# InuitArt

QUARTERLY

L<sup>α</sup>Q.Dペ<sup>®</sup> Δ.o.Δ<sup>°</sup> Δο<sup>®</sup> Δ.o.Δ<sup>®</sup> Δ.o.Δ<sup>®</sup> Δ.o.Δ<sup>®</sup> Δ.o.Δ<sup>®</sup> Δ.o.Δ<sup>®</sup> Δ.o.Δ<sup>®</sup> Maannaujuq Inuit Sanannguaqsimajangit Tauttungillu Contemporary Inuit Art & Perspectives

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The Hidden Lives of
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Untitled (Dream scene) (detail)
1989
Duffel, felt and embroidery thread
91.4 × 115.6 cm
COURTESY EXPANDINGINUIT.COM

ABOVE Kudluajuk Ashoona (1958–2019 Kinngait)

Untitled (Figure in kimono) 2017

COURTESY MADRONA GALLERY REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION DORSET FINE ARTS

LEFT
Unidentified artist
(Nain)

Embroidered square with inukuluit n.d.

COURTESY THE PEARY-MACMILLAN ARCTIC MUSEUM, BOWDOIN COLLEGE PHOTO LUC DEMERS





PREVIOUS SPREAD

Fanny Alagalak Avatituq
(b. 1950 Qamani'tuaq)

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Untitled
c. 1980
Duffel, felt and
embroidery floss
84 × 70 cm
GOVERNMENT OF NUNAVUT
FINE ART COLLECTION
COURTESY WINNIPEG ART
GALLERY

PHOTO ERNEST MAYER

₽₺σ⊲J' C&\D∩CD<' **९౮ ⟨८**₾८<sup>\$</sup> **८९०Ე'**\$ (∆.ბСЪ°\$\Z\\$ 1950-Г' \$\LФ'ጋ⟨¹Г')

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In 1970s Qamani'tuaq (Baker Lake), NU, a group of talented seamstresses invented a vital new art form called nivingajuliat, or wall hangings. Five decades on, Krista Ulujuk Zawadski considers how these remarkable and beloved works on cloth continue to record personal stories that have often been marginalized in the canonical art history of the region.



LEFT
Janet Nungnik
(b. 1954 Qamani'tuag)

Frost Boil Song

2003 Duffel, felt, embroidery floss and printed fabric 44.4 × 54.9 cm COURTESY MARION SCOTT

GALLERY MARI

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RIGHT

Jessie Kenalogak
(b. 1951 Qamani'tuaq)

Untitled 1979 Duffel, felt and embroidery floss 55.5 × 61.5 cm

COURTESY WINNIPEG ART GALLERY PHOTO SERGE SAURETTE

Cc<sup>™</sup>∧⟨do<sup>C</sup> **プレーンし<sup>™</sup>** (△oc ▷<sup>™</sup>) | 1<sup>™</sup>

(ALCPIPLE 1951-F9 6LGOGF()



Sewing for Inuit has always been the basis of our culture, our roots and our worldview. Sewing nourishes our lives with warm clothing, it strengthens our traditions by providing opportunities to share knowledge and opens an avenue for meaningful memory-making with our families. Sewing provides a way for transmitting our culture, stories and values to younger generations—threading our lives together in the intergenerational tapestry of Inuit life. Sewing is a cornerstone of our language, culture and values; it has been, and still is, a strong component of our lives.

Our sewing tradition sits outside of our experience with settlercolonialism. It is maintained by the value placed on it by Inuit who teach the skills to younger generations. Sewing is often one of the first things you learn as a young person in Nunavut. I learned to sew as a young girl in Igluligaarjuk (Chesterfield Inlet), NU, where we were taught basic stitches at home and in school, and the stitches have stuck with me since. Even today I continue to use the same stitches I learned back then, and I revel in seeing my children, nieces and nephews learn the same skills at home. Among my first grade-school projects were mitts and a nivingajuliat (wall hanging), and when I completed the nivingajuliat—with my signature "K. Oolooyuk" stitched at the bottom corner like all nivingajuliat artists do—I gleefully sent it to my grandparents in Winnipeg. I wanted to share with them my enthusiasm for learning new skills and to showcase aspects of my culture that bridge the gaps between generations and between cultures. This is the social life of nivingajuliat; sewing is the basis of Inuit upbringing and life and by extension so are nivingajuliat and other forms of sewn art.

