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Going native in the north: reconsidering British attitudes during the Franklin search, 1848–1859

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ABSTRACT. This article critically examines the assumption that the men of Sir John Franklin's last Arctic expedition died because, influenced by the characteristic British cultural prejudices of their time, they refused to employ Inuit survival skills. Since no detailed records from this expedition have ever been found, there is no direct evidence about the attitudes held or actions taken by its members. The article therefore draws on another source: the very extensive British periodical and newspaper coverage of the Franklin search. The writers who contributed to this literature knew even less than is now known about the events of the last Franklin expedition, but their speculations about the probable fate of the lost explorers reflect the beliefs about the Arctic and its people that prevailed at the time. Especially during the early 1850s, the great majority of periodical writers believed that Franklin and his men had gone native in order to survive. It is therefore evident that there was no cultural stigma attached to adopting the Inuit way of life in times of need.

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Introduction

That nineteenth-century British Arctic explorers suffered from 'an ethnocentric unwillingness to adopt native methods' and that '[d]oing things the hard way appealed to something deep in the psyche of Englishmen' (Mackinnon 1985: 132, 137) has achieved the status of an historical fact. Even when faced with the agony of slow starvation, the men of the last Franklin expedition supposedly preferred to die as Europeans rather than live like the Inuit. Their cultural identity as Englishmen was at stake, and, stoical to the end, they would not sacrifice it for mere survival. Canadian historian William Morrison claims that for Sir John Franklin and his men, 'to dress in caribou skins and eat seal meat like an Inuk would have been to let down the side; it would have been an act of race betrayal' (Morrison 1998: 71). Allegedly, the one British explorer who demonstrated the mental adaptability that Franklin and the others so conspicuously lacked was John Rae, an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). According to Vilhjalmur Stefansson and many later writers, Rae 'was in rather bad standing' with his contemporaries because he had 'lived like a savage' and 'behaved on his expeditions like a menial.' This 'did not seem cricket to the British public' because for them, the 'object of polar exploration' was 'to explore properly and not to evade the hazards of the game through the vulgar subterfuge of going native' (Stefansson 1938: 126. See also Mowat 1960: 276–277, 321; Huntford 1978: 10; Wallace 1980: 57, 62, 68, 110–111; Berton 1988: 158; Bunyan and others 1993: 68; Atwood 1995: 12–14; McGoogan 2001: 31, 215–216, 234, 305).

In fact, throughout the long Franklin search there was no expectation in Britain that the lost explorers would maintain their cultural identity at all costs. Instead, it was very generally assumed that they would, almost as a matter of course, go native in order to survive. Rae was a popular figure for a time precisely because he had demonstrated that this was likely to be a successful strategy. Nor did Franklin himself ever express the limited and ethnocentric views now commonly ascribed to him by historians. On the contrary, he stated during his first expedition that he had 'arrived at the belief that a determined man may bring himself to enjoy any change of food in a much shorter time than I formerly imagined possible. The Novice in this country is obliged to undergo the change in the first season' (Franklin 1820). Before leaving on his last expedition Franklin remarked, 'Where Esquimaux do live out a fair period of life, it is but reasonable to suppose that Europeans may subsist and survive for many years' (Pim 1857: epigraph on title page).

The 1845 expedition was trapped in a very poor hunting area, one that the Inuit themselves avoided. Rae observed that it might seem 'strange' for the Franklin expedition to starve only three hundred miles from Repulse Bay, where he himself had been able to live by hunting. However, Repulse Bay was 'most advantageously placed for obtaining venison during the spring and autumn migrations of the deer,' while Franklin's party were in 'one of the most unfavourable positions for procuring food.' Rae stated that there were only two places on the Arctic coast where he would feel confident of being able

to live off the land (Rae 1947: 47). Inuit oral testimony suggests that Franklin's men did attempt to hunt and to learn from the natives, but their party was simply too large to be supported by hunting in an area where game was so scarce (see Woodman 1991).

