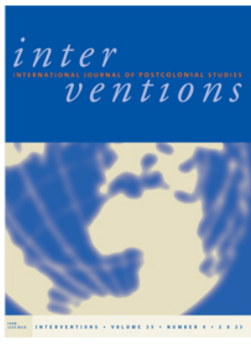

Interventions

International Journal of Postcolonial Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/riij20

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Traces of an Arctic Voice: The Portrait of Qalaherriaq

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To cite this article: Ingeborg Høvik & Axel Jeremiassen (2023): Traces of an Arctic Voice: The Portrait of Qalaherriaq, Interventions, DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2023.2169626

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2023.2169626

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Published online: 09 Feb 2023.

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TRACES OF AN ARCTIC VOICE: THE PORTRAIT OF QALAHERRIAQ

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Arctic exploration
civilizing mission
concurrences
contact zone
Inughuit
Qalaherriaq

This article analyses the portrait of the young Inughuit hunter Qalaherriaq, who was brought involuntarily to England from his home in Perlernerit (Cape York) in today's Kalaallit Nunaat (also known as Greenland) with Captain Erasmus Ommanney's expedition vessel in 1851. The portrait's highly unconventional representation, wherein the sitter is shown both en face and in profile, betrays an interest in nineteenth-century racial science and civilizing ideologies. Despite this problematic colonialist content, the double portrait serves as a record for the existence and experience of Qalaherriaq and the participation of Inuit individuals in European expeditions to the Arctic. As this article argues, the portrait is also a visual testimony to Qalaherriaq's agency, adaptability, and deliberate performance in a social environment characterized by ethnocentrism and racism. Bringing in the trail of Inughuit and European sources that this portrait connects to, this article traces the nature and terms of Qalaherriaq's stay in British society. As a decolonizing strategy, we use the method of concurrences to avoid universalizing perspectives on the past. Examining moments of competing truth claims in the European and Arctic sources about or relating to Qalaherriaq, we point to the competing

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

interventions, 2023
https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2023.2169626
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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

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perspectives on the Arctic, exploration, and British imperialism contained in this material.

Introduction

Situated between the Old Royal Naval College and the Royal Observatory – the "home" of Greenwich Mean Time and the prime meridian – the National Maritime Museum (NMM) in Greenwich testifies to Britain's history as an overseas imperial power. The museum's vast holdings include a large collection of fine art paintings. One of these is the portrait of a young Inughuit (Stern 2013, 67-68), or High Arctic hunter from the Northwest inKalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), named Qalaherriaq (d. 1856).[1] Also known as Erasmus York, Caloosa, Calahierna, Kalli, York, Kallihirua, Kalersik, Ka'le'sik, Qalaseq, Kalesing and Qalaherhuaq, he spent the last six years of his short life living in different British environments in the West Greenlandic and northeast Canadian Arctic and in England (Figure 1).[2] Rendered by an unknown artist sometime in the early 1850s, this painting portrays

1 The NMM uses the names Qalasirssuaq and Erasmus Augustine Kallihirua. Our decision to use Qalaherriaq (applying the Inughuit ending -herriaq rather than the West Greenlandic [Kalaallisut] -suaq) corresponds with how he likely would have pronounced the word Kallihirua, which he explained was his native name and used as his signature (Washington 1853, vi). This also resonates with the orthography Harper (2019, 35–36) applies in his brief biography on Qalaherhuaq.

2 Qalaherriaq's name varies in historical sources. Aboard Ommanney's vessel, he was renamed Erasmus York (Petersen 1857, 35). In 1853, he was baptized Erasmus Augustine Kallihirua, although "Kalli" and "York" were used

Figure 1 Artist unknown, *Qalasirssuaq (Erasmus Augustine Kallihirua)*, c. 1832/5–1856. Oil on canvas, 63.4 × 76.2 cm. BHC2813. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Qalaherriaq in a manner highly unconventional for European portraiture at the time. Dressed in a black jacket with a white shirt, wing collar, and black tie, Qalaherriaq appears in two half-length views simultaneously. Showing the sitter both *en face* and in rigid profile, the portrait is a highly unusual combination of traditional European portraiture and scientific imaging that speaks to the colonial context of Qalaherriaq's life in British society.

Since 2018 this painting has been on display in the NMM's new Polar Worlds gallery, where it hangs alongside images of Arctic explorers, landscapes and seascapes, artefacts connected to exploration and Inuit culture, and taxidermy specimens.[3] As one of just a few paintings depicting the numerous individual Inuit who partook in British exploration – as guides, translators, tailors, seamstresses, map-makers, hunters, and more – the NMM's double portrait of Qalaherriaq is rightly included among the formal portraits of British explorers commemorated by the museum space and its narrative. But this welcome inclusion is necessarily tainted by the painting's (for us) unavoidable duality, which remains problematically unaddressed by the NMM's display and online catalogue (https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-14286).

Taking this portrait as our starting point, we examine overlapping and at times conflicting narratives about Qalaherriaq's identity and experiences. To counter the dominant (Western) history of the Arctic, we draw on Fur's (2017) methodology of *concurrences* to critically examine the interrelationships between European source material, Inuit oral history, and – crucially – the small handful of Qalaherriaq's writings and drawings to have survived the passing of time. The result, though incomplete, is a piecing together of but one of the many microhistories of Inuit lives that intersected with European imperialism in the nineteenth century. It stands as a powerful counter to dominant (Eurocentric) narratives on the Arctic that assert the region as a white, pure, and empty space untainted by the messiness of colonial rule in the south, but rather the ideal space for the testing and exhibiting of white masculinity.

more frequently, also by himself (Murray 1856, 11, 33; letters in Canterbury Cathedral Archives). Petersen (1857, 1860), who was familiar with the Kalaallisut rather than the Inughuit dialect, uses Kalersik and Ka'le'sik, while Rasmussen (1915) uses Qalaseq. Based on information from Petersen's narrative, Møller (1883) refers to Kalesing. Rasmussen's and Møller's perspectives were as Kalaallisut speakers, which may explain the choice of spelling.

3 It also featured in the NMM's 2011 exhibition, *The North-West Passage*.

Background

Qalaherriaq may have been 16 years old when he first boarded Captain Erasmus Ommanney's HMS *Assistance* at Perlernerit (Cape York) in August 1850 (Missionen i Nordpolarlandene 1869, 35; Markham 1905, 221–224).[4] Ommanney and his crew were part of Captain Horatio Austin's 1850–1851 search expedition for John Franklin and, in order to prove false the accusation that his people, the Inughuit,

4 Both sources note Qalaherriaq's age to be 16 when he joined

Ommanney's ship in 1850. Most likely, the explorers determined his age by their own estimation, based on their reading of his physical appearance".

had killed Franklin's men, Qalaherriaq accepted – in a deal brokered by Carl Petersen, a Dane who lived in Kalaallit Nunaat and worked as one of Austin's expedition interpreters – to *briefly* serve as a guide for the explorers (Petersen 1857, 35–36). After leading Ommanney and his crew to the site of the rumoured massacre, further north along the west coast of Kalaallit Nunaat in Uummannap Kangerlua (Wolstenholme Sound), Qalaherriaq was not returned to his home and family in Perlernerit as originally agreed; apparently, ice floes blocked the way. Instead, he spent the next year aboard the HMS *Assistance* in winter harbour.

When Ommanney's crew set off on their return journey to Britain in August 1851, Qalaherriaq was meant to finally be returned to his home and people in Perlernerit. However, Ommanney again failed to make the agreed stop as promised – this time due to ice conditions that reportedly made landfall impossible (*Illustrated London News*, October 25, 1851, 514; Murray 1856, 12). Rather, Qalaherriaq was involuntarily taken to England and enrolled at St Augustine's Missionary College in Canterbury by the Lords of the Admiralty in November 1851 (Murray 1856, 28; Bullock, October 29, 1851).