Qamani'tuaq (Baker Lake), NU, has a long art history, one rooted in the legacies of ancestors' traditional work on clothing, tools and oral histories, and these skills have formed the pillar of the more recently developed commercial art production in the community. Benefitting from government crafts programs and early exhibitions, the community opened a print shop in 1963 that began producing an annual print collection and today it continues to support a fruitful carving scene known for the beautiful black sheen of its polished hard rock. As southern arts and crafts officers arrived in the community in the 1960s, facilitating workshops in collaboration with Inuit artists, the nivingajuliat movement began taking shape. Women

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were taking the sewing skills learned at home, honed while making beautiful clothing for their families, and applying them to the production of art. Although artists experimented with different art forms, the focus has always been on sharing stories.

In spite of the histories often accompanied by settler perspectives, nivingajuliat are a vibrant way to narrate Inuit stories and traditions, encoded with culture and language in the art form. The stitches in these textiles represent the multi-layered art history of Qamani'tuaq but also transfer the value and legacy of the practice of sewing within Inuit culture and history. *Untitled* (1979) by Jessie Kenalogak takes on this charge didactically, creating a sort of artful instruction manual for living on the land, which highlights the importance of passing on Inuit knowledge to younger generations. In *Untitled*, the words "In 1940/Inuk Tent/ Made From/ Tukto Skin/ and Sinew" are stitched around two bright pink tents in the centre, both tents held up with the shapes of caribou bones. The inventory of materials and the call to the past emphasizes the need to perpetuate this knowledge through the art itself.

Nivingajuliat are equally important for the unique and often gendered narratives they capture. Nivingajuliat are primarily created by women, offering glimpses into their lives and telling stories from their perspectives—stories that might otherwise be excluded from tangible records.<sup>2</sup> The unique opportunity afforded by these works, to engage with a female-dominated art form, is one that I gravitate toward because I can often personally relate to the art, the stories and the emotions that are being shared.

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OPPOSITE

Naomi Ityi
(1928–2003 Qamani'tuaq)

Untitled (With tattooed faces)
c. late 1990s
Duffel, felt and
embroidery thread
158.7 × 193.1 cm
COURTESY EXPANDINGINUIT.COM

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RIGHT **Myra Kukiiyaut** (1929–2006 Qamani'tuaq)

Summer Camp 1989 Duffel, felt and embroidery thread 86.4 × 67.3 cm COURTESY WADDINGTON'S

ʹየ∩⊲ċ·ʹϽʹჼ **LΔϚ dΡʹታ▷ʹ** (1929–2006 ʹቴLσ·ʹϽ⊲ʹΓʹ)



The seminal 1974 exhibition organized by the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council, entitled *Crafts from Arctic Canada*, is particularly notable when considering the trajectory of nivingajuliat art history. Featuring clothing, ceramics, dolls, jewellery and nivingajuliat, the exhibition was one of few early exhibitions of Inuit art that celebrated artmaking techniques beyond carving and printmaking, making it a watershed moment for Inuit textile artists. In the exhibition catalogue Virginia J. Watt and Susan Cowman write about the translation of Inuit sewing skills to this new art form, and the curiosity of the artists in learning and experimenting with new forms. The artists, according to the catalogue, were very receptive, even to those practices they were not familiar with, because they simply "wanted to know."

Elizabeth Angrnagangrniq, Martha Apsaq (1930–1995), Naomi Ityi (1928–2003), Jessie Oonark, OC, RCA (1906–1985), Mary Yuusipiq Singaati (1936–2017) and Marion Tuu'luq, RCA (1910–2002)—all from Qamani'tuaq—are among the artists included in *Crafts from Arctic Canada*. These trailblazing seamstresses distinguished Qamani'tuaq from other communities that were creating sewn art during this period by establishing the standard of what nivingajuliat represent, raising Inuit master stitching to new levels and experimenting in ever larger scales that departed drastically from other textile forms—beaded or embroidered clothing—that were meant to be worn.

