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## Inuit Sentinels: Examining the Efficacy of (Life) Writing Climate Change in Sheila Watt-Cloutier's *The Right to Be Cold*

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### ABSTRACT

The impact of climate change on Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic has been widely documented in a myriad of scientific publications. However, the cultural and identity shifts attached to these changes have often been overlooked in mainstream portrayals that center on ice melt and animal species extinction to the detriment of the human factor. As many scholars have stated (Patrizia Isabella Duda, 2017 and Andrew Stuhl, 2016), the risks embedded in Arctic climate change must be considered as directly related to a demise of culture, education, and the social conditions of Inuit communities. This paper examines Inuit experience as a human-centered approach to climate change in Sheila Watt-Cloutier's *The Right to Be Cold* (2015). The text explores how Inuit ways of being are inseparable from the Arctic environment, demonstrating the vulnerability, adaptability and ingenuity of Inuit communities in the face of environmental crisis. Informed by Inuit epistemology and impregnated with feeling, I will argue how the autobiographical subject positions interlaced with affectivity in *The Right* exemplify Inuit life writing as essential contributions to climate change discourse.

### Keywords

Arctic Literature; climate change; Indigenous ecocriticism; Inuit life writing; Sheila Watt-Cloutier; vulnerability.

As scholars such as Patrizia Isabelle Duda (2017) and Andrew Stuhl (2016) have observed, popular representations of climate change, depicting melting sea ice and starving wildlife, “are void of human experiences” (Stuhl 153). Long before scientists scrutinized the Arctic region, Inuit stood sentry, watching, warning, learning and adapting to the unfamiliar developments of the changing environment. Sheila Watt-Cloutier conjures up this image of “the Inuk sentinel” throughout her memoir, *The Right to Be Cold*, symbolizing “the human face of climate change” in an effort to center the world’s attention on Inuit experience of Arctic climate change. By extension, the analogy of the Inuk sentinel, “a figure of traditional knowledge,” epitomizes Indigenous ways of being and sustainable living while stressing the urgency of their forewarning that “whatever was happening in our Inuit homelands... was about to happen everywhere” (205).

The aim of this paper is to explore how Inuit life writing is a substantial contribution to interdisciplinary discussions of climate change and environmental justice. Recently, Solvejg Nitzke and Eva Horn (2020) have argued that “the abstraction and imperceptibility of climate can [...] be reversed and turned into vivid images, metaphors and stories we can relate to cognitively and affectively” (6-7). Likewise, Catriona Sandilands (2019) reasons that narratives including “grief, rage, hope, wonder, perplexity and love” will help to “notice, feel, understand, talk about, respond to the reality of climate change in ways that better acknowledge the personal complexities of our social and environmental problem” (8). My analysis of *The Right to Be Cold* will thus highlight the use of life stories and the value of affect in the human-centered approach to climate change. I will also employ autobiographical theory to consider how the multiple and overlapping genres of ecobiography, autoethnography and rights narrative support the text’s predominant call to action.

In what follows, I will arrange my analysis into three parts: I will start by contextualizing Watt-Cloutier’s life story within Inuit experience in the Canadian Arctic and elucidate how the environment is fundamental to Inuit wellbeing. Secondly, I will examine the formal aspects of the call to action, foregrounding Inuit epistemology and ways of being. The third part will then explore how the author uses autobiographical subject positions, which I will argue is an effective strategy to trigger affective reaction from reading audiences.

### **Ways of Being on the Land: A Life Story of Transformations in the Canadian Arctic**

As an example of ecobiography, the genre of life writing that interweaves the autobiographical subject and region (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 268), *The Right to Be Cold* details how “Inuit culture is inseparable from the condition of their

physical surroundings" (236). The opening account of Watt-Cloutier's childhood and upbringing in Nunavik is saturated with an overwhelming sense of Inuk identity found in the narration of everyday life as an Inuit family in the Canadian Arctic. Although the first line of her memoir, "the world I was born into has changed forever" (xvii), delivers a distress signal marking the underlying message of the text, the overall tone constructs an idyllic aura fabricated in the repetition of words such as "safety," "security," "comfort" and "peace" (11). This loving environment is painted with images of family hunting trips, dog sleds and country food, an idealized childhood she recalls with "intense joy" (xvii): "To live in a boundless landscape and a close-knit culture in which everything matters and everything is connected is a kind of magic" (xvii). The initial picturesque tone of the memoir shifts in the abrupt transition from the comforts of her homeland to a number of southern schools, a time period she diagnoses as fatal to her sense of identity. This reasoning leads her to contend that, based on her own experience, severing Inuit from the traditional bond with their community and removing them from the land is conducive to the precarious circumstances Inuit are confronted with today. As a result, motivated to restore Inuit ways of being, she initiates her career addressing three major issues: the education system in Nunavik, persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and climate change.

