

*The Social Contribution of the Canadian Rangers:
A Tool of Assimilation or Means of Agency?*

Magali Vullierme

Studying the relationship between Indigenous people and the Canadian Army helps to enhance our understanding of the place of Indigenous peoples in society. This article ascertains the current social costs and benefits of service in the Canadian Rangers for Canada's Inuit at an operational level, using a series of interviews conducted between August 2016 and December 2016 in Aupaluk and Saint-Jean-Sur-Richelieu (Québec). Applying the concepts of assimilation and agency helps to clarify our understanding of the identities, relationships, and practices associated with this military subcomponent, challenging conventional understandings of the military as a state instrument to assimilate or marginalize Indigenous people and peoples (Lackenbauer, 2006; 2007a).

Scholars have analyzed the relationship between the Canadian Armed Forces and Indigenous people through several lenses. In some instances, the close association of citizenship and enrolment has been used by Indigenous people to avoid enlistment (Riseman 2014; Boas 2010). In other instances, Indigenous people faced difficulties trying to volunteer as social consequences of discriminatory policies (Winegard, 2011,

2012; Jordens 1989; Sheffield, 1996). Scholars have applied the same analysis to explain difficulties faced by Indigenous veterans when returning to civilian life (Sheffield, 2007; Lackenbauer, 2007b; Riseman 2012). The history of the Canadian Rangers, however, has shown that “quintessentially assimilationist” nature of military institutions cannot be applied to Rangers patrols. Seemingly for pragmatic reasons, Canadian Rangers patrols evolved to take into account cultural differences and smoothed the assimilationist nature of military institutions (Lackenbauer 2006, 2011a, 2011b, 2013; Lackenbauer and Mantle, 2007; Griffiths, Huebert and Lackenbauer, 2011).

Briefly said, the Canadian Rangers are a subcomponent of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Reserve located in remote areas of Canada. Patrols are composed mainly of Indigenous men and women under the responsibility of predominantly non-Indigenous Ranger Instructors (Lackenbauer, 2007a; Kikkert and Stern, 2017). Serving their country from their home communities, Canadian Rangers are recruited based on their knowledge and skills, and on their “intimate, ancestral ties to their homelands” (Lackenbauer, 2013 p. 51). Officially, their main task is to demonstrate Canadian sovereignty over isolated regions that cannot be conveniently or economically covered by other element of the Canadian military, such as the Arctic. As part of their mission, Canadian Rangers participate in exercises with Regular and Primary Reserve forces, where Indigenous peoples thus work alongside and guide southern-based units. They also conduct constabulary missions (search and rescue) and are in charge of Junior Canadian Rangers patrols in their communities.

This close association of Indigenous people with a predominantly non-Indigenous military institution more generally raises questions of assimilation and agency. How do the participants describe Canadian Ranger patrols? Do elements of assimilation or of agency transpires from their discourse?

This paper is centred on the analysis of twenty interviews that were conducted with members of the 2nd Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (2 CRPG) in 2016 – ten Rangers (ranked R-1 to R-10) and ten instructors or other ranked officers (ranked M-1 to M-10). Based on an inductive analysis of participants’ opinions, this paper discusses whether the respondents saw Canadian Rangers as a tool of assimilation of Inuit and/or as a mean to reinforce the agency of Inuit communities. Two central themes are identified in the interview corpus. First, phrases, or part of phrases, pointing toward the

identification of assimilation were identified. Yet these elements refer to the assimilation – albeit limited – of non-indigenous Ranger Instructors rather than of Inuit. This does not deny or downplay the painful history of forced assimilation endured by Inuit and other Indigenous peoples through much of Canadian history. Evangelization, forced resettlement, and residential schools are examples of the attempted assimilation of Indigenous people to occidental culture. However, huge cultural differences persist and when someone goes “up North” he or she has to adapt to a different physical and social geography. In the past, the reality of adaptation led to a restructuring of Canadian Ranger patrols (Lackenbauer, 2013) and, today, to a limited assimilation of Ranger Instructors. Second, I identify elements referring to a positive contribution that Ranger service brings to a sense Inuit agency. These elements further explain the active support of Inuit for this unique military subcomponent.