Although numerous other Franklin search expeditions and whaling vessels sailed to Northwest Kalaallit Nunaat the following years, Qalaherriaq was never given passage back to Perlernerit. He lived at St Augustine's for the next four years and was trained as a missionary – presumably, as was communicated to him, to eventually return home to missionize among his people (Missionen i Nordpolarlandene 1869, 36; Murray 1856, 28; Bullock, October 29, 1851). As late as 1853, Qalaherriaq expressed that "he should like to teach *his* countrymen the many good and useful things which he had learned" and that "he hoped to tell *his* people about religion" (Murray 1856, 34 [emphasis added]). In the autumn of 1855, however, the Admiralty instead sent him to Newfoundland for more religious training at the College of the Theological Institution in St John's so that he could later work as a missionary not with the Inughuit in Northwest Kalaallit Nunaat, but in Canada among the Inuit in Labrador (Murray 1856, 45–46; Bailey, December 22, 1855). On 14 June 1856, just eight months into his stay in St John's, Qalaherriaq died from lung tuberculosis (Bailey, July 16, 1856; Murray 1856, 52–53) that he had contracted some years earlier (most likely aboard Ommanney's ship in 1850) and continuously suffered from. Indeed, two of the few words Qalaherriaq communicated upon his arrival in England – "[v]ery sick" (Murray 1856, 22) – seem to poignantly foreshadow the tragic endpoint of what proved to be (as it was for many other Inuit) a fateful intersection with British colonial endeavours in the Arctic.

Literature, primary sources and theoretical framework

The existing scholarship on Qalaherriaq comprises a few Greenlandic-, Danish-, and English-language articles (Møller 1883; Bugge 1965, 1966, 1981; Sturtevant and Kleivan 1998; Kleivan 1999; NMM entry on Qalaherriaq's portrait). Despite these and a few other scholarly and popular publications on Qalaherriaq's participation in the Franklin search expeditions and his subsequent stay in England and Newfoundland, his story is not well known in Kalaallit Nunaat or elsewhere today.[5]

5 In 2022, we published two articles in Kalaallisut (Greenlandic) on Qalaherriaq in the popular journal *Kalaaleq* (issues 2 and 3). Qalaherriaq is also mentioned in the following literature: Savours (1963); Gilberg (1994, 232–235); Wilson (1987); Harper (2019, 35–36).

Our article critically expands on existing literature on Qalaherriaq by both revisiting the primary sources and information that have circulated previously, and introducing additional unpublished primary sources – to which we bring an art-historical perspective and postcolonial methodology.

The most substantial European primary source on Qalaherriaq's life and experiences in British society is the Reverend Murray's (1856) sixty-four-page memoir *Kalli, the Esquimaux Christian*, published the year Qalaherriaq died. As Secretary to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Murray was from the start part of the circle of people – comprised of Royal Navy officers and clergy in Canterbury – who structured Qalaherriaq's new life in England. His memoir is based on personal contact with both Qalaherriaq and other members of this circle. Other primary sources include accounts from the Franklin search expeditions and letters of correspondence between the figures governing Qalaherriaq's life and education in Canterbury and St John's. These European primary sources provide useful information about Qalaherriaq's various whereabouts and undertakings – first aboard Ommanney's vessel (1850–1851), then in England (1851–1855), and finally in Newfoundland (1855–1856). They reveal instances where Qalaherriaq speaks up against the ethnocentric and patriarchal system that dictated his circumstances. At the same time, these texts and images are often problematic as sources of information. Produced by men in the Royal Navy and other people within their circle, scientists, and members of the clergy, they generally betray their authors' support of the British civilizing mission in the Arctic. In this material, there are also several texts (by men within the same circle) that discuss the "Esquimaux" in relation to current debates in the human sciences.

Against these sources, we find traces of Qalaherriaq's voice through instances of direct self-expression. A handful of letters and five drawings survive from his time at St Augustine's in Canterbury and St John's in Newfoundland, now kept in the Cathedral Archives in Canterbury and Derbyshire Record Office respectively. Although these few pieces of paper no doubt represent but a small part of what he wrote and drew, they are important testimonies to Qalaherriaq's desire to reflect on and express a critique

(albeit subtle) of his involuntary stay in England, and to assert the continued importance to him of his Arctic homeland.

The local Greenlandic perspective on Qalaherriaq's sudden disappearance from his community is preserved in Inughuit oral history, as mediated by the Danish-Greenlandic explorer and anthropologist Knud Rasmussen (1879–1933). In the early twentieth century, Rasmussen (1915, 182–185; 1925, 138–139) recorded and published one version of this story, titled "Da 'Navlen' blev bortført" (When "Navlen"[6] [the navel] was abducted).

6 The title is in Danish and "Navlen" translates as the navel. In Inuktun (the Inughuit dialect) the navel also refers to the Pole.

We follow the thread of this special issue in borrowing the term *contact zone* developed by Mary Louise Pratt (2008) to designate the social spaces (in both the Arctic and Britain) where Qalaherriaq met and interacted with British culture. Like Pratt, we believe that although the forms of contact in these spaces were characterized by highly asymmetrical power relations, colonial encounters were also informed by various degrees of dialogue and common understanding between the cultures involved. Emphasizing "how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other", Pratt's (2008, 8) contact perspective foregrounds the interactive dimension of colonial encounters, which she points out is "easily ignored or suppressed by accounts of conquest and domination told from the invader's perspective". The concept of the contact zone is useful, therefore, because it allows for the agency of marginalized individuals, even though typically their voices are hidden, manipulated, or absent in the European archives that contain them.

The contact zone is also helpful because it foregrounds the existence of Indigenous transcultural sources that are more available to scholars removed in time and culture from the object of study (Pratt 2008, 7). In our analysis of this material, we apply Fur's (2017, 40) method of *concurrences*, which is reminiscent of Pratt's contact zone in the way it emphasizes how the "manner in which human beings narrate and engage with their world(s)" is characterized by "intersections, contentions, imbalances, and bridge-building". Concurrences encompasses agreement but also, and at times more so, competition and incompatibility, it "signals contestations over interpretations and harbours different, diverging, and at times competing claims" (40). In analysing European and Arctic sources about or relating to Qalaherriaq, we seek out such moments of contestations or competing truth claims. Our interest is distinctly not to expand dominant history by presenting our case study as a corollary to the Franklin searches that would fit with the overall history of Britain's exploration of the Arctic. Using concurrences as a decolonizing strategy, our intention is to avoid universalizing perspectives on the past and instead bring forth competing truth claims and Qalaherriaq's agency to present a counter-narrative (Fur 2017, 40–41).

Situating the double portrait of Qalaherriaq

The NMM's bust-length life-size (64 × 76 cm) painting of Qalaherriaq can be read as a visual testimony to the contact zone(s) in which he moved after first meeting Ommanney and his crew in 1850. There is little information about this painting, with the artist's name and date of completion having disappeared from the records. We do know, however, that Ommanney donated it to the Greenwich Hospital Collection for display in the (former) Royal Navy Museum at the Royal Navy College in Greenwich sometime between 1877 and 1904.[7] From this we can perhaps assume that Ommanney, having brought Qalaherriaq to England and then acting as his guardian, may have commissioned it during Qalaherriaq's four-year stay in England between the autumns of 1851 and 1855.

7 https://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/14286.html.

The *en face* view in NMM's painting of Qalaherriaq follows a tradition of British bourgeois portraiture reminiscent for example of works by David Wilkie and Henry Raeburn (see Coltman 2013) from earlier in the century, and Stephen Pearce's series of Arctic explorer portraits from the 1850s.[8] As with the sitters in these portraits, Qalaherriaq is presented as a gentleman of the middle class, painted against a neutral background of subdued colours with primarily his face illuminated. With cut, combed hair and a European suit, Qalaherriaq assumes a confident posture and expression. He calmly meets our gaze, his expression suggesting a smile, and holds his left hand up in a lightly clenched fist. The overall impression – given by the left side of the painting, alone – is of a personal portrait of a family member or friend, intended for display in a middle-class British home.