Rae's account was fully confirmed by other explorers. Leopold McClintock, the leader of the first expedition to travel along the western shore of King William Island after the Franklin party, found it 'almost utterly destitute of vegetation, and consequently of animal life' (McClintock 1859a: 10). It was clear that the Inuit seldom hunted in the region, since the wood and metal items left behind by Franklin's men on their last march remained untouched, even after a lapse of ten years. Roald Amundsen, one of the greatest of all polar explorers, spent two winters on King William Island during his 1903–1906 voyage through the Northwest Passage. He denied that 'even a good marksman' could '"live off the country" in the Arctic.' Amundsen believed that Stefansson's books and articles had 'given to many an entirely wrong impression of the care, experience, equipment and planning necessary merely to stay alive in the far North' (Amundsen 1927: 536–537).

William Gibson, an Irish-born HBC trader who spent many years on King William Island in the early twentieth century, wrote that the western shore was 'most unproductive of game at all seasons of the year, and the loosely packed heavy floes in the neighbouring sea obstruct sealing operations. For these reasons it is rarely frequented at all by the natives' (Gibson 1937: 73). Another HBC trader with long experience of the area, Scottish-born Lorenz Learmonth, called King William Island an 'often (though not always) niggardly and bitter country', and noted that elderly Inuit could 'relate more than one sad story of how whole groups of their people have perished from starvation in its vicinity, the last one in 1922, just before the H.B.C. established its trading post at Gjoa Haven' (Learmonth 1946: 3; see also Rasmussen 1931: 134–135). One of the Netsilingmiut who lived in the area told Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen, 'Life is so with us that we are never surprised when we hear that someone has starved to death. We are so used to it. It sometimes happens to the best of us' (Rasmussen 1931: 134).

It therefore seems highly unlikely that cultural prejudices against native food and clothing caused the Franklin tragedy; indeed, if such prejudices existed at all, they were held only by a few. What, then, did most nineteenth-century Britons actually think on the subject of going native in the north? That some of them viewed the idea with repugnance is unquestionable, but there is no evidence that they considered death the better alternative. The very extensive British periodical and newspaper coverage of the Franklin search shows that many journalists expected at least some members of the lost expedition to be found alive. These writers saw the Arctic as a region of bountiful natural resources, teeming with animal life. The lost explorers, they insisted, would naturally take advantage of these resources. Nor were such claims mere journalistic fantasy, based on nothing more than a desire to increase circulation. Even after more than ten years had passed since the Franklin expedition left Britain, prominent scientists, geographers, and naval officers were willing to state that they considered it not only possible but probable that a few of Franklin's men remained alive among the Inuit.

There was certainly a range of opinion as to just how bountiful the resources of the far north were, with some writers expressing serious reservations about the possibility of survival for more than a year or two, and others claiming that the more northerly reaches of the Arctic archipelago were the gateway to a sort of polar paradise, where the climate was moderated by the effects of an open polar sea, and where plant and animal life could be found in abundance. However, all seemed to agree that, if Franklin's men had indeed gone native, they had acted in accordance with the dictates of nature and of God. As one devout writer in the Evangelical *British Quarterly Review* expressed it, the Inuit had long ago learned the skills necessary for survival in the north, 'aided by the subtle suggestions of that instinct which Providence has implanted in man wherever located, and which civilization seems rather to overlay than to destroy'. Therefore, a Briton could justly consider himself the Inuk's 'scholar in practical polar life.' After he had gone native, the Englishman could still demonstrate the superior qualities of his race, combining civilised intellect and foresight with aboriginal survival strategies (*British Quarterly Review* 1857: 340; see also 343). The president of the Royal Geographical Society, Sir Roderick Murchison, agreed that 'the exhausted crew of Franklin. . .would naturally. . .seek a refuge among the Esquimaux, at some chosen spot where animals abound.' In his view, it was only to be expected that 'those who were left of Franklin's noble crew should, according to the dictates of nature, endeavour in [this] manner to prolong their existence' (Murchison 1857: cxciv. On the broader Victorian debate about acclimatisation, see Livingstone 1987).

The relatively favourable view of the northern environment that prevailed throughout most of the search period changed only after it was ascertained that there were in fact no survivors of the last Franklin expedition. Public opinion on the subject of Franklin's survival was moderately optimistic from 1848 until the autumn of 1851. Optimism was at its peak in 1852, declining gradually throughout 1853 and the early part of 1854. In October 1854 Rae's report of cannibalism and death near the mouth of the Great Fish River convinced the majority that there could be no survivors. However, even after the return of McClintock's search expedition in 1859, there were some who clung to the belief that a few of Franklin's men might still be alive. Interestingly, this group was not entirely made up of hopelessly impractical romantics. Instead, it included men with personal experience of the Arctic.