Assimilation Theory: A Short Précis

In *La relation à l'Autre*, Schnapper (1998) explains two ways to perceive the Other. The first one takes into account difference: “The Other is other, human societies are diverse.... ‘I’ evaluate the Other with ‘my’ own culture, perceived as the main culture. The Other, then, can only be an imperfect state of oneself. He is accepted with his difference but he is stuck in his inferiority, which is definitive” (Schnapper, 1998, p. 35). The second way of perceiving the Other derives from the principle of universalism: differences are taken into account but the unity of human race prevails. According to this logic, each person has the same capability or the same intellectual and moral potential, even though it might not be expressed in the same manner. Each possesses the same reason and the same vocation to freedom. “The Other is an other self. In principle, no limits exists to the right of human as human, to the dignity of each of them and to the respect that must be shown to each of them” (Schnapper, 1998, pp. 36-37).

In real life, universalism is limited by inequalities of power and individual capabilities. In addition, a risk exists that universalist principle leads to assimilationism. In this situation, “‘I’ perceive the other has a human being benefiting from the same rights as I. But, since it is difficult to think the other could be equal without being identical, ‘I’ do not perceive he/she in his/her uniqueness. The Other is

meant to become like 'Y' (Schnapper, 1998, pp. 36-37). Hence, the Other must be assimilated to the culture of "I", if needed with an assimilationist policy¹ to eradicate his/her culture and absorb it. "In its most aggressive political form, it follows the logic of imperialist racism, colonialism or assimilationism. The goal is not to exclude the other but to include him/her while denying him/her since we want him/her to be like 'Y'" (Schnapper, 1998, pp. 36-37).

When analyzing the interplay between democracy and assimilation, Schnapper uses Park's analysis on the race relation cycle. This cycle starts with contact resulting in competition relation between the groups; it is then followed by conflict, accommodation or adaptation amongst these groups; and the last step is assimilation. According to Park (1924):

Assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups develop memories, feelings and attitudes towards others persons or groups; and, by sharing their experience and their history, they build a common cultural life. Since assimilation reveals this sharing of tradition, this intimate participation to common experiences, it is a central phenomenon in historical and cultural process.... Through imitation and suggestion, communication leads to a progressive and unconscious modification of attitudes and feelings of group members. The resulting unit is not necessarily or even usually unambiguous; it is more a unit of experiences and orientation from where a community of goals and actions will develop (quoted in Schnapper, 1998, p.194).

According to Park, national unity does not derive from a forced ethnic and cultural homogeneity. Hence, the process of assimilation refers to the idea that individuals – by participating in several dimensions of collective life, and by sharing experiences, language, techniques, and way of lives – are progressively able to build a common cultural life. While not defending an assimilationist program, he believes that assimilation facilitates the preservation of each person's particularities.

For the purposes of this article, two dimensions of this theory should be underlined:

¹ Different from an assimilation policy (Schnapper, 1998)

(i) When applied to the Canadian Rangers, this concept of assimilation means that Indigenous and instructors share experiences, techniques, and ways of life during training, allowing them to progressively build a common cultural life. Sharing of the same language – in this case, English – is more debatable as a source of shared interest and well-being because Inuit are deeply committed to preserving their Indigenous language (Inuktitut) (Simon, 2017).² Of course, this “common cultural life” is limited in time since Ranger Instructors only visit each community with a Ranger patrol for a twelve-day training period each year. Nonetheless, this short period creates a cultural “awareness” which leads to (limited) “assimilation,” as we see in the following developments.

(ii) Schnapper’s and Park’s theories were mainly conducted within research on immigration in which assimilation processes are intended to bring together multiple populations to build a unique and unified society. Applied to a colonial society with Indigenous peoples, this assimilation process is best conceptualized as one where multiple populations – allochthone (now dominant) and Indigenous (now dominated) – are trying to build a unique and unified society.