8 See David Wilkie's self-portrait (1804/5, Scottish National Portrait Gallery); Henry Raeburn's portrait of William Fraser of Reeling (1801, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); and Stephen Pearce's mid-century portraits of Arctic explorers (National Portrait Gallery, London).

Indeed, although it is clear the sitter's ethnicity is not white European, this all seems surprisingly distanced from other European paintings of Inuit in the nineteenth century, which commonly betray a long lineage of ethnographic interest in Arctic dress and adornment – as seen for example in Léon Cogniet's *Une femme du pays des Esquimaux* (1826, Cleveland Museum of Art). In this regard, (the left side in particular of) the NMM's painting of Qalaherriaq shares similarities with J. Henderson's lithograph of Eenoolooapik (MacDonald 1841, frontispiece) which features in Sophie Gilmartin's article in this special issue – showing Eenoolooapik in bust length, facing the viewer, wearing a tartan waistcoat and sailor's coat over a white buttoned shirt, with his hair cut and combed like Qalaherriaq's. But this is only half the picture. While Eenoolooapik could easily pass for a Scot, the NMM's portrait of Qalaherriaq seems composed precisely to accentuate – and encourage the study of – his racial difference.

Racial framing occurs in two ways in the painting of Qalaherriaq. Firstly, the use of two views (front and profile) presents a radical break with established conventions for official and personal British bourgeois portraiture. The highly unusual – if not unheard of – double representation invites a

study of the sitter's head shape and facial forms that clearly resonates with scientific research and popular interest in the character and variety of non-Western peoples at mid-century. Secondly, the painting differs significantly from the conventional practice of subtly adjusting a sitter's actual form and colour to conform to a classical visual language, as seen for example in portraits of William Kennedy (1814–1890, Cree/Scottish; by Stephen Pearce, 1850s, National Portrait Gallery, London), John Norton (1770–1827, Cherokee/Scottish; by Mather Brown, c. 1805, Yale Center for British Art), and Sakæus (1792–1819, Kalaaleq; by Alexander Nasmyth, c. 1818, Scottish National Portrait Gallery) painted at the time.[9] By contrast, the double portrait of Qalaherriaq is interested in capturing its sitter's *divergence* from classical forms. This is noticeable in the front view on the left in the skin colour, round cheeks, and head shape, and in the profile view to the right in the protruding jaw and low forehead. This differs significantly from the classical profile Stephen Pearce employs in his contemporary portrait of the Arctic explorer Sir John Richardson (1850, National Portrait Gallery, London; Figure 2).

9 William Kennedy worked for the Hudson's Bay Company and partook in the Franklin search expeditions in 1851 (Shaw 2003). John Norton came to England in 1805 to speak to the government in London on behalf of the Six Nations concerning land ownership, control, and political sovereignty (Morgan 2017, ch. 1). Sakæus was an Inuit hunter from Ilulissat who travelled to Scotland in 1816. In 1818, he accepted employment as interpreter on John Ross's expedition in search of a Northwest Passage (Høvik 2017).

These traits point to the asymmetrical power relationship between both the commissioner (most likely Ommanney) and the painter of the work on the one hand, and Qalaherriaq on the other. Clearly, this scientific interest in recording the anatomy and colour of a living Inuit head through the hand of a professional artist complicates, or altogether negates, reading the painting as a personal or familial portrait capturing Qalaherriaq's experienced identity and respecting his terms for self-representation (Wallis 1995, 54–55; Brilliant 2002, 45–46).

Rather, the double portrait of Qalaherriaq seems to fit Vizenor's (2000) theoretical concept of the *indian*, a term he uses to designate wholly imagined, constructed, and reductive representations of Native Americans in Western imagery. As expressions of European colonialism, the *indian* is a "simulation" characterized by the *absence* of the native sitter, their individuality and culture. According to Vizenor (2000, 146), the "*indian* is poselocked in portraiture, intaglio, photogravure, captivity narratives, and other interimage simulation of dominance; the poselocked fugitive of ethnocentric discoveries, not the traces of heard stories, or … native survivance". In analysing Euro-American photographs of Native Americans from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that "entrap" their subjects in "fugitive poses" as the primitive, noble savage destined to die, Vizenor (1998) nonetheless finds signs of what he terms "survivance". In silently performing these "fugitive" and "eternal" poses for photographers, sitters such as Quanah Parker (1845–1911, Comanche) showed their real presence through their eyes. To Vizenor (1998, 10), the eyes that meet the camera in these photographs are the "stories of resistance, and the traces of tribal survivance" that "dare the very closure" of the body's fugitive pose.

Figure 2 Stephen Pearce, *Sir John Richardson*, 1850. Oil on millboard, 37.8 × 31.8 cm. NPG 909 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

If signs of resistance and survivance can be traced in demeaning Western photographs of conquered American Indigenous bodies, the double portrait of Qalaherriaq, being one step further removed from its referent, has perhaps less of a claim as a trace of real presence. At the same time, the confident posture and smiling expression in the front view may suggest that Qalaherriaq was knowingly performing the "fugitive pose" the painter – and its commissioner – required of him.

In the second part of this article, we return to issues of agency, resistance, and survivance in a discussion of the terms of both Qalaherriaq's departure from Perlernerit and his experiences in England, and, especially, in our

analysis of his own visual production. First, however, we position the double portrait of Qalaherriaq in relation to nineteenth-century racial science and visualizations of race. From here, we discuss how ideas about race played out around Qalaherriaq on the ground in Britain: in the press's reception of him as the HMS *Assistance* docked in London; and in the further "uses" of (images of) him in scientific discourse – namely, in Prichard's 1855 edition of *The Natural History of Man*. We further examine a running discussion about the "Esquimaux" between Ommanney's officers that occurred while Qalaherriaq was aboard the HMS *Assistance*. As we shall see, there is a distinct relation between form and content in Victorian conceptions of race and character, and the NMM's double portrait of Qalaherriaq clearly invited such discussions.

Visualizations of race and the British reception of Qalaherriaq

The emphasis on racial difference that we find in the NMM's painting responds to a nineteenth-century British concern. As Ryan (1997, 147) argues, the "language and imagery of 'race' occupied a central place within Victorian culture" and "pervaded all manner of scientific concern" especially at mid-century. This language and imagery frequently saw the correspondence between bodily expression and mental development. In general, Victorian society believed in the intimate relationship between physical appearance and mental character on an individual, national, and racial level. These convictions were developed and supported by science, for example through theories of physiognomy (which read "character" through analysis of the face) and phrenology (which understood character through analysis of the skull). These theories, which sorted human variety in hierarchical systems that always placed the European on top, were in broad circulation during the Victorian age. According to Poskett (2019, 1), phrenology was the most popular mental science of the period. Artists also embraced such theories and their audiences frequently expected accurate physiognomic depictions of social and racial types (Cowling 1989, 104; Druick and Zegers 1988).

While the use of two views was highly uncommon for European portraiture, it was certainly employed by European scientists to visualize data concerned with the anatomy of human heads of different races. Going back to the late eighteenth century and across the Western world, we find examples of comparative illustrations of European and non-Western (often African) heads and skulls in front and profile views circulating in phrenological journals and such influential publications as Petrus Camper's (1792) *Über den Natürlichen Unterschied der Gesichtszüge in Menschen*; Virey's (1801,

1824) *Histoire naturelle du genre humain, ou Recherches sur ses principaux fondemens physiques et moraux*; and Morton's (1839) *Crania Americana; or a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations*.[10]

We also find instances of comparative front and profile views of Indigenous sitters in Arctic expedition imagery from the first half of the nineteenth century. An important early example is the body of coloured lithographs in Louis Choris's *Voyage pittoresque autour du monde* (Paris, 1822). Many of Choris's lithographs give bust-length front and profile representations of unnamed but geographically classified Indigenous figures on neutral backgrounds. To the plates showing Inupiat and Unangax̂ heads and skulls, Franz Joseph Gall, one of the two founders of phrenology, contributed his character observations.[11]

By mid-century, the use of front and profile views to document the shape of the skull was a recognizable form of ethnographic visual representation. With the development and popularization of photography in the second half of the century, biologists, phrenologists, and ethnologists such as Louis Agassiz, William E. Marshall, Thomas Huxley, and John Lamprey contributed to making face and profile photographs the common standard for visual representations of non-European races (Poskett 2019, ch. 6; Wallis 1995). The double portrait of Qalaherriaq thus displays a distinct interest in racial anatomy that mirrors some of the central scientific and popular concerns of the time.