Untitled (With tattooed faces) (c. 1990s) by Naomi Ityi showcases the large format possible with nivingajuliat, as well as its ability to

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LEFT Jessie Kenalogak

> — Untitled

1979
Duffel, felt and embroidery floss
70.5 × 76 cm

GOVERNMENT OF NUNAVUT FINE ART COLLECTION COURTESY WINNIPEG ART GALLERY PHOTO SERGE SAURETTE

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OPPOSITE

Janet Nungnik

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Eagle's Shadow 2018 Duffel, felt and embroidery thread 146.1 × 203.2 cm

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transmit Inuit knowledge and stories. Here Ityi resists colonialism head on, telling a story to be shared with future generations of Inuit about the traditional life and religion we once practiced with angakuuniq (shamanism). Two drumming figures are interlaced with other aspects of Inuit life, such as travelling by dog team and fishing with kakivak, highlighting their importance to Inuit identity and values. What strikes me when looking at this piece is the way Ityi has helped preserve the imagery of kakiniit (tattoos) in the midst of colonial anarchy, which sought to end the practice. Thankfully, stitched iconography like Ityi's has recorded the practice and created a safe space for Inuit women to embrace this important tradition of self-representation today.

Outside of their representational work, the very act of stitching nivingajuliat sustains Inuit culture, fostering opportunities for meaningful mentorship. In 2018 I attended a printmaking and wall hanging workshop held at the Jessie Oonark Centre in Qamani'tuaq. Renowned and prolific artist Fanny Alagalak Avatituq lead the wall hanging classes, and it was endearing to watch her teach stitching techniques to a young Inuk. The care and patience she demonstrated in her teaching was as palpable as it is in her work. The impeccable artistry and skill of Avatituq's work personifies the cultural mentorship of Inuit seamstresses, as seen in *Untitled* (c. 1980). The colours of this piece are striking and the details are intricate. This is, perhaps, the apex of this technique of nivingajuliat as an art form, refined through intergenerational mentorship, making Avatituq's mentorship

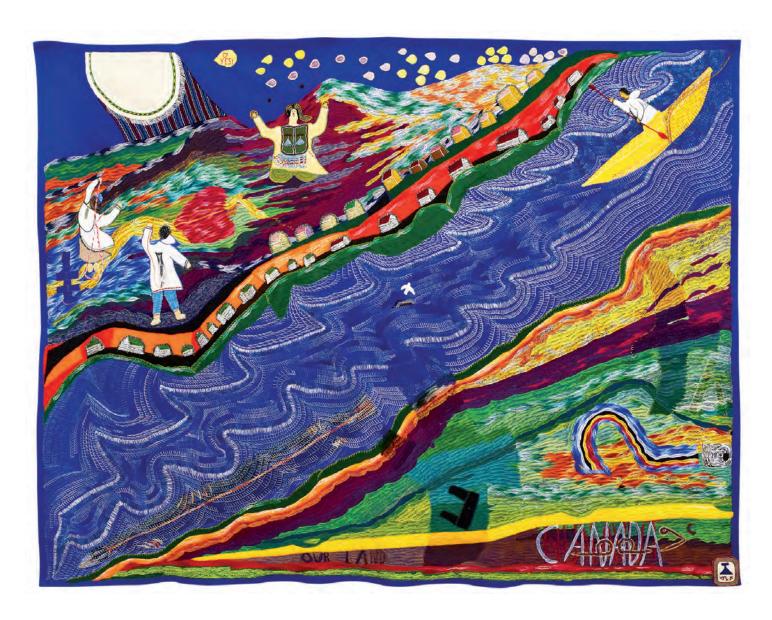
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that much more special. Scenes like these at the Jessie Oonark Centre make me optimistic that the future of nivingajuliat will be as vibrant as Avatituq's style.