Wellington Channel and the open polar sea

From the earliest years of the search, arguments in favour of the survival of the lost explorers were based on the experiences of Sir John Ross, who spent four winters in the Arctic between 1829 and 1833, yet returned with most of his crew alive and well. The explorers had survived by establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with the Inuit. The white men purchased huge amounts of game from the native hunters, and were able to procure a very respectable amount of fresh meat and fish on their own. In return, the Inuit were fed from the ship's stores whenever hunting was poor. At the same time, Ross and his men did much more than just stay alive: they explored the Boothia Peninsula and discovered King William Island. Ross's nephew James Clark Ross was the first European to reach the north magnetic pole.

That the Arctic was a place where resourceful white men could not only survive but distinguish themselves, even under adverse circumstances, therefore seemed to be a very reasonable position in the late 1840s and early 1850s. In January 1850, naval officer Sherard Osborn wrote in a letter to *The Times* that no one familiar with the history of British Arctic exploration could believe Franklin's case was hopeless. In support of this claim, Osborn pointed to Ross's case in particular. There was, he insisted, no reason to assume that 'some horrible calamity' had occurred (Osborn 1850). An anonymous pamphleteer argued that Ross's survival 'deprives us of all excuse and subterfuge for inaction or despondency' (Anon. 1850: 456).

At this time, Rae was known in England both for his successful Arctic expedition in 1846–1847 and as a member of Sir John Richardson's overland search expedition, which had left England in 1848. In the January 1850 issue of the *New Monthly Magazine*, geographer W. Francis Ainsworth observed that 'with ordinary skill in hunting, a large supply of food might be procured' in most parts of the Arctic. As proof of his statement, Ainsworth cited 'the recent example of Mr. Rae. . .that most intrepid and enduring Arctic traveller' (Ainsworth 1850: 97–98). If Rae had survived by adopting Inuit techniques, then so, it seemed, could Franklin. Rae's *Narrative of an expedition to the shores of the Arctic sea in 1846 and 1847* was published later in 1850, and received very favourable reviews. A writer in the *Athenaeum* commended Rae for his 'high moral and physical qualities', and commented that Rae's 'unpretending narrative' had confirmed 'the sentiment pre-existing in his favour' (*Athenaeum* 1850: 784). As late as 1853, the *Quarterly Review* recounted the details of Rae's 1846–1847 expedition at considerable length, 'because they support the idea that Franklin and his crews. . .might not, even to this date, be reduced to utter extremity for want of food' (Coulton 1853: 393). In the same year, *Chambers's Repository* speculated that Franklin's men might be surviving on a diet of seal and walrus meat, aided by the 'skilful and judicious management' that was characteristic of 'really intrepid' explorers like Rae and William Kennedy, the leader of one of Lady Franklin's search expeditions (*Chambers's Repository* 1853: 17, 25–30).

In February 1851 *Fraser's Magazine* declared that, though 'great mortality' might have taken place, 'we do think it not only possible, but probable, that a few survive, and that we shall hear from living lips the strangest record of endurance and suffering that have yet befallen the mariners of any nation' (Weld 1851a: 202). By the end of 1851, hopes of the expedition's survival stood higher than ever, due to the increased prominence of the idea that it had turned northward and entered the open polar sea. Up to this point, it had generally been assumed that after entering the archipelago by way of Lancaster Sound, Franklin had, in accordance with his instructions, proceeded in a southwesterly direction towards Bering Strait. However, he had also been given the option of going northward along Wellington Channel, between Devon and Cornwallis Islands. Wellington Channel had been discovered, but not explored, by Sir Edward Parry on his first expedition. Although north might seem to be the least likely direction in which a passage to the Pacific might be found, there were some scientists and explorers in England who were convinced that only by turning north could Franklin hope to succeed.