Several officers aboard the HMS *Assistance* that brought Qalaherriaq to England were interested in the notion of human races and the physical markers defining and distinguishing between them. Captain Ommanney (quoted in Murray 1856, 22), for example, commented that Qalaherriaq's people were an "uncontaminated" breed of "Esquimaux", "a remnant of the pure race which … migrated from Asia" and whose "formation of skull" bespoke "Tartar extraction". Ommanney responded to an interest in physical expressions of race that repeats both the intellectual environment among his officers, which we return to below, and the interest of the British public, as is apparent from the press coverage of the explorers' return to England in 1851 (*Morning Chronicle*, October 8, 1851; *Liverpool Mercury*, October 10, 1851; *Examiner*, October 11, 1851; *Reynold's Newspaper*, October 12, 1851). A repeating interest concerning Qalaherriaq's physical appearance in these reports starts off with the *Morning Chronicle* on October 8, 1851. In this notice, the journalist comments on Qalaherriaq's age, bodily build, temper, height, colour, and facial features. Describing the "Esquimaux youth" as "stout for his height, with a face of an Asiatic cast, nearly like the face of persons of Chinese origin, but very flat, and more round", the reporter seems to engage in a taxonomic discussion in order to define and place an Inuit "sample". The same may be said of the newspaper articles covering the Great Exhibition, which Qalaherriaq visited a couple of

10 For illustrations in scientific publications using anatomical drawings of heads (front and profile or just profile), see "Introductory Plate" in Goyder (1845, unnumbered); *The American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany* ("Article V, Character of Eustache" 1840, 177); Tab. I-III in Camper (1792, unnumbered back); Pl. III "1. Profil de l'Apollon. 2. Celui du Nègre. 3. Celui de l'Orang-Outang" and Pl. IV "1. Profil d'un Européen et lignes facilaes d'un Nègre. 2. Crâne de Géorgienne. 3. Celui d'une Nègresse", in Virey (1801, 1824, 134, 136); Pl. 8 in Virey (1801, 1824, 42); about seventy plates of American Indigenous skulls, the majority profile views, in Morton (1839, page 297 onwards).

11 See "Kamtchatka, Le Golfe De Kotzebue. Et la Terre Des Tchouktchis", in Choris (1822, 16–18).

days later. Again, the interest was in Qalaherriaq's physical appearance (including face and colour) (*Liverpool Mercury*, October 10, 1851; *Examiner*, October 11, 1851; *Reynold's Newspaper*, October 12, 1851; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, October 12, 1851). As both the *Daily News* (October 11, 1851) and the *Glasgow Herald* (October 13, 1851) put it, their interest was to learn more about this "specimen of Polar humanity".

The reception of Qalaherriaq in England was primarily concerned with physical manifestations and classifications of race. While Ommanney and the journalists left it to the reader to form their own understanding of the potential significance of Qalaherriaq's looks, more scientifically inclined writers used his head, face, and body to elaborate on theories concerned with the origin and variety of humankind and connections between the physical appearance and civilized development of races.

We find one example of this in the fourth edition of James C. Prichard's *The Natural History of Man* (1855), in the chapter "Esquimaux, or Karalit", which features a print from a photograph of Qalaherriaq (now lost) (Figure 3). Prichard (1786–1848) was a well-known ethnologist and devout Christian who, in an effort to counter the polygenist impulse of several colleagues, saw it as his task in life to prove the unity of humankind and to examine and trace physical difference to a single root (Stocking 1991, 48–49). While Prichard (cited in Poskett 2019, 89) denounced phrenology as a "hypothesis without foundation", he nonetheless shared the discipline's interest in the human skull.[12]

12 In the first volume of his third edition of *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind* (1836), Prichard argued that the human skull was the best marker of national difference. Replete with nine illustrations of human skulls, his volume (cited in Poskett 2019, 88) argued that "[i]t is in the head that we find the varieties most strongly characteristic of different races".

Prichard did not live to meet Qalaherriaq, who arrived in England three years after Prichard's death. It was possibly Edwin Norris, the editor, who ensured that Qalaherriaq's photograph was taken and used for the enlarged fourth version of *The Natural History of Man*. The photographic reproduction does not betray Prichard's interest in "national" heads. Rather, Qalaherriaq is represented in the manner of traditional European portraits of the time: a single bust-length view encircled by an oval frame. He is facing the viewer with his body slightly turned to the right, and seems to be wearing the same shirt, suit, and hairdo as in the NMM's painting of him. Unlike the double portrait, the photographic reproduction does not display a concern for race. In the context of Prichard's book, however, the illustration takes on a different meaning as visual data for the "Esquimaux" race.

This happens where the illustration features, in the second part of the chapter "Esquimaux, or Karalit". While the first part explains the geographical spread of the Inuit, the second part, which amounts to more than half of the text, gives a physical description of the "Esquimaux" that focuses on the face and head. Here, Prichard (1855, 517) makes the reader aware that he has already "described the form of the skull peculiar to the Esquimaux", before citing David Crantz (1765–1766) in an unreferenced passage on the physical appearance of Greenlanders. Perhaps to support his thesis on the existence of

Figure 3 Illustration in James C. Prichard's *The Natural History of Man*, 4th ed. (1855).

only one human species, Prichard argues for a general physical likeness of all Indigenous peoples of the Arctic, declaring that Crantz's description "may well apply to the whole race". Some 150 pages later, Prichard (1855, 671, 682) states that, despite their primitive state and wide separation from the rest of mankind, "the mind of the 'Esquimaux' has the same moral and

13 We are grateful to Dr Robert J. C. Young for encouraging a closer reading of Prichard.

intellectual constitution as that of other human beings".[13] Prichard understood human variety as a result of the environment; humans emerged from the same source, from one family, but had gradually become different because they had been affected by the environment in which they lived (Stocking 1991, 50–51).

Despite Prichard's emphasis on a common biological constitution and source, Norris' edition did not shy away from racist and derogatory descriptions of the Inuit that paired physical appearance with "savage" behaviour. This happens in the text in which the illustration of Qalaherriaq features, where a long passage by the French historian Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix (1682–1761) (again) describes the head, face, and body of the "Esquimaux".[14] Despite Qalaherriaq's westernized appearance, Charlevoix's (cited in Prichard 1855, 518) text posits him as the visual evidence of the "savage" look and manners of all "Esquimaux", concluding that "[t]heir habits and their characters are completely in accordance with their bad looking physiognomy. They are ferocious, belligerent, defiant, anxious, always inclined to harm strangers".

14 The same illustration features in an article in the *Gospel Missionary* ("Kallihirua" 1856, 165).

The overt racism in Charlevoix's quote thus became the context for how the audience was meant to read the illustration of Qalaherriaq. Charlevoix's vilification of the Inuit resonated with parts of British society at the time. The reason for this had to do with the controversy the Scottish Hudson's Bay Company man Dr John Rae (1813–1893) caused when in 1854, after encountering Inuit who had been in contact with the missing explorers, he reported that John Franklin's expedition had perished *and* that the men had resorted to cannibalism on their last days (*The Times*, October 23, 1854, 7–8). Shocked by this piece of information, Charles Dickens (1854a, 1854b), the spokesperson for Lady Jane Franklin and her circle of supporters, used his pen to feverishly denounce Rae's report. Applying a set of racist tropes about the "savage" ("[w]e believe every savage to be in his heart covetous, treacherous, and cruel"), Dickens (1854a, 362) declared that the true (and only) villains in the Arctic were the Inuit (Høvik 2013, 124–140; McGoogan 2002, 2007).