Agency Theory: A Short Précis

Agency is the human capacity to intentionally influence the course of one’s life and actions, as well as to influence others, collective action systems, or the social and natural space (Carré, 2004; Afonso, Devundara, Jeansonnie and Egbor, 2011; Jézégou, 2014). It also implies a component of anticipation by the agent regarding consequences of his/her behaviours. An agent is “able to act and make decisions in a reasoned and responsible manner towards others,” and is “able to act competently, reasoned, conscientious and thoughtful” (Lang, 2011). According to Bandura, one must reject binary views explaining human behaviour exclusively through the prism of the unconscious or environment; he does not deny the scope of sociological analyses of social reproduction but relativizes it. Thus, everyone can be a proactive agent, with auto-organizational, auto reflexive and auto regulative capacities. Everyone can demonstrate element of agency if he/she sees him/herself as agent of his/her actions.

² Inuktitut is frequently used between Rangers and between Rangers and Rangers Juniors.

Everyone can be actor of his/her development and choices, even though these still will be influenced by history and social environment (Lang, 2011).

Agency can be exercised in three ways. First, it can be the direct result of a person's intention, which reflects the anticipation component of agency. Second, it can result from a proxy or mandate by which the agent relies on others to achieve it. Third, it can be collective, when goals are reached thanks to coordination and interdependency of several agents. This collective agency functions through "the intermediary of a common goal, a common belief in collective performance; it allows to transform the environment instead of collectively adapt or adjust to it; it allows also to generate communities and to develop them thanks to a collective effort aiming towards the shared goal" (Jézégou, 2014).³

From Better Knowledge to "Assimilation"; From Active Involvement to Agency

Below I analyze responses to questions about how Rangers and Ranger Instructors describe their relationships with their patrols and the Canadian Rangers as an institution. These relationships underline elements showing Ranger Instructors' "assimilation" and elements showing Rangers' agency.

The Canadian Rangers, a tool of instructors' "assimilation"

Data analysis revealed several elements of Ranger Instructors being "assimilated" into Inuit culture. This "assimilation" is possible thanks to a better understanding of Indigenous peoples within the subcomponent. Indeed, working within the Canadian Rangers allows instructors to understand differences between Indigenous peoples (a). Then, it reveals the added-value of Inuit Rangers (b). These two elements, supported by all the instructors, are well summarized by M-10:

³ Previous scholars have begun to apply the concept of agency to civil-military relations. In *Armed Servants*, Feaver (2003) uses it to demonstrate that each party, as agent, makes strategic and rational choices by collaborating with other parties. This collaboration is conducted by fear of the other, and therefore reflects a power struggle. Here, no element related to power struggle will be included.

What I learned at school and the reality, it is two completely different things..... Having living it for a long time, there are big differences.... I don't even know where to begin: with 17 years of experience within the Canadian Rangers, I have a lot to say. I worked with Cree, Naskapi, Montagnais, Inuit, Whites, Franco... I can give you example for each of them.... Inuit and First Nations are really different, for sure. For me, Inuit are less assimilated to [the Southern] way-of-doing than First Nations but they are... more followers if I may. There are some natural leaders but it is a people who knows how to live and let live. Stress is not part of their culture, stress comes from the South, not from the North. There are really communitarian persons, they will always be there to help each other, they survived this way for thousands of years, so it is something that they will always have.... It is a people that, once they trust you, they will always trust you but... they have a hard time trusting people because they saw a lot of persons come and go ... and it is each time a break up so they are fearful. But when they open up, they know you and they know that you are here ... and after 17 years, I consider some of them as long-time friends.