Principally, Watt-Cloutier's work reforming the education system pushed for programs that would reconcile principles of traditional Inuit epistemology, known as Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), with the curriculum in an effort to repair the rupture between the younger generation of Inuit and their Arctic environment. A sense of frustration can be picked up as she details a series of discouraging events and confrontational incidents, realizing that the obstacles impeding these changes were "too large, too systemic" for her task force to tackle (87). However, the memoir reaches a turning point when she attends an Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) assembly and discovers persistent organic pollutants (POPs) are responsible for a large part of the demise of the Arctic environment. This revelation brings her to identify environmental issues as a direct threat to Inuit well-being, systemically determining the social issues encountered during her work in education. Here, a sense of optimism and energy pervades the text, taking on a new tone as a "rights narrative" (Schaffer and Smith, 2004) describing the political fight against the use of POPs and the petition for legal action on climate change.

Similar to Amitav Ghosh's (2016) view of climate change as a 'threat multiplier,' *The Right* essentially demonstrates that the repercussions of colonization, resulting in intergenerational trauma and a lack of self-determination, are intensified by the decline in the Arctic environment. In order to illustrate this point, it is important to first consider how Inuit ways of being have transformed within the historical context of the Canadian Arctic.

The primary source of colonial interference in Inuit ways of being can be traced back to the triumvirate of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and Christian missionaries. As Arctic whales and fur became a coveted commodity, an influx of foreign whalers and trappers settled in the North, hiring Inuit to collaborate in their activities, bolstering trade with the HBC (Wright 110). Christian missionaries, ignoring what had hitherto been highly functioning cultural systems, determined to convert Inuit and conform them to Canadian society (Laugrand and Oosten 379). In the 1950s, the Canadian government moved from a position of dispersing the Inuit on the land to centralizing them in settlements, enforced by the RCMP, subjecting them to systems and institutions inherently embedded within the culture of imperialism (Wright 141). One example of this manifestation of control can be found in the government issued military identification tags, what Watt-Cloutier calls "dog" tags, engraved with a disc number system to indicate relation and location of each community member, as Inuit did not have conventional surnames. To counteract this dehumanization, the Inuit-led "Project Surname" underwent an operation of assigning last names in a process that reidentified Inuit in a matter of 2 years, transforming traditional social relations even more than the military issued tags themselves. Other means of submitting Inuit communities to southern ways of being were more aggressive, such as the mass sled dog slaughter between the 1950s and 1970s, an affair Inuit call Qimmijjaqtauniq. The justification for these killings, the RCMP claimed, was for public health and safety, although the loss of sled dogs rendered Inuit incapable of traditional hunting by following game and coerced Inuit into permanent settlement (Vowel 251). Watt-Cloutier recalls these changes in Inuit ways of being in her memoir, even alluding to her disc number in one instance. However, the anecdote about narrowly avoiding an accident with a snowmobile while visiting her home on Christmas break confirms the abrupt pace of these transformations. Oblivious to the tragedy that had taken place while she was away at school, she comes to the realization that she must learn to safely navigate the streets of swarming snowmobiles that had suddenly replaced the sled dogs.