The illustration of the young Inughuaq with his short hair and western suit, accompanied by the caption "now a student at S. Augustine's College in Canterbury", may have challenged Charlevoix's statements (Prichard 1855, 518). Published in the year after Rae's report appeared in *The Times*, the polite presentation of Qalaherriaq must nonetheless have rendered the "civilized" state of the "Esquimaux" sitter ambiguous.

Speculations about the "Esquimaux" character and development were also a topic for discussion among the British Royal Navy officers involved in the Franklin Search Expeditions. Surviving documents connected to Qalaherriaq's stay aboard the HMS *Assistance* reveal an intellectual climate reflecting the currents of the time, with the ship's officers being especially concerned

with questions regarding the origin and variety of humankind in general, and the intelligence level and development of the Inuit specifically. *Aurora Borealis* (1852), a newspaper edited by one of Ommanney's officers and later published for public consumption, contains a running debate between three officers – writing under the pen names Clio, Examiner, and Scriblerus – about the origins of the Inuit and the character of their race. Drawing on the works of the French naturalist Georges Cuvier (1769–1832), these officers, if not fully embracing a polygenist view, clearly believed in rigid hierarchical divisions that separated the Inuit, in particular, from Europeans (Scriblerus 1852, 150; Examiner 1852, 88).[15] This is evident in the writings of Clio (1852a, 1852b, 1852c) who, while recognizing the role played by the environment in shaping the unique characteristics of all peoples, stated that the "Mongolians" (the race in which the Victorians placed the Inuit) were biologically more susceptible to external influences than others. This, Clio (1852a, 43–44) argued, had caused a severe degeneration that accounted for the allegedly "inferior" state of present-day Inuit. Comparing the Greenlandic Inuit to the (Old) Norse settlers of Kalaallit Nunaat, who he acknowledges were eventually wiped out by "immensely superior numbers of Skraelings [Inuit]", Clio argues for a biological, permanent, and hierarchical difference between European and Inuit peoples:

15 Cuvier suggested that racial differences were more or less permanent (Stocking 1991, 26, 50; Cuvier 1834, 40).

> It is deeply interesting to observe how one race of humankind, labouring under the most disadvantageous circumstances, with regard to climate and an inhospitable and barren country, has struggled against these evils, and to a certain extent overcome them; while another in the same predicament has sunk into the most degraded state of barbarity. Such has always been the difference between the Caucasian and Mongolian races, a difference which, even if their physical conformation, and especially the shape of their skulls, did not at once stamp them as another race, would alone suffice to distinguish them. (Clio 1852b, 182–184)

The ethnocentrism apparent in Clio's text adds to the social discourse that, as demonstrated above, manifested itself in a variety of media and cultural expressions at mid-century.

The race science that thus underpins the NMM's double portrait of Qalaherriaq places the painting in Vizenor's category of "poselocked *indian*". To many Victorians, Qalaherriaq as he appears here could only be a visual embodiment of a lower race, with the painting providing them with the necessary "evidence" – skin colour, cranial anatomy, low forehead, protruding jaw, and so on – from which to draw their racist conclusions. The painting seems to tangibly reflect an extreme asymmetry of power between Qalaherriaq and the varying social environments he moved within from the moment he set foot on the HMS *Assistance*. The painting points to

Qalaherriaq's situation as, in many ways, a puppet for British colonialism and its civilizing mission in the Arctic.

Competing truth claims

We now employ the method of concurrences to problematize the entrenched narratives – found both in historical sources and continuing today – about the explorers' benevolence towards Qalaherriaq, and instead render their coercion and violence visible. In critically analysing concurrent accounts of some select situations from Qalaherriaq's life story, we reveal discrepancies in the source material that was produced either by men connected to the Royal Navy or people within their circle – including scientists and members of the clergy. Together with these discrepancies, Inughuit oral history and Qalaherriaq's own letters and drawings may not only give us a better understanding of Qalaherriaq's situation, but also call out the explorers' ethnocentrism, arrogance, and cynicism, and expose the limits of European progress narratives and civilizing mission ideologies.

Qalaherriaq's departure from Perlernerit

According to Carl Petersen – the Dane working as one of Austin's interpreters who facilitated Qalaherriaq's joining of the search expedition – Qalaherriaq *happily* volunteered to leave his home. This statement, or versions of it, is repeated in other European sources (e.g. Ommanney 1853, 187; Murray 1856, 10). Disregarding the severity of the circumstances under which Qalaherriaq "volunteered", Petersen (1857, 35) claims that Qalaherriaq in fact thought it a good arrangement as he did not have a wife. Petersen (1857, 35 [our translation]) further declares that Qalaherriaq said he would be happy to wear the "white men's clothes", keep himself tidy and clean, and have his hair cut. Qalaherriaq was then,according to Petersen, "honoured" with the new name of "Erasmus York" – "Erasmus" after Captain Erasmus Ommanney and "York" after Cape York, the British name for Perlernerit.

As if to crown off this quick and successful transformation of a "wild" Esquimaux into an obedient servant of empire, Petersen goes on to add that Qalaherriaq was indifferent to his family:

> It did not bother this man at all to leave his homely area. He did not say goodbye to his mother and sister, who were present, but walked away from them, as if leaving was something usual and in no way unsettling. After giving the ones left behind

> some pieces of wood, pocketknives, needles etc. we went back to the steamer the *Intrepid*. (Petersen 1857, 35 [our translation])

Petersen's account of Qalaherriaq's departure from Perlernerit as an unproblematic exchange of favours and goods betrays his insensitivity to and disregard for the difficult situation in which he and the other explorers had put Qalaherriaq and his community. As well as having to act against an allegation that could have serious consequences for British–Inughuit relations, Qalaherriaq was also forced to abandon his immediate family – a mother and, most likely, two younger siblings, who would have relied on him (as probably the main hunter in their family) to provide food, clothing, and equipment.[16] This is precisely what is suggested by Inughuit oral history, which places Qalaherriaq out bird hunting while his mother and younger siblings remained "alone" back in the place that in Danish is called "Søkongefjældet", near Perlernerit (Rasmussen 1915, 183). In Inughuit society, sons were trained to become good dog-sled drivers, kayak rowers, and hunters, because it was their duty to provide for the family unit and, when possible, the community. His departure almost surely had a negative impact on his mother and younger siblings' well-being and survival in the demanding environment of Northwest Kalaallit Nunaat– perhaps, in turn, further burdening their wider community.

16 Qalaherriaq's family members are listed as his mother and one or two siblings (*Missionen i Nordpolarlandene* 1869, 35; Petersen 1857, 35; Murray 1856, 12–13; Rasmussen 1915, 183). From the handwritten notes on the first page of Qalaherriaq's *Book of Common Prayer* (1851), kept in the Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library, the names of his parents are listed as "Kirshung-oak" (likely Qisunnguaq in Kalaallisut) and "Sa-too-ney". Qalaherriaq's father died after contact with British explorers of the HMS *North Star* in 1849–1850 in Uummannap Kangerlua where Qalaherriaq guided Ommanney's men (Murray 1856, 13).

That Qalaherriaq and his family were *indifferent* to his departure, as Petersen would have us believe, seems highly unlikely. It appears too that Petersen is either misunderstanding or misrepresenting the situation, since Qalaherriaq clearly thought he would be returned to Perlernerit after only a short time away, as becomes clear when examining two concurrent voices to that of Petersen.