These words show that, by spending time with Inuit serving in the Rangers and getting to know them, Instructors develop a very close relationship with their Rangers, which then leads to the “assimilation” of elements of Inuit culture (c). The following sections focus on each of these three main ideas.

a. A tool to understand differences between Indigenous peoples

During interviews, several instructors admitted having a wrong or distorted idea of Canadian Indigenous peoples before joining 2 CRPG. These elements were elicited by the question: “In your opinion, has your perception, through your contact with Indigenous peoples, evolved with the Canadian Rangers?” Responses were unanimously positive. A lot of Instructors used to confound First Nations, Métis and Inuit and were not aware of the differences of life in First Nations’ reserves and life in Inuit communities.

For example, M-2 emphasized that: “people in the South, they have the tendency to say: ‘Indians this,’ ‘Indians that’ and ‘Inuit this,’ ‘Inuit that.’ But they are not aware of

the reality.... And you know, Indians and Inuit, they do not live the same way either.... Inuit people live like us, like white people. They pay taxes, just like us.... People are not aware of that.” Interviewee M-5 offered a similar analysis: “At the beginning, like almost everyone, we believed: ‘we know, Indigenous peoples do not pay taxes’ and everything. But at the end, after working with them... we see that it is only people living in reserves that have these privileges. So you can be Indigenous but if you decide to go and live in a big city, Montreal, Quebec, Ottawa let’s say, you become a Canadian citizen like everyone, a Québécois, and you will have to pay your taxes as everyone.... People will sometimes criticise, they will judge those people but most of the time they just don’t know.”

M-4 underlined that differences between First Nations reserves and Inuit communities are well illustrated in Kuujjuarapik, a town split between Cree and Inuit. The “Canadian Rangers world is very wide... at our office, we are dealing with Cree, Innu, Inuit, Montagnais etc. we deal with the military reality but we also deal with the community reality,” he explained. “For example, in Kuujjuarapik, we can see the difference between two cultures, for example at the socio-economical level. There is the Cree side of the town, they are well, they have got subventions. They have money. Look at all the stations, they have new firefighter stations, police stations and so one. The Inuit side also have their police station and firefighter station but it is far from being that beautiful.... Us, we say ‘Kuujjuarapik’ but it is actually Kuujjuarapik for the Inuit side and Whapmagoostui for the Cree side. And they have their own budget and own administration. There are a major and a band chief.”

Canadian Rangers reflect the cultural diversity of Canada and can help us to better understand various Indigenous peoples and the differences between them. By showing the structural and budgetary differences between First Nations and Inuit, however, the Canadian Rangers might be a drag on Park’s “unity of the community” idea. Indeed, several Ranger Instructors emphasize differences between Indigenous communities and show a certain empathy towards Inuit.⁴

⁴ That being stated, participants knew that I was focusing on Inuit people and I interviewed Ranger Instructors working with Inuit communities as a priority. Accordingly, this ‘empathy’ might reflect these biases. Still, this empathy persists when Instructors talk about their patrols’ abilities, as we will see in the next section.

b. A tool to show Inuit 'added value'

Many Instructors expressed clear admiration towards "their" Rangers. M-8 exclaimed:

The gang is excellent! One time at Trenton, there was an accident with a chopper, it was five years ago maybe. Trenton refused to ask [for the] Rangers' activation because 'it is all good, we checked with planes.' After 48 hours... Trenton still could not find the victims. They asked for Rangers' assistance. The Rangers found the site... I think 12 hours after. So after that, Trenton realised 'hey, the Rangers are important, an asset.' The gangs are excellent.

Later, M-8 added: "the pride is here for the gangs, really... in their communities, the Rangers are freaking like that [thumbs up]. The youths watch out for the Rangers, the Rangers are here at every ceremony in red and everything and pride, it is really a good thing." As this testimony indicates, Instructors stand up for their patrols and are impressed by their capabilities and their added-value to the community.