In addition to these traumas, Inuit children were forced into residential school systems that used "tactics of denigration, shaming and harsh physical, sexual and psychological abuse" (Nicholas 21) as "part of a coherent policy to eliminate Aboriginal people as distinct peoples and to assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream against their will" (Truth and Reconciliation, *Honouring* 3). Like so many others, Watt-Cloutier was among those selected for education outside of the Arctic, staying with different host families and even spending a few years at a residential school. As part of this process of assimilation, she shares how her letters home, written in English, were censored and she

was never able to express her homesickness freely, attributing what she calls the weakening of her voice (31), a trope encountered throughout her memoir. But, I would like to point out that her Inuktitut voice, found in the uncensored letters to her grandmother in Inuktitut syllabics, remained firmly established and unfiltered. After her time living with southern host families, she moves into Churchill Vocational Centre and considers her years there a favorable experience that strengthened her fellowship with other Inuit children and offered her the means to build up confidence and leadership, much needed life skills that would aid her political career (40). Cautiously, she clarifies that although her years at the residential school were overall positive, “not everyone may have felt this way” (45), pointing out that recent studies carried out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) have uncovered some cases of abuse in Churchill. “The Final Report of the TRC on The Inuit and Northern Experience” concludes that residential schooling was ultimately cultural genocide and it “disrupted the intergenerational transmission of values and skills:”

When they returned to their communities, they were estranged from their parents, their language, and their culture. Many of their parents, the generation still in a state of shock from the upheavals of the 1940s through the 1960s, could not knit their communities back together again. The removal of children added to the damage already done by other economic and demographic changes. And jobs—which were the main inducement to parents to give up their young people—generally failed to materialize. But despite these hardships, many Survivors found the courage and the energy to begin to pull their lives and their communities back together. (187)

Although Watt-Cloutier's time away from the Arctic unmistakably precipitated an identity crisis, by striving for the retention of her mother tongue and aspiring to leadership among other Inuit, she affirms her Inuk identity and Inuktitut voice. Therefore, this memoir is an example of Inuit life writing that asserts Inuit voices as a contribution to the ongoing discussions of historical vulnerabilities while emphasizing Inuit resilience amidst these transitions.

Additionally, *The Right* indicates how the precarity of Inuit relationship to the land, vital to Inuit identity, is twofold: firstly, in the ongoing aftermath of the aforementioned colonial interference with traditional Inuit ways of being; and secondly, in the current unsustainable conditions of the changing Arctic environment. The repercussions of this intersection between the two temporalities of historical colonialism and contemporary climate crisis have jeopardized the well-being of Inuit communities. As a result, Watt-Cloutier posits a reframing of the question of Arctic climate change by presenting it as a human rights violation so as to guarantee “protection against the power of others” (219).

Reframing climate change as a human rights violation also questions the normative earth, nonhuman and animal-centered approaches to environmental justice, and instead underlines the importance of a human-centered perspective. Inuit ways of being prioritize a safeguarding of the Arctic as a whole, including wildlife, although many anti-sealers, such as Paul McCartney during his 2006 campaign, condemn hunting practices. Watt-Cloutier makes a particular reference to this affair confessing the betrayal Inuit felt as a member of the first rock band that connected Inuit to the outside world essentially alienated and disregarded their way of life (43). Using this incident, she explains that while southerners have aversion to images of animal blood, Inuit understand that

this blood offered to us by our wildlife will keep our own blood warm and fuel us from the inside as we, along with our wildlife, spend hours in the deep cold—a deep cold that all life, including the flora, fauna, and Inuit, depend on in order to remain healthy and vibrant. (247)

She further explains this by sharing an anecdote about a southern filmmaker who refused the country food offered to him saying that he had “too much of an affinity for whales to eat them,” to which she replied, “but we too have an affinity for whales, which is why we eat them” (248). Later, a nursing Inuit mother offers the filmmaker some of the country food she was eating, a picture reflecting the interconnectedness between Arctic wildlife, the woman and her baby, and without thinking he accepts it. What the author designs to show by including these stories is then how environmentalist approaches must not disregard the cultural significance of the dependency on hunting and country food.

One of the author’s primary intentions is to clarify that traditional hunting practices are not only crucial for sustenance, but also for the continuation of Inuit ways of being. Hunting provides younger generations with the opportunity of acquiring “the character skills one would learn on the hunt such as patience, boldness, tenacity, focus, courage, sound judgement and wisdom” (254). These, she adds, are life skills that are transferrable to other situations, aiding young Inuit to cope with the current social issues that plague their communities, namely substance abuse, violence, depression, and suicide. This is just one of the numerous rationalizations that identifies the precarious social conditions as inseparable from the environment:

It was clear to me that a holistic approach must be taken to heal the wounds that affect Inuit communities— historical traumas; current spiritual, social, health, and economic problems; *and* the environmental assaults on our way of life. Our challenges cannot be “siloeed” or looked at in isolation if we want to rise above them. (xxiii)

From this perspective, climate change is not merely seen as a contributing factor to the incessant state of devastation but also a driving force in the infringement of basic human rights: "the protection from climate change was essential in order to secure the social, cultural, and economic rights that were already internationally recognized" (224).