The first of these voices is an anonymous poem written by a sailor aboard the HMS *Assistance* and included in a publication by Ommanney (1853, 187–188). It describes Qalaherriaq as anything but unconcerned when Ommanney's crew, after he briefly assisted them with their investigations a bit further up the coast from Perlernerit, did not deliver him back home, as agreed:

> For he had come amongst our crew,
> A week or so before;
> And now we knew not what to do
> To put him safe ashore.
>
> Poor lad, he strain'd his eyes in vain
> Till tears began to come,
> And tried if he could see again
> His mother and his home

The poem speaks plainly to the despair Qalaherriaq by all accounts experienced when realizing that he was not to be let off and reunited with his family as agreed. The poem nonetheless goes on to say that Qalaherriaq quickly adapted to and became happy in his new situation:

> We cheer'd him up; and soon he grew
> So useful and so kind,
> *The crew were glad, and Kalli too,*
> *He was not left behind.*
> (Ommanney 1853, 187–188 [emphasis added])

Echoing Petersen's account, the poem implies that Qalaherriaq was treated well by the crew during their year-long stay in the Arctic. Although this may hold some truth, what they fail to understand or address (perhaps blinded by their own deep belief in the civilizing mission they were part of) is the obvious pain and hardship to which they clearly subjected Qalaherriaq through their efforts to convert and assimilate him from the moment he set foot aboard the ship.

In addition to the rolling debate held between the officers of the HMS *Assistance* as to the extent of the Inuit's humanity, entries in the ship's on-board newspaper reveal an ethnocentric and disrespectful treatment of Qalaherriaq. Although he could only speak a few words in English upon the expedition's return to England in 1851 (Murray 1856, 22), the HMS *Assistance*'s on-board newspaper contains a four-and-a-half-page (typed) letter in English ascribed to "Erasmus York, of the Arctic Highlands" (York 1852). Addressed to the editor, and allegedly signed by "Calahierna, *alias* Erasmus York", this mock letter – which is clearly penned by someone else (perhaps an officer) to humour the men and affirm their cultural and intellectual superiority – stages a perverse playing out of racist tropes and assumptions: Qalaherriaq humbly recognizes his primitive shortcomings; laments his lack of a "civilized education"; and marvels and delights at the technology, ingenuity, and religion of the explorers (York 1852, 92–93). The letter continues in this vein, further parodying Qalaherriaq as naive and childlike when allegedly wondering where the explorers kept their women after having met "pretty Koonahs" (who were in fact men cross-dressing) at a masquerade aboard the HMS *Resolute*. "[A]re they spirits evoked by your Augerkoks for such occasions?" (York 1852, 93).

The second, concurrent voice to Petersen's is the Inughuit's response to Qalaherriaq's departure, as retold in some of Rasmussen's publications from the early 1900s. Two Inughuit named Masaitsiaq and Arnaruluk related this story to Rasmussen sometime between 1902 and 1904,and thus in living memory of the event.In Rasmussen's book, their story is called "Da 'Navlen' blev bortført" and it speaks, already through its title,

not of Qalaherriaq's "volunteering" to join an expedition or "indifference" at leaving both family and home behind, but of his abduction(Rasmussen 1915, 1925).

In stark contrast to Petersen's account, or indeed the NMM's online catalogue description of a "young Inuit man" simply being "engaged as a guide", Inughuit collective memory explains how in advance of Qalaherriaq's disappearance mountain spirits separately warned both Qalaherriaq and his mother of an imminent, negative event. The story makes clear that the assumption within Qalaherriaq's community was that he "quickly found his death among the white men" after he left with Ommanney's ship (Rasmussen 1915, 184 [our translation]). While their assumption was correct, of course, the story suggests that no actual news about Qalaherriaq reached the Inughuit after his departure in 1850. The story concludes with the heart-breaking comment that "in vain, his old mother asked her helping spirits for assistance, but she never did she learn anything about the fate of her son" (Rasmussen 1915, 185 [our translation]).

Qalaherriaq's stay in England

The primary sources on or relating to Qalaherriaq leave little doubt that he was well looked after, both materially and socially, during his time in England and that he likely had positive relations with people both at St Augustine's College in Canterbury and within Ommanney's circle. Murray (1856, 25, 31) mentions a couple of people (including himself) whom Qalaherriaq visited during holidays, or who took him to sites in London. Besides his Christian training at St Augustine's, he found outlets for his creative impulse and talent through woodworking, tailoring, and drawing (Murray 1856, 32, 34, 36). Likewise, his surviving letters suggest Qalaherriaq cared about the people involved in his life, such as Ommanney's and Austin's families.[17]

17 See for example Qalaherriaq's letters dated September 17, 1852–1854; May 11, 1853; October 3, 1855.

If the NMM's (https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-14286) statement that "[h]e adapted well and cheerfully to life in England and was much admired by those who knew him" holds some truth, it is important to add that Qalaherriaq believed his stay in England was temporary and that he would be returned to his people (e.g. Murray 1856, 34). It was moreover in the interest of both the College and the Royal Navy to maintain good relations with Qalaherriaq, since the future they had cut out for him relied on his participation. As Ommanney (July 18, 1856) noted in a letter to the College Warden, Rev. Henry Bailey, following Qalaherriaq's death, "[i]t is much to be regretted that his Christian disposition could not have been disseminated amongst the heathen Esquimaux in Labrador".

Qalaherriaq's letters and drawings conflict somewhat with notions of a "successful" and "cheerful" adaptation to life in England. The few letters that have survived suggest a mixed appreciation of his new circumstances. Writing to Ommanney from St Augustine's, probably in March or April 1853, Qalaherriaq acknowledges the kindness he feels from those around him. But he also clearly emphasizes his poor health – something that had plagued him since his time aboard the HMS *Assistance*, and from which he continued to suffer now nearly two years into his stay in England:

> I [am] hoping you and all my kind friends are well. Had very bad cold pain in my side, bed four days, better now. Weather bad, rain very much. Hope Mrs Ommanney and little boy very well. Like to see you summer. All people very kind to me.

In another letter Qalaherriaq wrote in April 1853 (recipient unknown), he is even more explicit about his sufferings:

> I be in England long time none very well – very bad weather … very bad cough – I very sorry – very bad. Weather dreadful. Country very different – another day cold another day [h]ot. I miserable.

Qalaherriaq's acquaintances also noticed that he was frequently ill (e.g. Ommanney, May 20, 1853; Murray, June 19, 1854). In his account of Qalaherriaq's arrival at St Augustine's in November 1851, Murray (1856, 29 [emphasis added]) noted that a "tendency to cough, arising from an ailment*, the seeds of which had probably been sown long before*, was often observable" and that "he was very susceptible of cold". The autopsy report from St John's in Labrador (June 25, 1856) leaves no more doubt in the matter, proving that Qalaherriaq died from heart failure caused by long-term lung tuberculosis.[18] We get a rather clear idea of the pain Qalaherriaq had been enduring: while the outside of his throat was visibly marked by scrofula (inflammation of the lymph nodes), the autopsy of his chest uncovered an "enormously enlarged" heart with "greatly" thickened walls and "tubercular deposits" inside blackened lungs. Qalaherriaq's recurring bouts with such serious illness surely affected his overall well-being and feeling of happiness, with his surviving personal correspondence certainly seeming to hint at depression and homesickness. Indeed, we may speculate as to whether his comment "[c]ountry very different" had to do with a change of climate only, or if he was also articulating a critical (and understandable) reaction to the difficult experience of attempting to cope with illness, culture shock and cultural assimilation.

18 Qalaherriaq's associates ordered the autopsy because they wanted to know what caused his sudden death. The physician was only allowed to open and examine Qalaherriaq's chest. We are grateful to MD Øystein Høvik for his analysis of the autopsy report, obtained August 23, 2021.