Inuit also see this added-value, even though they did not express it the same way. Indeed, Inuit participants also underlined the pride of being a Ranger and the importance of what they learn in patrol which allowed them to work with other constabulary teams. For example, R-9 explains that the Ranger patrol taught him "to be a good person... yeah... to be a role model to the communities and everything." R-10 shares the memory of a search and rescue operation where the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) team was surprised by his capabilities: "The one that I remember very well, I was actually in charge of a multiple search," the Ranger recalled. "I was in charge of it because they did not have the knowledge and I did a lot of training with the Rangers so that is why they said 'we trust you more, can you tell us what to do?' So that time I did that, and... when the SQ came and they take a look at the municipality with the Rangers, the SQ were really surprised of what I have done with the Rangers, the maps, compass, GPS, and myself with electronics, computer-based program, the map on the conference table, setting up the searches facilities and setting up the teams and focusing them to go out on different sections."

These stories show two points of view. For Ranger Instructors and for people from outside the Canadian Rangers, the patrols' capabilities are impressive. A huge part of the Rangers' strength (both individually and collectively) derives from everyday experiences, from their "skills and expert local knowledge" (Lackenbauer, 2013, p. 14). According to Rangers interviewed, however, these capacities also reflect their training, provided by the military through the Ranger Instructors, which allows them to operate independently and to know how to operate with other constabulary teams in terms of vocabulary, process, and equipment. R-10 sums this up well: "It is working very well. The training that we received and the local knowledge... when you put together the two cultures, the military culture and the Inuit culture, you sort of mix them together and you find unity."

c. A tool leading to (a limited) instructors' "assimilation"

During data analysis, I discerned Ranger Instructors' "assimilation" to Inuit culture using two elements: the relationship to time – an essential component of Inuit culture – and the ways that Inuit raise children.

Several participants explained in detail how Inuit have a different relationship to time than people "down south." For instance, M-9 told me:

Regarding way of doing things.... In the North, you cannot ask them to hurry up, to run, it is not normal. They will do it if it is a matter of life or death, if someone is injured, in that case they will hurry up. Otherwise, why hurry up? We will do things slowly and we will do things right. It is a different world when it comes to that. Completely different.... They will go to sleep when they are tired, get up when they wake up, they eat when they are hungry. They do not necessarily have the same relation to time than us.... We have instilled in them this relation to time and it is the part that they like the least.

During my field work, I personally witnessed this distinct relationship to time on several occasions. The first example was related to an appointment that I had with a Ranger to conduct an interview. At the end of a training meeting, we agreed to meet two hours later. He never showed up and explained later that he fell asleep. The other

example happened during a training activity. We were split into three teams: one team at the headquarters, and two teams in vehicles to conduct radio tests. I was in one of the vehicles. On our way back, Rangers decided to have a coffee break at a hunting cabin. When the headquarters called to check at what time we would be back, a Ranger answered: "We will be back... soon enough." Later he added: "if you are impatient, then you chose the wrong place to work."

This relationship to time has been a persistent theme during the Canadian Rangers' seventy-year history, and the organization has adapted to this cultural reality (see Lackenbauer 2013). Indeed, some Instructors told me that the Inuit approach to time was more logical than the "Southern" mentality, particularly in an Arctic context, thus indicating their "assimilation" to an Inuit way of thinking.

Some Ranger Instructors have also been assimilated into Inuit styles of education, especially M-7 who explained how he "brings back home" educational elements that he discovered while working with his patrols. In particular, he speaks about learning by observation and experience:

I have a small family, I have three children. So I liked what it brought me to see their culture, how they interact with children. And, slowly, it changed me. I brought it back home. So, with my children, I was more tolerant, more permissive. I include them more in a culture where we are relatively more constraining. For example, when it comes to playing with certain things. When I say play.... with kitchen knives, with axes ... we say to our children: "don't do it." We immediately put restrictions, and Inuit never do that. On the contrary, they will let them try, until they see that there is a danger. Then they will warn the kid. And sometimes even after the "danger" has passed. They will then say "you see, you are too young. You should not play with that." Learning by experience. So they will watch and do. I brought that back home and I am happy about that. I have a good mix, I think.