While *The Right* presents unquestionable anti-colonialist discourse that denounces "the deep historical traumas," Watt-Cloutier is very clear to address the problem of Indigenous self-determination: "It should have come as no surprise that if young people didn't see their elders take command of their lives and their culture, they would quickly lose their own sense of responsibility and survival" (111). In her opinion, we're still facing poverty, social and health problems, and many other struggles because we, along with our governments, haven't learned how to empower our communities to become prosperous and sustainable regions (291). As she sees it, it was *ilira*, or fear, that "made it difficult to speak for ourselves, to find our own voices" (99). However, I would point out that this translation of "fear" connotes a sense of submission to qallunaat out of fright. Instead, I would defer to Louis-Jacques Dorais' (2020) translation "high respect" and would like to point out that while there was a time qallunaat authorities were "sources of *ilira*... because of the power over the Indigenous population and the penalties they could inflict" (89), it is certainly not a sentiment that has been passed down to Inuit today. What has silenced generations of Inuit voices is, in essence, a manifestation of the deeply ingrained IQ principles of respect, cooperation and the desire for harmonious ways of being.

Accordingly, the predominant motivator in her petition for the Right to Be Cold boils down to self-determination: "ensuring that we continue to have a frozen Arctic allows us Inuit to *choose* our own future" (303).

### Confronting the Climate Crisis: A Global Call to Action

Despite being bound to the region of the Canadian Arctic, *The Right* presents a call to action that is demanded on a global scale. From the perspective of ecobiography, "a textual place from which to call for an ethic of care for the environment" (Smith and Watson 161), the strength of the text lies in the exhortation addressed, on the one hand, to her Inuit community, and, on the other, to "the global community" (322). Aside from the overarching objective of compelling political and social change, Watt-Cloutier addresses her own people prevailing on them to return to traditional ways of being in order to reconcile their severed relationship with the land, and to her global audience she resolves to expose the connectedness of the world to Arctic environmental degradation. Capturing the intricacies of a region that depends on international mitigation

measures to protect itself from the threat of external activity, she demands international action: "Our challenges were local, but they were part of something global. Our problems were not made in the Arctic. So our solutions couldn't be entirely local either" (121). With this in mind, I would also point out that the global ethic of care proposed is a particular feature of Arctic climate change as it pulls the addressee into the vulnerable collective by reminding the reader of the global scale of the climate crisis: "I [...] hope that this book inspires others to take up the cause of the climate change. What is happening today in the Arctic is the future of the rest of the world" (xxv). From this vantage point, the implications of the message trigger a unique self-regarding aspect to the ethical imperative of climate change action.

Throughout the memoir, the call to action swings back and forth between tones of reassurance and alarmist, a contradiction which she herself is aware of and refers to as a "strange balancing act" (150). On the one hand, the author exudes confidence in the resiliency and adaptability of the next generation, while on the other, her alarmist tone alerts to the urgency of her call to action:

I hope... that future generations will continue to be global citizens with a vibrant culture that is uniquely Inuit. Yet because of climate change, this future, my grandson's future and the future of generations to come, is melting away. (323)

But, while the text expresses and definitely contributes to the ongoing discussion of the multiple vulnerabilities, it also, at the same time, foregrounds the historical adaptability, resilience and ingenuity of Inuit. Based on Jane Danielewicz's (2018) idea that life writing demonstrates "how writers believe in the possibility of action and how they honor their convictions through memoir" (5), I would add that Watt-Cloutier's autobiographical act and the inclusion of the trope of hope exemplifies a confidence in potential change and in Inuit ability to continue thriving in the Arctic, essentially overcoming the sense of alarmism.