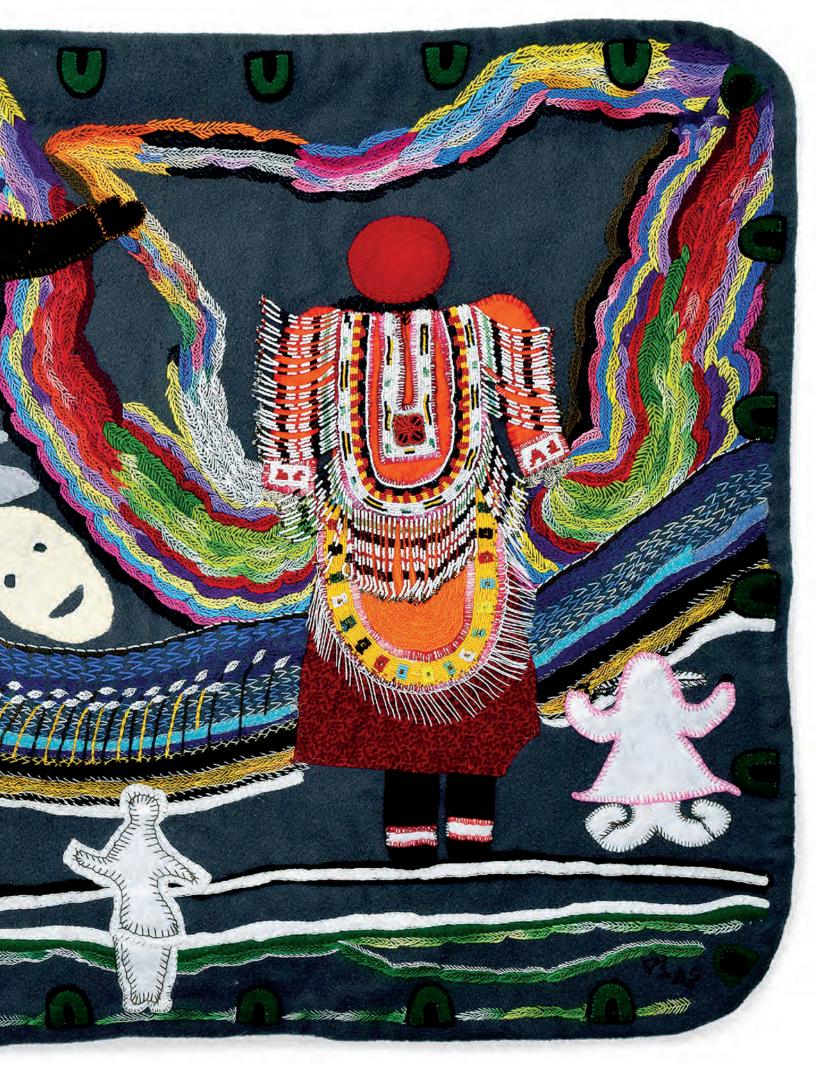
This impulse, to record and to pass forward, is evident across the work of many nivingajuliat artists. Irene Avaalaaqiaq Tiktaalaaq describes her work as trying "to keep our culture alive through my art. Each nivingajuliat I do tells a story or legend. Art is a way to preserve our culture." Janet Nungnik is among the next generation of artists, including Avatituq, after master artists like Jessie Oonark and Marion Tuu'luuq. Nungnik's bold colours, expansive use of stitches and novel perspectives mark her as a master artist in her own right. Nungnik has a decidedly individualistic style that she has worked hard to cultivate that parallels Avaalaaqiaq's storytelling technique. Learning to sew from her late mother, renowned artist Martha Tiktak Anautalik (1928-2015), Nungnik has been steadily sewing nivingajuliat since the 1970s, continuing to learn new techniques while pushing the boundaries of stitching and representation. Works like Eagle's Shadow (2018) and Kiviuq and His Journeys (2007) put Nungnik's skills on full display through intricate shadow work and three-dimensional beading. It's skill that hasn't gone unnoticed by the broader art world—2019 found Nungnik with two solo exhibitions, a showing at Canada's largest art fair and several major acquisitions.