This quote, and similar ones in other interviews, show the influence of Inuit culture on Ranger Instructors. This influence is not experienced passively; on the contrary, it is acknowledged, accepted, and assimilated consciously.

The Canadian Rangers as a Means of Reinforcing Inuit Communities' Agency

The composition of a Canadian Ranger patrol is closely linked to an Indigenous person's will. This will is illustrated either when they join a patrol, when they participate in training exercises, and/or when they chose to leave the organization. Indeed, volunteering to serve as a Ranger is a personal choice. As a corollary, if a person wants to leave a patrol, he/she is free to do so. In the past, some Rangers have quit training or operations, or have left a patrol altogether, when a conflict occurred (Lackenbauer, 2006). Rangers' agency was revealed in discussions about (a) the number of Rangers, (b) about the central role played by family and community for the Inuit (reasons why Inuit join), and (c) elements of Inuit culture and personality.

a. Inuit participation

During my study, I heard a few times about a supposed drop in the number of Canadian Rangers in Quebec. In order to understand the reason for this potential decrease, I added a question on that subject in my interviews. Answers were mixed. For some respondents, this "decrease" is the result of endogenous and/or exogenous elements of the subcomponent. For others, there is no "decrease" but possibly weaker participation in training exercises and activities.

Interviewees suggested several endogenous elements. A particular emphasis was placed on the implementation of rules regarding past criminal records checks. Since the Junior Canadian Rangers (JCR) were launched in 1995, recruits to the Rangers must produce a copy of their criminal record to work with youth involved in the JCR programme. Several prospective Rangers have not applied to join the organization because of this rule: some refuse to produce their criminal records because they are too ashamed to ask for them or are afraid to discover what is in them. "Since the Rangers now have to be involved with the Junior Rangers, the military took that very seriously," R-4 summarized. "They can't have people with criminal records dealing with children, especially any kind of sexual abuse, sexual assault.... So immediately there is less people that can join. And there was also a lot of push for alcohol- and drug-free training, and a lot of people [in Nunavik] use drugs and alcohol." Other endogenous elements

suggested by respondents link to redundancies in the training program or the fact that Rangers are being “warned too late” of training dates to secure time off work.

Interviewees also underlined various exogenous elements: work, family, or a shortage of money to buy mandatory equipment (such as snowmobiles and boats). The most significant, however, is basic demography. M-1 explains that “we have a lot of old Rangers, young ones, but in the middle ... the baby-boomers... they don’t have a strong interest in their communities. They left their communities at an early age, they came back when they were old.... It is one of the big challenges. My colleagues and I discuss a lot about that. It is a very big challenge to accept this demographic decline: ‘how can we keep the Rangers?’ but also ‘how can we keep the knowledge?’” More categorically, M-6 suggests that: “this has nothing to do with the Canadian Rangers at all. It is only demographic and the program suffers” from this broader societal reality.

One Ranger Instructor indicated that a lack of growth in the number of Rangers is not an issue at all: in his view, it is better to have a smaller number of people involved and well-trained than to have a larger number who are less capable on the land. These elements illustrate how the Canadian Rangers depend above all else on the Rangers’ motivation and willingness to participate. Accordingly, their patrols are an indicator of Indigenous people’s agency.

b. Motivations to join the Canadian Rangers

While discussing common interests between the military and Inuit, several participants told me about the central importance of family and community amongst Inuit (M-1, M-4 or M-9). Of interest is the frequent explanation that helping family and community are the main reasons why Inuit join the Rangers. For them, Ranger training is a way to save lives, as R-3 highlights:

I just want people to be safe and normal.... Sometimes they are hurt and they cannot walk. They are hurt because we get very cold very fast. We don’t have trees, it is very cold. It is good now they have phones, they can call us... ‘We are here, we are hurt’... because we have to rush because it is cold like minus 30 to 60.... It is very special because everybody has to be OK... until we find them... very special people... we have to search.