In terms of the formal aspects of her call to action, I would like to point out the convergence of the peaceful and composed delivery of her powerful textual battle-cry. The author objects to wielding an "adversarial approach" to her petition and instead, repeatedly utilizes tactics of persuasion in the form of appealing to her audience "on a personal level" (209). Nonetheless, her consistent use of the analogy of the sentinel equates Inuit experience of climate change to that of wartime. Indeed, one of the concluding lines upholds this comparison: "We are on the front lines of the cataclysmic environmental shifts that are affecting the world" (325). Again, this metaphor is reinforced as she repetitively suggests Inuit take "the moral high ground" and maintain their "moral compass" challenging the many instances where Inuit have decided to adapt



to southern industries, such as resource extraction, and have compromised Inuit values (315). Using rhetorical questions she confronts this situation:

How will our hunters, men, women, and youth, those who have known the wisdom of the land, feel at the end of a workday spent digging up and destroying the very land they have held sacred? Will these short-term jobs really address the dispiritedness of our men, a dispiritedness that is at the root of the social and health ailments of our communities? In other words, will the resource industry help make our communities safer? (293)

Watt-Cloutier goes on to argue that the optics of a people that welcome unsustainable industries undermine their demand for climate change action, bringing the image to a full circle, stating that the “high ground is fracturing as quickly as the ice is melting” (294). While her arguments deny antagonism, her rhetoric is riddled with a vocabulary that connotes conflict, to the extent that she even inserts her voice to explain that “my voice on these issues is once again about reaching out, not striking out” (294). I would argue that the idiosyncratic nature of these analogies intensifies the sense of responsibility to inform and alert on the nature of the changing climate “and to spur people and nations to action” (324), ultimately aligning with the principles of IQ that value serving, decision-making, learning, cooperation, resourcefulness and environmental stewardship (Wenzel 242).

Hunting is an essential exercise of these principles, as Inuit use the land as a “natural teacher of life” (110). In the author’s own words:

hunting has taught us to value patience, endurance, courage, and good judgement. The hunter embodies calm, respectfulness, caring for others. *Silatuniq* is the Inuktitut word for wisdom— and much of it is taught through the experiential observation of the hunt... But this important traditional knowledge has begun to lose its value as a result of the dramatic changes to our environment. This wisdom, which comes from a hunting culture dependent on the ice and snow, is as threatened as the ice itself. (xix-xx)

The unreliable, unstable climate has compromised the practice of Inuit hunting culture, rendering hunters vulnerable to unpredictable local weather. The already high-risk activities such as seal, whale, caribou and polar bear hunting have become even more dangerous due to unexpected changes in the weather and melting sea ice at times of the year that had hitherto been traditional hunting seasons.

An entire chapter of *The Right* is dedicated to this issue, titled “Voices of the Hunters,” centering the role of the Indigenous voice in the collection of

ecological knowledge, exemplifying the extent to which Indigenous epistemology aligns perfectly with what scientific research has also determined:

Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, and sea level has risen. (IPCC, 2)

The hunters' accounts illustrate how the migratory patterns of sea mammals have changed as a consequence of the melting sea ice, rendering the once predictable hunting activities on known terrain unreliable. The hunters also tell of how the change in types of snowfall compromises the integrity of snow houses, which are the only means of protection against the cold, wind and predators such as polar bears. Still others compare how sea mammals and land animals are not as healthy or fatty as they were before (188-93).

The inclusion of the hunters' stories clearly promotes Indigenous knowledge, as Watt-Cloutier reasons that Inuit knowledge of climate change must be considered as sound contributions to scientific documentation:

Science is a body of knowledge, and a way of knowing based on rigorous observation. By this definition, the hunters who criss-cross the ice and snow and embody centuries of observation are scientists. When they describe what is happening to their landscape, the world needs to listen. (199)

However, it is not uncommon to encounter reports of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in international and governmental assessments such as the IPCC's Synthesis Reports. TEK has been extensively exhausted and presented for political purposes in the decision-making processes of climate change mitigation and adaptation. That being said, the unique quality of the inclusion of the Inuit hunter voices contributes differently to current scientific knowledge in that these accounts are human-centered. It is through these testimonies of accidents, injuries and even losses, that she offers the human facet of climate change, inciting an affective response to an otherwise factual report. In her own words: "I was adamant about adding the 'heart' of the matter to the political and scientific words" (162). As has been suggested at the beginning of this paper, unlike most science-centered representations of Arctic climate change found in international discussions, *The Right to Be Cold* brings firsthand narratives to the fore, exemplifying a text that puts climate change into what Candis Callison (2012) proposes as a "vernacular" or that which is communicated and integrated into a comprehensive account (46), in this case, of how Inuit have come to know climate change. In this way, a study of climate change as represented in

life writing can bring the felt experience of climate change and vicariousness to debates that have been mostly concerned with factual evidence. Concomitantly, the inclusion and integration of personal experience and affectivity function as means of bridging the gap between scientific observation and public understanding of the lived exposure to Arctic climate change.