Qalaherriaq's response to British imperialism

Did Qalaherriaq speak up against the racism, ethnocentrism, and paternalism that structured and determined most aspects of the last six years of his life? If so, how? It is easy enough to point to clear evidence of Qalaherriaq's intellectual capabilities, such as his map-making (Murray 1856, 35–36)[19] and language skills, that clearly rendered absurd the deplorable "scientific" statements to which Qalaherriaq and Inuit peoples more broadly were subjected during his lifetime. A good example is found in the revised edition of Captain John Washington's Greenland-Eskimo Vocabulary of 1853. The preface to this handbook dictionary, which was published specifically for Arctic expeditions and distributed throughout the British Navy in the 1850s, documents how Qalaherriaq spent some days in the summer and Christmas holidays of 1852 helping Washington update, extend, and improve his work. Washington (1853, vii) acknowledges Qalaherriaq's invaluable contribution to the project, describing him as both intelligent and capable in English. As a stamp of linguistic quality, Washington proclaims "every word has now been revised by the lips of a native". As Washington's handbook was originally for West Greenlandic (Kalaallisut) and written according to the logic of English orthography, Qalaherriaq's revisions involved adding new words to the dictionary when his Inughuit dialect (Inuktun) differed from the existing record (Washington 1853, vii).

19 Qalaherriaq charted the coastline between Perlernerit and Smith Sound for the explorers (Murray 1856, 35–36).

Instances where Qalaherriaq actively resisted, questioned, or criticized British assimilation efforts are harder to come by – although we do find a clearly oppositional statement contained in Washington's handbook. The preface not only explains how Qalaherriaq was renamed "Erasmus York" by Ommanney and his crew, but also that he *reclaimed* his native name "as soon as he could explain himself" (Washington 1853, vi). Qalaherriaq's name must have mattered deeply to him. Personal names were sacred to the Inughuit and Qalaherriaq would have been given his name by the helping spirits of an *angakkoq*. Names were souls (*ateq*) with inherent powers that absorbed the good qualities of the people who bore them, and these qualities could be passed on to a descendant who was given the same name (Gilberg and Petersen 1985, 63; Rasmussen 1908, 116). Another possible instance of talking back also emerges from the preface to Washington's revised handbook – again having to do with (re)naming and the (re)asserting of identity. Perhaps instructed by Qalaherriaq, Washington (1853, vi–vii) corrected his contemporaries by pointing out that the Inughuit "term themselves Innuit … the word Eskimo is not known".

In Qalaherriaq's five surviving drawings (that we know about), we find further evidence of the continued importance of his Arctic homeland and culture to him. Murray (1856, 34–35) writes that Qalaherriaq was fond of drawing ships, Arctic animals, and "other objects familiar to him in the

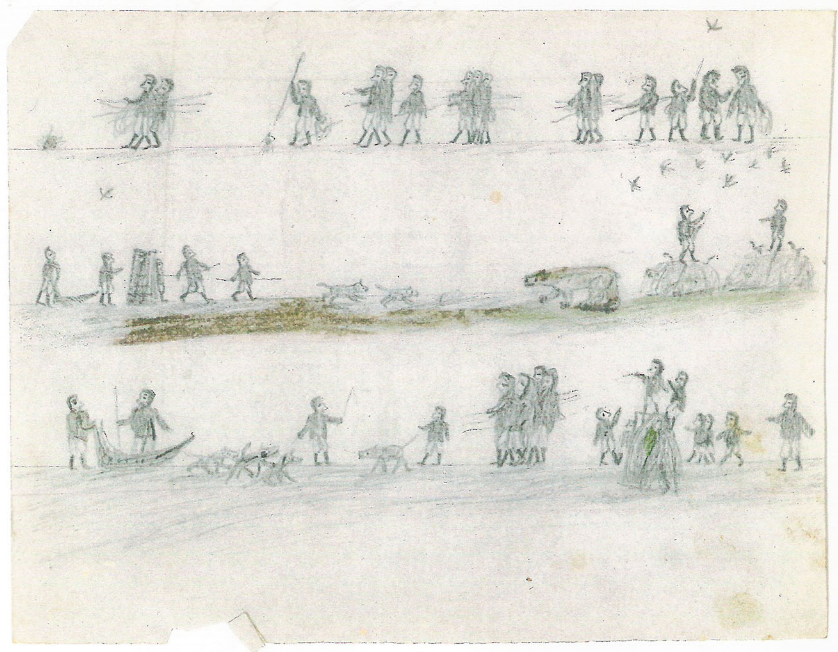

Figure 4 Qalaherriaq, Untitled, 1851–1855. Pencil and crayon on paper. CCA-U88/A/5/2 © Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library.

Arctic regions … he used sometimes to draw them for the amusement of children". Although this gives us some context for how Qalaherriaq's drawings might have been produced and experienced at the time, it does not mean that we should assume – as Murray seems to direct us to do – that they lack added layers of meaning.

Four of the surviving drawings contain motifs of ships, polar bears, and other Arctic animals. One of these (the first of two drawings kept in the Cathedral Archives in Canterbury) is a scene teeming with life and activity. Clearly set among Qalaherriaq's people and sled dogs in Northwest Kalaallit Nunaat, it shows three stacked horizontal lines filled with multiple Inuit figures, sleds, harpoons, birds, dogs, and a polar bear (Figure 4). The drawing gives an overriding sense of home – a place we can imagine Qalaherriaq not only longed for but worked to keep alive in his thoughts and imagination. However, there is perhaps more at stake here than Qalaherriaq's sense of self and belonging. The drawing's familiarity and homeliness strike at the core of the well-known stories of extreme heroism, suffering, bravery, courage, and sacrifice that permeate British narratives of Arctic exploration, exposing also the enduring visual tropes of the Arctic as a savage, inhospitable, and barren wasteland (see for example Edwin Landseer's painting *Man*

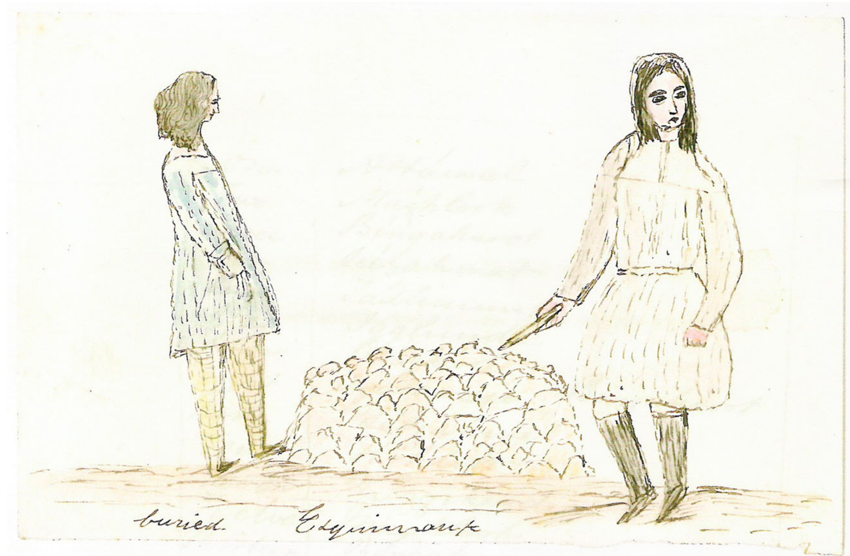

Figure 5 Qalaherriaq, *Buried Esquimaux*, 1851–1855. Pen and watercolour on paper. CCA-U88/A/5/2. © Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library.

Proposes, God Disposes [1864], which Alison Wright discusses in this special issue).

It is tempting to also read resistance into the second of the two drawings held in Canterbury, which Qalaherriaq titled *Buried Esquimaux* (Figure 5). The drawing seems to be of a burial ritual: it shows two grieving figures standing beside a traditional Inughuit burial site – a shallow or above-ground grave covered with a mound of stones, containing the deceased and their important possessions such as tools and hunting equipment (Gilberg and Petersen 1985, 63). Yet while the grave is Inughuit, the two figures standing beside it seem to be wearing European clothing (as compared to Qalaherriaq's rendering of Inughuit clothing in Figure 4).