Nungnik uses her art to dig into the deep recesses of her childhood memories and bring forward images and feelings that she thought were lost. In a conversation with Nungnik, she explained that she was  $\Lambda$ -L-16PULG'', Paipina 4.F Darina Aruen ĎĽᠮᡠᡃ᠘᠘᠘ᢣᡟ᠋ᢐᡝᢗᡆᡟᢂᢞᡆᢩᡠᡏ᠋ᡗ᠌᠄ᢆᡷᠦᡕ᠘ᡥᠦᡥ᠙ᡀᡃᡊᠫᡃ᠘ᠳ CALADO" JACIO" JAC" JAC" JAC" JACO", L'I  $^{1}$ ላ ᡃᢐ᠋ᠪᢣ᠘ᡃᠵᠪ᠈ᡃᡕ᠒ᡴᢣᠮ᠊᠋ᠳ᠈ᡎ᠘ᠫᢛᢩᢖᠦ᠕ᠸᡙ᠍᠍᠘ᡎ᠖᠘᠘᠙ᡯᡳᢗᠪᢛ ላペ二የላና ነ<u></u>ሲペቴሮዮቦናበጋና Þፚ•፞፞፞፞ፚ• ርd•\Þበናበペ•፟ጋፚ.  $\Delta$ ርናበረዾ•ኑፖL<sup>e</sup>ጋፚ  $\forall \Delta \Delta \Gamma \sigma^{b} \Gamma^{c} A^{c} \sigma^{c} \Delta \Delta C^{c} \dot{\sigma}^{c} A^{c} L^{c} D^{c} \Delta D U C^{c} C^{c} A^{c} C^{c} L^{c}$ ᠣ᠗ᠰ᠘ᢗᠸ᠊ᡏᠦ ᢗ᠘᠋᠋᠋᠉᠘ᠸ᠂᠒ᡩᠧ᠘ᢖᠴ᠘Ċᠦ<sup>ᡈ</sup>  $\Gamma^{\text{19}}$   $\Gamma^{\text$ 4LD  $PAD^{5}$  4L  $\Delta^{5}$ ቦና $\sigma$ ቢ Cር $^{5}$ ር $^{5}$ ቦና (2007)  $D^{5}$ ቦናJና 4የ $^{5}$ ቦ $^{5}$ ታ ᠘ᡙ᠘᠐ᢣᠦᢛ᠘ᢩ᠙᠙ᢗᡥᡗᡥᠦᢛ. ᡏ᠘ᢞᡎᢛ᠋ᠣᡥ᠘᠂᠙᠐ᢣᢣᠪ᠘ᢗᠸ᠆ᢛ᠑᠄ᢛ᠘ᢩ᠘᠐ᡤ᠘ \\
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PREVIOUS SPREAD

Janet Nungnik

Kiviuq and His Journeys 2007 Duffel, felt, embroidery floss and beadwork 88.9 × 144.8 cm

COURTESY MARION SCOTT GALLERY

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P&▷<sup>56</sup> ⟨I'L Δ<sup>6</sup>/P<sup>5</sup>⟨σ<sup>6</sup>/ 2007 <sup>5</sup>b'\_⊃ċ<sup>5</sup>(<sup>56</sup> Δ<sup>5</sup>₹⟨<sup>56</sup>,

BELOW
Marion Tuu'luq
(1910–2002 Qamani'tuaq)

Untitled 1979–80 Duffel, felt, embroidery floss and beadwork 113.5 × 150 cm

COLLECTION CANADA COUNCIL ART BANK PHOTO LIPMAN STILL PICTURES

⊲ርở′ጋ" **Γ⊲ሲን⁴ ጋ'ے"** (1910–2002 'bLơ'ጋ⊲'Γ')

CΔ\J/5bm\rC50
1979-80
5b-205c5 Δ\ddot
6b-205c5c C5b/5b/5b/16-20
4lL /5uD>-5c5b/5b/16-20
113.5 × 150 cm

ለታ⊳ለL4' bQCF bNL>ጐՐ'C ጎዉÞᲡ'b'ልবσ' PaÞታ'b'ልবσ' ব'ኦሮÞሲ> ሮኒ° ነበኦ' ব'ኦጐህব'



settled in the community of Qamani'tuaq around six or seven years old, and was not able to recall many memories from then. Yet through her art she has been able to open a seam revealing many of her childhood memories that had been hidden for years. "I can't remember how our camp looked when I was growing up," she told me, "but when I started making art I started to remember things, including where my mother would be when she cooks." That little intimate detail is an important thread to Nungnik's past that connects her to her family and her homeland. This is a strong demonstration of the power of art. Not only does art give you the opportunity to document and convey oral histories, traditional stories, Inuit material culture and Inuit values, it allows you to reconnect with your own histories, and helps one find their place in the broader story.