This theory was based on the assumption that there existed an open sea around the North Pole. Behind this belief lay the scientific discoveries of Alexander von Humboldt, who pointed out that climate was related to many factors other than latitude. As a British reviewer of Humboldt's book *Kosmos*, *a general survey of the physical phenomena of the universe*, put it, 'the different materials, solid and fluid, which form the superficial covering of the earth, absorb and radiate heat unequally, and the currents in the atmosphere and in the ocean, and various other causes, with some of which we are imperfectly acquainted, modify in a remarkable manner the uniform distribution of the solar heat. It is, therefore, only by thermometrical observations that we can determine the forms of the isothermal lines or curves, and the actual distribution of heat in the different climates and regions of our globe' (*North British Review* 1845: 235).

Humboldt's treatise on isothermal lines, published in German in 1817, was translated into English by the physicist David Brewster in 1819. Drawing on Humboldt's ideas, Brewster hypothesised that were 'two poles of maximum cold in each hemisphere, apparently related to the two magnetic poles'. The isothermal lines encircled these poles like concentric rings. According to Brewster, there was one such pole in Siberia and another in the Canadian archipelago, at 80°N, 100°W. The regions north of the 80th parallel would therefore have a climate similar to that which prevailed well to the south. Brewster, who took a keen interest in Arctic exploration until his death in 1868, obtained meteorological data from the explorers Parry and William Scoresby. He believed that their observations were consistent with his theory

(*North British Review* 1845: 235, 250). Further support seemed to be given to Brewster's ideas by the fact that Russian explorers had found large expanses of open water, which they called *polynyas*, off the coast of Siberia. The term *polynya* (usually spelled *polynia*) duly entered the vocabulary of British geographers. It was applied not to isolated cases of open water, but to a large polar sea that was supposedly free of ice in the summer because it lay beyond the pole of maximum cold (Sabine 1844; Osborn and others 1868: 108). Adherents of the theory believed that a ring of exceptionally heavy ice must surround the open sea, so those who found a way in might not easily find a way out (Kane 1853: 4–6).

As the American geographer John Kirtland Wright has commented, the theory, although later shown to be far removed from the truth, was not in itself ridiculous. Given the state of knowledge about the polar regions at the time, scientists had good reasons for accepting it. However, Wright also points out that some of the theory's 'more credulous and rhetorical proponents. . .embroidered upon it in a manner that was "outrageous" as measured by the scientific standards even of their own day' (Wright 1966: 118). The Franklin search expeditions of 1850–1851 provided the occasion for some of the most outrageous exaggerations. 'Who can tell,' asked American writer John C. Lord, 'if this lost company have not. . .found. . .a new world from which they cannot return to relate the story of their marvellous voyage? Who knows if they are not now reposing upon some island of that unknown Sea, where a modified climate, and a fertile soil furnish all the necessaries of life, or are vainly coasting along that wall of ice through which they unexpectedly entered, and from which they hope to escape by some opening like that in which they came?' (Lord 1852: xv) Despite such overblown rhetoric, the commentaries written by believers in the open polar sea offer an extremely useful window on mid-nineteenth-century beliefs about the Arctic environment and about the complex question of going native.

William Penny and the discovery of Queen's Channel

In 1850 a squadron of six British ships, *Resolute*, *Assistance*, *Pioneer*, *Intrepid*, *Sophia*, and *Lady Franklin*, was sent to Lancaster Sound. The ships were under the command of Captain Horatio Austin, R.N. Originally, *Sophia* and *Lady Franklin* were to have been part of a private expedition, paid for by Lady Franklin and commanded by William Penny, a Scottish whaling master. However, the Admiralty decided to take the expedition over, placing Penny under Austin's authority. In August 1850, Captain Erasmus Ommanney of *Assistance* found the first traces of the lost expedition on Beechey Island. It soon became clear that Franklin's ships had spent their first Arctic winter there. Unfortunately, no written record revealing the course Franklin intended to take once he had left his winter quarters could be found.

Beechey Island is close to the entrance of Wellington Channel. In the summer of 1851, ice conditions made it impossible for Austin's ships to sail either west or north. Sledging parties were therefore sent out. It fell to Penny to travel up Wellington Channel. He found that in 76°N, the ice-bound channel gave way to open water. Penny could see a new channel, which he named after Queen Victoria, leading to the northwest. He returned to his ships and dragged the boats north over the ice, but even with their help he could find no signs that Franklin had passed that way. Penny was eager to explore Queen's Channel further during the next year. However, he could not convince Austin that this should be done. The ships returned to England, arriving in September 1851.