The figure on the left has blond shoulder-length wavy hair and a somewhat feminine posture, suggesting a British woman – although the trousers render this conclusion ambiguous. The figure on the right takes up more space and attention, placed in the foreground with their body and face fully facing the viewer. With tall black boots, a significantly larger face, thick eyebrows, and long black straight hair, this figure's posture and appearance seem masculine. His eyes seem to make contact with us, his right hand inviting us to focus our attention on the grave. While the feminine figure on the left holds a handkerchief for mourning, the male figure holds a book, which may be the Bible; in the drawing's composition it fills – literally and perhaps symbolically as well – the space between his body and the burial mound.

This drawing poses some basic questions of interpretation: whose burial mound are we looking at, who are the figures standing by it, and where is it located? The unlikely combination of features suggests Qalaherriaq was not representing an actual event. Rather, this appears to be an imagined scene that compounds time and space, with Qalaherriaq combining memories from his previous life in Kalaallit Nunaat, aspects of his current situation in England, and perhaps his looming death – of which his painful long-term illness was a constant reminder.

One possible reading of this drawing is that Qalaherriaq is the *Buried Esquimaux* – making this a post-mortem vision of his grave being visited by two of his British acquaintances. Our documenting of Qalaherriaq's poor health and physical suffering in England at least partly supports this interpretation – as does the inherent and somewhat surrealistic "impossibility" of the scene itself. In its staging of an improbable encounter between a British woman (?) and an Inughuit burial mound, Qalaherriaq's drawing seems to inhabit something of a dreamworld that is neither England nor Northwest Kalaallit Nunaat, yet somehow also both places simultaneously.

Another possible reading is that *Buried Esquimaux* is the grave of Qalaherriaq's father. Shortly after he set sail from Perlernerit to help Ommanney and his crew investigate (and prove false) the rumoured massacre of Franklin, Qalaherriaq guided the HMS *Assistance* to a site in Uummannap Kangerlua where his father, along with some other Inughuit and British men, had died from an epidemic a couple of years earlier. Here, Ommanney and his men looted the huts and graves for Inughuit artefacts and, most likely, human remains – as was common practice for Royal Navy explorers, who regularly procured objects for the (racial science) collections of numerous museums and societies back in Britain (Poskett 2019, 41–50; Høvik 2022). According to Murray (1856, 11–12), one of the "well-formed graves of heaps of stones" that the explorers destroyed and looted contained the body of Qalaherriaq's father. Visibly distraught, Qalaherriaq pleaded with them to "desist from the work of desecration" – with his request, according to Murray (1856, 13), then being respected.

Qalaherriaq's very understandable reaction to the violence enacted on his father's burial site finds parallels in the critique an Inughuit hunter named Qisunguaq launched against Knud Rasmussen around fifty years later. According to Rasmussen, Qisunguaq – who guided Rasmussen on a journey southward from the area of Perlernerit to Upernavik in 1904 – angrily turns on him when bad weather struck following Rasmussen's pillaging of an old grave they had come across: "You are so strange, you white men! You collect things you will never require, and you cannot leave even the graves alone. All this calamity is the revenge of the dead. Perhaps we

shall die of hunger. Just because you took those stupid things!" (Rasmussen 1908, 72).

As with Qalaherriaq before him, Qisunguaq's reaction to grave robbing points to the Inughuit's deep relation to and respect for their fellow beings. Inughuit beliefs concerning human/animal existence and death/burial practices were a complex and important part of their cosmology. To them, both humans and animals consisted of a mortal body and an immortal soul, which was attached to the body if you were alive and well. But in serious illness or death, your soul left the body and set off for one of two pleasant places – either the sky or the sea – where you met your ancestors. During illness, however, there was a chance your soul could be returned, and your life and body restored with the help of an *angakkuq* (*angakkut*). Upon death, the lifeless body absorbed the evils, including illness and misfortune, endured during life. Because the living travelling soul might require equipment, the Inughuit buried their dead together with their material possessions, such as harpoons and kayaks (Rasmussen 1908, 106–115; Gilberg and Petersen 1985, 66–70). The graves were sacred and, as Qisunguaq's reaction against Rasmussen demonstrates, grave robbery could have serious consequences. As a couple of leading Inughuit men told Rasmussen (1908, 124), "[w]e observe our old customs in order to hold the world up", otherwise "the sea would rise in violent waves while we are out in our kayaks, or … a flood would sweep our houses out into the sea".

Qalaherriaq was likely just as well attuned as Qisunguaq to the beliefs and customs of his people, but the desecration he witnessed was arguably even more emotionally charged and personal. His father's grave was – given the course of events that followed – the last point of contact Qalaherriaq had with his family before involuntarily leaving home for good, and it is likely that his memory of this last parting was traumatized by the explorers' actions. If he drew *Buried Esquimaux* from memory, then the figure to the right with long black hair may be Qalaherriaq. This could signal his (enduring) Inughuit identity, which the varying forces of British colonialism continuously worked to remove – starting, quite literally, with the "civilizing act" of Ommanney's men cutting his hair. Considering that Qalaherriaq might have converted to Christianity, it is not unlikely that he represented (and imagined) himself revisiting his father's grave with a Bible in hand.

Although *Buried Esquimaux* seems to suggest that Qalaherriaq assimilated to some extent into British society, the drawing (also) contains an implied critique of colonialism. A further possible reading of the drawing, this time with the buried Inughuit being both father and son, could suggest an inevitable circle in which father and son – who both died prematurely because of their contact with Europeans – shared the same fate. Their fate was also, as Qalaherriaq had witnessed in Uummannap Kangerlua, the fate of several other Inughuit. In this sense, the drawing might not (only) be about

Qalaherriaq and/or his father, but rather a scene commenting on or laying bare the devastating consequences European explorers and settlers had for Indigenous peoples in the Arctic (and elsewhere).

Conclusion

The trail of historical sources and archival fragments we have analysed in our article, together with the varying and at times oppositional truth claims they make, outlines a timely alternative to the established, entrenched narratives of daring exploration that (still) dominate Western understandings of and relationships to the Arctic. Our work on Qalaherriaq reveals the pressing need for scholarship to push beyond – and push back against – established interpretations of history by teasing out the alternative, divergent, or even oppositional claims harboured in archival material. The case we have charted here represents but one of many cases – over time and in different cultural contexts – of Inuit intersections with European histories of Arctic exploration and conquest (see articles by Hulan, Gaupseth, Gilmartin, and O'Dochartaigh in this special issue).

However, we also recognize the limits of our research as academics who are both removed in time and space from Qalaherriaq and his Inuit and European contemporaries, and thus forced to make selections and piece together (only some) aspects of Qalaherriaq's life and agency using materials that are often difficult to interpret and, in different ways, both problematic and inaccessible. We realize too that *on its own* our micro-history may not present a powerful counter-narrative to the ethnocentric, colonialist, and masculinist discourses that govern most thinking about the Arctic. But there is, we think, much potential in bringing together research that similarly seeks to bring out the agencies, experiences, and, when possible, voices and artistic productions of other inhabitants of the Arctic that were caught up in the structures of Euro-American imperialism and expansionism. Our article thus aims to simultaneously construct, add to, and – we hope – inspire further research on *concurrent* versions of the past, where the weight of what is considered history and how it is told is productively rethought.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Research Council of Norway (Grant 301340). The authors would like to thank all members of the Arctic Voices group (www.arcticvoices.space), in particular Drs Jérémie M. McGowan and Sigfrid

Kjeldaas, for their insightful feedback on earlier versions of this essay. We are also grateful to the two anonymous peer reviewers and the Editorial Board at *Interventions* for their valuable comments. Lastly, we would like to thank Drs Richard Thomson and Viccy Coltman, who supervised Høvik's very first version of this text.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Norges Forskningsråd: [grant no 301340].

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