Another noteworthy feature of this engagement with the collective memory of Inuit hunters is how it is distinctively intertwined with individual memory. As an example of how the author adheres to IQ principles of storytelling by honoring "the commitment to speaking only from experience" (Martin 107-8), the following excerpt corroborates a story of one of the hunters, Ronald Brower, by means of her own memory, with the purpose of pointing out the drastic rate at which these incidents have increased:

All my years growing up in Kuujuaq, I don't recall many stories of hunters having accidents with breaking ice. I remember hearing of one elder and her grandchild who fell through and drowned, but such events were rare. Now we were hearing stories like Ronald's all the time. And when I moved to Iqaluit, I was reminded of the tragic results almost every day. My neighbor, Simon Nattaq, had fallen through the ice on a hunting trip soon after I moved to Nunavut. (186)

This engagement with memory therefore shows how Inuit autobiography can actively put IQ into practice and observe Inuit ways of storytelling. I would also like to bring attention to the fact that the voices of the hunters in this text are male, yet as Dowsley et al. (2010) have argued, knowledge of climate change is not gendered. Inuit women participate in a critical social role "discussing environmental knowledge, processing it within the household and disseminating it to others" (157), as seen in the inclusion of the stories Watt-Cloutier has heard herself from local hunters.

As an account of both successes and failures, this memoir also aligns with the didactic nature of traditional Inuit storytelling. Keavy Martin (2015) has extensively examined how *unipkaaqtuat*, or traditional Inuit stories, contain "important lessons about ways to live a good life" (45). The author does not shy away from repetitively acknowledging that her life's work was not only purposed to serve Inuit but also to set a precedent for future generations, which is why she engages in the autobiographical act. However, not all of her professional endeavors were successful, as seen for instance in the rejection of the Petition to the Right to Be Cold and the loss of the Nobel Peace Prize to Al Gore. There is also a noticeable pattern of misfortunes that follow each milestone in her career: her divorce, her daughter's accident and the death of her sister are just a few examples. It is during these episodes of grief, opposition and failure that she responds with perseverance and resilience:

I needed these character skills in order to survive my grief. [...] There were many times I thought I could not carry on. But I learned that true commitment really begins when we reach a point of not knowing how we can possibly go on— and then somehow find the strength to go on anyway. (278)

Whereas Reneé Hulan (2018) writes that “Her success as a leader offers a model of how modern Inuit life can teach others to succeed” (71), I would like to add that the extensive and detailed account of the obstacles and failures in her memoir also serve a pedagogical function by exemplifying resilience. In her own words:

My maternal instincts also tell me that it is extremely important that the younger generation see beyond the material recognition and grasp the meaning of success: achievements reflect an acceptance of the human condition, with all its challenges, and they mark the human journey, which requires us to show up and focus, commit to our passions, persevere, and endure the moments of struggle and loss in order to overcome them and transform our lives (xxv).

Therefore, similar to the *unipkaaqtuat*, or traditional Inuit stories that contain “important lessons about ways to live a good life” (Keavy Martin, 45), I would argue that Inuit life writing, grounded in IQ like *The Right to Be Cold*, can serve the same purpose of guiding young generations of Inuit through the difficulties of modern-day ways of being.

Considering the stress placed on the maternal subject position of the excerpt quoted above, I will now turn to examine the role womanhood in this life writing.

## Affect as an Autobiographical Approach

In the Introduction, Watt-Cloutier makes her identity very clear before delving into her memoir: “As an Inuk woman, a mother, and a grandmother... I want to offer a human story from this unique vantage point” (xxiv). From the very beginning, the author invites the reader to approach her life writing from the perspective of these three subject positions.

In autobiographical theory, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (*Women* 1998) have argued that women’s life writing has made visible “formerly invisible subjects” (5). The Indigenous subject position is explicitly drawn on throughout her memoir as one of Watt-Cloutier’s intentions of writing is to share “the story of Inuit history and contemporary Inuit life, through my lens” and “correct the preconceived notions of the Arctic and Inuit that many people hold” (xxiv-xxv).