The news of Penny's discovery sparked a press sensation and a round of extremely optimistic commentary. Since no traces of Franklin had been found by any of the search parties to the south or west of Beechey Island, it was widely accepted that Queen's Channel must be the answer to the riddle of his disappearance. The open water seen by Penny seemed to point to the existence of an open polar sea, where Franklin and his men would have an excellent chance of survival. In the October 1851 issue of the *New Monthly Magazine*, Ainsworth observed with enthusiasm that the news was 'of a most consoling and most inspiriting character' (Ainsworth 1851a: 201). In the December issue, he printed a letter from Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort. Beaufort speculated that Franklin must have gone north, and then sailed to the westward unimpeded by ice. However, 'some labyrinth of ice and islands' might have blocked his way once he tried to turn south towards Bering Strait (Ainsworth 1851b: 484).

In October and November 1851 a letter from Rae to the New York *Albion* was widely reprinted in the British press. Writing from Rupert's Land in October 1850, Rae strongly opposed the idea that further searches were useless. He wrote that his opinion was 'founded on a personal experience which few persons have had an opportunity of acquiring, and which leads me to believe that a part, or all, or Sir John's party may still exist'. Rae recounted that his party in 1846–1847 had included only two good shots; nevertheless, they had 'obtained the means of subsistence for twelve months. Why may not Sir John Franklin's party do the same? If he has providentially been thrown on or near a part of the coast where reindeer and fish are at all numerous, surely out of so many officers and men sportsmen may be found, after some practice, expert enough to shoot the former, and fishermen to seize or net the latter, or take them with hook or line set under the ice' (Rae 1851: 939). C.R. Weld commented in *Fraser's Magazine* that with the abundant resources seen by Penny on the shores of Wellington Channel, 'it would not be difficult to prolong life' (Weld 1851b: 509). The *Spectator* pointed out that in fifteen months, Rae's party consumed only three months' worth of the provisions they had brought with them. With equal or greater success in hunting, Franklin's party could

make three years' supplies 'serve for fifteen or twenty years' (*Spectator* 1851: 404).

Such views received strong support from the writings and public lectures of the famous German geographer August Petermann, from the evidence given by Sir John Richardson and William Scoresby to the government's Arctic Committee, and from a letter published in *The Times* by Penny. Petermann was an advocate of the open polar sea theory, with a particular interest in the distribution of animal life in the Arctic. In a lecture given at the Royal Institution, he pointed out that 'animal life is found as much in the Polar as in the tropical regions, and though the number of species is decidedly inferior to the number in the latter, yet, on the other hand, the immense multitudes of individuals compensate for the deficiency in the former respect.' Large numbers of animals were found in some areas, such as Melville Island, and almost none in others. But if Franklin had found the open polar sea, it was likely that this would be one of the areas of abundance. There were, therefore, good scientific grounds for hope (*Athenaeum* 1852b: 281; see also Petermann 1852).

The government committee was appointed to determine whether more expeditions should be sent, and if so, what areas they should search. Much of the testimony focused on the question of whether or not it was possible for any of the explorers to have survived almost seven years in the far north. Richardson (Franklin's companion on his first two expeditions) stated that he considered it 'probable' that some of Franklin's men were still alive in the northern part of the archipelago. He testified that there was solid evidence to show 'that life may be supported for a number of years on animals inhabiting the land and waters of the most northern known islands. The existence of Eskimos up to the 77th parallel . . . is in itself sufficient evidence of the means of subsistence being produced in these latitudes.' There was no reason to think that Englishmen could not match the survival skills of the natives. 'Except practical skill in hunting seals, and the art of building snow-houses, that people [the Inuit] have no qualifications that may not be surpassed by the intelligence, providence and appliances of Europeans', Richardson remarked. He pointed out that musk oxen were abundant in many areas of the Arctic, and could very easily be killed by men with firearms. Reindeer (caribou), polar bears, hares, and foxes were not difficult to shoot. Richardson cited 'the success of Mr. Rae' as proof that Europeans could support themselves by hunting wherever there was a reasonable amount of game. He observed that much would depend on the region in which the expedition's progress had been stopped. If it was a poor hunting ground, most of the explorers were probably dead. However, even then hope should not entirely be abandoned, since life could be 'maintained in the most Arctic lands under circumstances, at first sight, seemingly the most hopeless' (*Report* 1851: 174–177).

