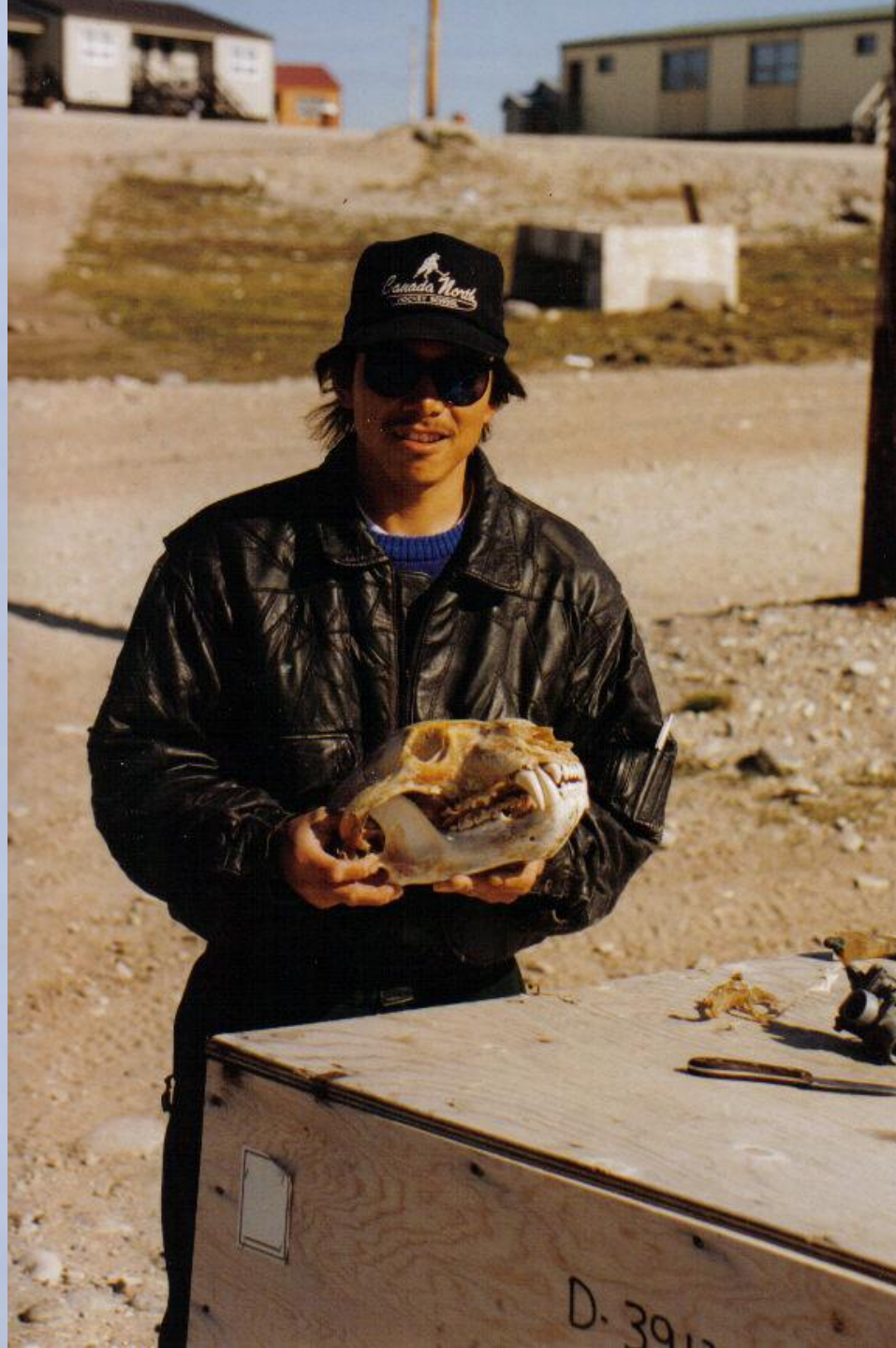
The animals can hear

- **DARREN:** During my first fieldwork in the Arctic in 1991, I was in an Inuvialuit bowhead whaling camp on the Beaufort Sea. The Elders said that the whales were not showing themselves because there were disagreements between the two whaling boat crews. They said the whales can hear. Polar bears are like that too.
- **JERRY:** [Talks about how he was told to watch how he talks about polar bears]
- **JERRY:** [Talks about how he was told as a child not to chew or bite off polar bear meat but to cut it with a knife or else a bear could end up chewing on you]



Rules for relating to polar bears

- **DARREN:** Traditionally it was understood that all animals know what people are saying or how they are behaving. Today, this belief seems to be strongest with the large, dangerous animals such as bowhead whales and polar bears.
- **DARREN:** In addition to being sensitive to people statements, and how their bodies are treated after death, polar bears are also aware of whether their meat has been shared. Sharing is an obligation taken on by the hunter who has taken a bear.
- **JERRY:** [Talks about his first polar bear and how when he got home and got up the next morning the meat was gone and only the skull and the skin were left for him. Talks about why his parents did that – so he would be successful in hunting polar bears in his life]



Children were “worked on” to limit their vulnerability to bear attacks

- **DARREN:** Traditionally parents and other adults close to a child would try and prepare them for life by trying to influence the formation of the child’s skills and trying to limit or at least recognize the child’s vulnerabilities. One of the potential vulnerabilities of a young hunter was how they would be seen by a polar bear. Parents tried to ensure that their sons would not be recognized by bears by “working on” them with words and with amulets. When speaking about her late husband Jerry’s mother Taliraq said:

I have never seen or heard of him getting so close to a bear [that he would be injured]. But he has been really close to a bear, he had been worked on in the traditional way. When he was newborn he was worked on. His parents said to him how he should hunt (Annie Arquviq, A3: 35).

Forming by words and amulets

I have heard people work something on their kids or talk to their kids when someone else is listening. They used to say "he can't be chased by a bear or be bit by a bear or be chased by a muskox" or any dangerous animal. I heard of these things, but I never really saw it or worked on anybody (Annie Arquviq, A3: 35).

I only noticed they get worked on and they put anguat (amulets) on so that they won't get chased when they grow up. And for girls they put anguat so that the bear won't come into their iglu (Annie Arquviq, A3: 35).

The rules still apply today

- JERRY: [Talks about his first polar bear and how his Elder watched to see how the bear would react to him. Talks about how when we were on the trip in 2002 Elder Bob Konaag asked him if he would be okay – if the bear would notice him]
- JERRY: [Talks about how when the Elders say when someone is out polar bear hunting you can tell if they have caught a bear because it will snow in a certain way – that is true today. Youth today don't understand about these things, but things continue to work this way. If they are disrespectful something will happen though perhaps not right away and perhaps they won't connect the two things]



To cite this publication:

KEITH, Darren. ARQVIQ, Jerry. "Polar bears can hear: the consequences of words and actions in the Central Arctic." *In* Collignon B. & Therrien M. (eds). 2009. *Orality in the 21st century: Inuit discourse and practices. Proceedings of the 15th Inuit Studies Conference*. Paris: INALCO.

<http://www.inuitoralityconference.com>