Through this autoethnographical perspective, or “lens of culture” (Adams 1), the author magnifies the significance of the cultural transitions Inuit women have experienced in this process of modernization.

Firstly, she observes that in a matter of just twenty years, Inuit women had become vulnerable to gender-based violence. Upon returning to the Arctic after spending her teenage years in southern schools, working as a translator at a health clinic, she writes:

As a young woman, I was witnessing the painful, destructive connection between addiction and alcohol abuse and violence. And I was seeing that it was women who were bearing the brunt of this terrible social unraveling. (62)

This transformation, born of qallunaat interference with Inuit hunting culture and the effects of *ilira* mentioned earlier, arose from the “loss of integrity and pride” that festered into shame, guilt, anger and resentment, deemed the “wounded hunter spirit” (73). While the men fought to make their way in the new Arctic that no longer reflected Inuit ways of being, many Inuit women adapted into positions in society as wage earners displacing the traditional “hunter-provider” role of Inuit men (74). Tending to the injured Inuit women at the clinic, she is careful to consider the shame and embarrassment many displayed as their abusers were oftentimes beloved members of the community. At this moment, she adopts a collective voice:

In the past, we had seen our men working on their sleds, carefully, meticulously preparing the runners; tightening the ropes; focusing on the tiniest details. And we had seen them heading out onto the land. We all knew they would be spending hours, days in silence and stillness, disappearing into the landscape so that caribou or the seals might appear. Their masterful control and focus were more important than anything. But later, as the years passed, we started to see men traveling out onto the land with booze packed alongside their food and supplies in the qamutiik. How could they hunt when they were drinking? How could they afford to engage in reckless habits in a remote and often unforgiving terrain, where clarity and focus are a must and where injury might quickly lead to death? How could they accept these bursts of violence when we as Inuit have traditionally looked at anger and loss of control as the most childish of behaviors? And why would they sacrifice the meditative, clarifying, healing experience of being on the land in exchange for mind-fogging booze? (64)

Here, the use of rhetorical questions and negative assertions creates, as it were, a small dialogue, using this very deliberate command of language as a means of “moral suasion” (Schaffer and Smith 3). As a result, the ethical dimension

of the diction contributes to the unremitting tone of the aforementioned rights narrative, demanding recognition of the injustices of their situation.

Watt-Cloutier is acutely aware of her influence, acknowledging the significance of her role as an Indigenous woman in leadership on many occasions:

I was one of the few women leaders at these forums, and as an Aboriginal one, I was an even rarer entity. This crisis reminded me once again that I represented voices that often went unheard. My maternal instincts kicked in. And my desire to protect the Arctic and our culture ... gave me the courage and perseverance to increase my participation in the council meetings. (207-8)

Here, a sense of responsibility binds her positionality to the allied collective of Indigenous voices. Bearing the weight of representing not only her own community and Indigenous peoples, she attributes her fight for environmental justice to the bouts of “maternal energy” that motivated her to “protect the future for *our* children” (211; emphasis added). From the subject positions of mother and grandmother, she considers the precarious conditions in which she must raise her own children and grandchildren. The determination behind her sense of purpose reveals the deep-seated IQ principles of caretaking and serving that extend beyond her own maternity, reflecting a global mindset:

We have a common cause. A coalition of citizens, particularly women, from all regions of the globe is forming to demand that you, the governments of the world, take concrete and effective action to rid us of the POPs’ threat to our children. (162)

This “coalition of women citizens” is a fierce metaphor that reinforces a resilient and steadfast collective female voice, yet also contributes to the directness of the call to action. In this sense, the trope of love and maternal affect is drawn on to illustrate this desire to protect children, a universality that is effective in approaching environmental justice on a global scale.