R-5 also talks about the importance to be a Ranger because “personally for me it is to gain knowledge on survival or like rescuing, helping people, to get trained, to protect... just in case something happens to my family and my friends.”

c. Inuit culture and personality

Rangers’ agency can also be shown through elements linked to the Junior Canadian Rangers. This programme was launched at the prompting of Inuit leaders, as R-4 relates:

They created the Junior Rangers program because the Rangers of a town called Puvirnituk on Hudson Bay said “You know what? We should do something like cadets for our junior, our young people” and the Quebec group said: “Sure, let’s try” and so they created the Junior Rangers and I believe that’s true, it started in Northern Quebec. It spreads to the all of Canada now.

In *The Canadian Rangers: A Living History*, Lackenbauer corroborates that Lieutenant-Colonel Chartrand, in charge of the Cadets and Rangers of Quebec, launched an unofficial program for youth after a spate of suicides in the mid-1990s. This unofficial program was financed by Kativik, the regional government in Nunavik, and the first summer camp and training were organised in 1995 (Lackenbauer, 2013, p. 365). The Junior Rangers have expanded since, numbering 4421 youth in 141 patrols across Canada as of 2016 (National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman, 2016).

This dramatic JCR expansion also reflects Indigenous people’s and peoples’ agency. Indeed, the implementation of a Junior Rangers patrol in a community comes from personal, grassroots initiatives. One participant (R-7) described how she launched the Junior Rangers patrol in her community as follows:

I did join the Rangers... I started off actually as a civilian to start the Juniors Rangers program in our community because it is a really good program for our youth and it was just drawing my attention so just as a civilian I decided to make some calls and inquire. Finally after a couple of

years it was possible and the program became available in our community. It was in 2005, I started with the PHASE program.⁵

These examples show that Indigenous people are active agents (rather than passive actors) in the Canadian Ranger organization and the Junior Canadian Ranger programme: they choose to join a patrol and invest in developing them because it is good for their communities.

Conclusion: The Canadian Rangers as a Tool of Instructors “Assimilation” and a Means of Reinforcing Inuit Agency

While working with different Indigenous cultures and learning to respect their capabilities on the land, Ranger Instructors have developed a set of memories, feelings and attitudes towards Indigenous people serving in the Canadian Rangers. Experiences and techniques shared in the field build a common cultural life between Rangers and Ranger Instructors. In this process of assimilation, imitation and suggestion led to a progressive but (contrary to Park’s theory) conscious modification of Instructors’ attitudes and feelings. In this example, the unit of experiences and orientations has produced a community of goals and actions. In turn, these common goals and actions allow predominantly Indigenous Ranger patrols to function effectively and efficiently.

These elements also result from the positive contributions that the Canadian Ranger organization makes in terms of Inuit agency. Interviews reveal that Rangers intentionally influence their lives and actions, and act in competent, reasoned, conscientious, and thoughtful ways to improve their communities. When Indigenous people choose to join a Ranger patrol, to participate in training and exercises, or to create and support a Junior Canadian Ranger patrol, they do so to be better trained, to save local lives, or to help youth in their communities. This study argues that the three elements to exercise agency exist in the Ranger organization. First, Indigenous people’s personal agency results in their choice to join a patrol. Second, Indigenous people serving in the Rangers give their non-Indigenous Ranger Instructor a mandate to train

⁵ The JCR PHASE program is “a culturally and geographically-sensitive program that teaches Junior Canadian Rangers about different forms of harassment (personal, racial, sexual, emotional), abuse (physical, sexual, neglect), and appropriate forms of discipline” (Junior Canadian Rangers, 2018).

them, but in terms that reflect rather than undermine Indigenous knowledge and practices. Third, this agency is collective because Rangers (and Ranger Instructors) share a common goal and belief in collective performance to help each other. Taken together, inductive interpretation of interviews reveals that the Canadian Rangers represent a partial tool of “assimilating” non-Indigenous Ranger Instructors into Indigenous thought and practice (and not vice versa), as well as a means to contribute positively to the agency of Inuit communities.

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