Inuit art histories written by non-Inuit are often prefaced by narratives of survival, where Inuit are depicted as working hard to endure life in a harsh and extreme environment. These narratives are damaging as they perpetuate the colonial gaze and prevent Inuit from representing ourselves the way we want in media. These depictions are well trodden and persist today, continuing to speak over Inuit voices. The recent backlash to the New York Times article "Drawn From Poverty: Art Was Supposed to Save Canada's Inuit. It Hasn't," shows that Inuit still combat these tropes, disputing the paternalistic gaze of non-Inuit art historians and writers. Nivingajuliat makers can interrupt this gaze, weaving their own direct counter-narratives. The cloth works of Ityi, Nungnik and other Inuit seamstresses refuse the tropes of decline and nostalgia assigned by outsiders, and depict scenes of renewal and transformation: sons-in-law joyfully received after a successful hunt, intergenerational games played in the freshness of spring and patterns that shift one's sense of place and ground.

Creating space to tell our own stories, from our own perspective, is an important part of decolonizing our art, 5 and this practice of self-representation is an essential facet of the story of nivingajuliat. Not only are the styles and perspectives deeply individual, each artist stitches their names into the art, as though offering their names as a personal, authorial corrective to the colonial histories that shape the descriptions of Inuit artmaking. Sewing, in this way, has created its own divergent art history in the Arctic, and I don't think it is a coincidence that these unique, stitched stories emerged during the height of colonialism in Qamani'tuaq. At a time when artists and art historians were framing Inuit art and language as cultural products in need of saviours, women were threading our collective memories, language and traditions onto wool duffel and disseminating our stories for everyone to see.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The print program was established in the 1960s, and the first annual collection was released in 1970. The Sanavik Co-op suspended the print program in 1990.
- <sup>2</sup> Although nivingajuliat are primarily produced by women, there are also men who produced the sewn art, and some became well known in their own right. Jimmy Taipana (1919–2000) and Normee Ekoomiak (1948–2009) are two such examples of nivingajuliat producers.
- <sup>3</sup> Nasby, Judith. Irene Avaalaaqiaq: Myth and Reality. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.
- <sup>4</sup> Janet Nungnik interview conducted by author in December 2019.
- <sup>5</sup> Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. "Forward." In *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, edited by Jo-Ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem et al. London, UK: Zed Books, 2019.

#### NOTES

- <sup>2</sup> CL<sup>6</sup>dd σል<sup>6</sup>\CC<sup>4</sup>C 4<sup>6</sup>a.o<sup>6</sup> \abba\b<sup>6</sup>b<sup>6</sup>\abba\b<sup>6</sup>, C\Delta\cop 4<sup>8</sup>\Delta\cop 1948-2009) Ċ<sup>6</sup>dd σል<sup>6</sup>\CC<sup>5</sup>C\Delta\cop 174<sup>6</sup>.
- 3 ሲጎሊ, ላበ. ላΔሲ<sup>6</sup> ላዋረናየላማ Þo<sup>6</sup>6<sup>6</sup>ንላና ላዜጋ ፖርፕ Lናንሲላ ላዜ የ<sup>6</sup>ጎር<sup>6</sup>: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.
- <sup>5</sup> /Γ', C<sup>C</sup>C CHΔ&Δ. "/≫⅃Ϥʹσʹͼͽ", ʹϐϦϷϽϹϦϤʹͼͽ: ΔοͺʹϐϭͼϸϬͼϧʹͰͿϤϭͼ Ϧϭ϶ͼϧʹ ʹϐϦϷα,ΡϹϦϤϭ·ϧ, ϤʹͼϧϷϧʹϲʹͼϹϦϤʹͼ ϦͿʹͼϧ ປ<sup>α</sup>ϲ ϤʹͼͿ<<sup>C</sup> Q'uim Q'uim Xiiem et al. London UK: Zed Books, 2019.