Correspondingly, the chapters dedicated to the issue of POPs are also impregnated with imagery of womanhood and motherhood. Watt-Cloutier establishes that the approach to environmental justice as a human right was inspired by the figure of Rachel Carson, emphasizing her perseverance despite opposition. I would argue that the reference to Carson’s death by breast cancer lays the foundation for the importance she places on the image of breasts as indicators of health, wellness and womanhood. The author moves on to clarify that the problem of POPs found in breast milk and country food ultimately threaten Inuit ways of being. In this way, she maintains that the fight against the pollutants was meant to safeguard “families, parents, children, and grandchildren” and protect “our right to lead our lives and continue the strong traditions of our

hunting culture" (141). Illustrating the importance of breastfeeding, she conjures up the images of her own daughter nursing her grandson and Stephanie Meakin, the biologist who was either pregnant or nursing during the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) sessions, "lending powerful symbolism to our message" (160). The author even goes to the extent of presenting an Inuit soapstone carving of a breastfeeding mother to the chair of the session to bolster the ethical imperative of their task (161). Together, these images paint a picture that reveals the vulnerability of women yet manifests a shared space of womanhood and, in this case especially, motherhood, that enables an approach to environmental justice on a united front.

In safeguarding future generations of Inuit, she affirms to have "fortified" her "sense of self," stating that defending Inuit ways of being has brought her to the verdict that "I was Inuk— heart, mind, and soul" (183). This is not the first time that she mentions her Inuk soul, and I would argue that spirituality, like womanhood, plays an important role in her memoir. Whereas she makes multiple references to God, her abstract and vague language restrains from specifying what that spiritual relationship looks like: "the universe, or God, however we describe our higher power" (275). For this reason, I would instead like to examine the connection between spirit and land, unequivocally rooted in IQ: "the animals that are our country food connect us to the water and the land, to the 'source' of our life, to God" (135). On numerous occasions, she alludes to eating country food with overwhelming feelings of comfort and security. As a child, sent away to a hospital in Quebec for surgery, she refuses to eat the food provided until a First Nations woman serves her moose meat, similar to caribou, and cured her homesickness to a certain degree. This example and the many others demonstrate how country food "nourished me not only physically but spiritually as well" (137). Hence, securing country food, understood as vital to her spirituality, is a motivating factor in her fight for protecting Inuit hunting practices.

What these examples demonstrate is how the overall message avails of motherhood and spirituality as affective responses to environmental justice, a notion that is crucial to understanding the approach to climate change as a human right. From a theoretical perspective, the rights narrative provides a space that can embrace this manifestation of affect and draw on it to "invite an ethical response from listeners and readers" (Schaffer and Smith 4), a notion that I will argue aligns with the aforementioned call to action. In the words of Eva Darias-Beautell, "an affective perspective on literature opens up the space between the mind's power to think and the body's power to act as well as between the power to be affected and the power to act" (453).

Zygmunt Bauman (1993) notes that acquiring knowledge of others occurs naturally by living in close quarters and observing how others perceive their surroundings. This acquisition relies on intimacy, whereas larger distances

between subjects effect anonymity (148). Watt-Cloutier addresses this gap, acknowledging that “people don’t damage the earth out of malice. We all want to do what’s right– it’s just not always easy to understand what that is” (210). To view life writing as an opportunity to gain this knowledge of people in remote and inaccessible locations, such as the Arctic, is to close in on the distance that restrains knowledge of other experiences and perceptions to a scale of proximity. Put simply, bearing witness to Arctic climate change by reading *The Right to Be Cold* is thus a means to swing from Bauman’s pole of anonymity to intimacy and engage in a process of acknowledgment, awareness, and reflection and feeling, key contributions to discussions of environmental ethics.

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate the substantiality of Inuit life writing as a means to intimate Inuit experience of the current climate crisis. The cultural and identity shifts detailed in *The Right to Be Cold*, inseparable from the transformations of the Arctic environment, are a testament to the vulnerability, adaptability and ingenuity of Inuit ways of being. The ubiquitous influence of traditional Inuit epistemology and the principles of IQ that permeate the memoir contribute to an approach to environmental justice that advocates Inuit voice and insight. The author’s call to action effectively communicates the sense of urgency for environmental ethics and Indigenous self-determinism in the face of climate change. Her subject positions as Indigenous woman and mother enable vicariousness in the text, constructing an affective approach to the issues of environmental justice.

In my analysis, I have demonstrated that Inuit life writing is an asset to the human rights framework, as affectivity in life writing becomes an effective tool for literary representations of climate change as a human-centered experience. These findings suggest that, similar to the image of the Inuk sentinel, *The Right to Be Cold* functions as textual means of sounding the alarm, forewarning its global audience of the ethical imperative of imminent climate change.

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