Scoresby began by affirming, 'That Sir John Franklin, or some portion of his associates, *may* still survive, is a position which cannot be controverted. It follows, therefore, that *some degree of probability*, whatever that degree may be, does exist.' Ross had survived four northern winters, and Franklin had set out 'with incomparably superior equipment and resources' to those carried by Ross's expedition. The Inuit were able to 'live out, not six or seven winters merely, but a fair portion of the ordinary life of man.' It should, then, be evident that 'hardy enterprizing Britons', sustained not only by their civilised intellects but by 'moral courage and Christian hope' might well 'be yet surviving' (*Report* 1851: 154–155).

The belief in Franklin's survival was strengthened yet further when a letter from Penny was published in *The Times* in late December 1851. Penny repeated the account given to him by a fellow whaler, Robert Martin, who had encountered Franklin's ships *Erebus* and *Terror* in July 1845, during their outward voyage from England. Martin recalled that when asked 'if he had a good supply of provisions, and how long he expected them to last', Franklin replied that 'if it were necessary he could "make them spin out seven years"; and he said further, that he would lose no opportunity to killing birds, and whatever else useful that came in the way, to keep up their stock"'. The officers' comments were 'to the same effect as Sir John's'. Penny added his own comment: 'To see such determination and foresight. . .must give us the greatest hopes' (Penny 1851). Like Rae's letter, this account was widely reprinted.

In February, David Brewster wrote in the *North British Review* that if *Erebus* and *Terror* had been 'frozen up in perpetual ice', there could be little chance of survival. On the other hand, if they had 'escaped from the Wellington Channel into a polar basin', the hope of their safety must be 'greatly increased'. The 'more genial temperature' in the area of the open sea would 'foster animal life, and supply [the explorers] not only with materials for food, but even with the elements of luxury' (Brewster 1852: 258–259). In the same month, an anonymous writer in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* argued strongly in favour of survival. His arguments were based not only on the likelihood of the explorers finding abundant game in the Arctic, but on a sense that they could readily adapt to the Inuit way of life. To this writer, it was evident that survival in the far north was possible, since 'all over these icy regions isolated tribes of natives are to be met with; and they do not exist in a starved and almost famished condition. . .but in absolute abundance'. To the possible objection that Europeans simply could not live like natives, the writer replied that it was 'incredible how soon a man becomes reconciled to, and healthful under, a totally different diet from that to which he has been all his life accustomed, so long as that change is suitable to his new home. We ourselves have personally experienced this to some extent, and were quite amazed at the rapid and easy way in which nature enabled us to enjoy and thrive on food at which our stomach would have revolted in England.' In England, a diet rich in oil would cause only disgust, but such a diet was 'precisely what is best

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adapted to sustain vital energy' in the polar regions. This was in accordance with the simple rule that, in any part of the world, 'the food eaten by the natives is that which is incomparably best suited to the climate'. The author stated that he himself had eaten polar bear and reindeer meat 'with hearty relish' (*Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* 1852: 91–92).

It seemed self-evident to this writer that 'Europeans in the position of Franklin's crew would become acclimatised, and gradually accustomed to the food of the natives, even before their own provisions were exhausted; and after that, we may be very sure . . . they would necessarily and easily conform to the usages, as regards food, of the natives around them.' Indeed, Englishmen in such a situation might quickly outdo their 'simple instructors' in the art of northern hunting, 'being aided by vastly superior reasoning faculties, and also by incomparably better appliances for the chase.' It was 'impossible to doubt' that Europeans, with their higher intelligence, would 'participate equally [with the natives] in all things which the Creator has provided for the support of man in this extremity of the habitable globe.' The writer concluded that the expedition had probably ascended Wellington Channel, and that its members would be able 'to support life for years to come. Great, indeed, their sufferings must be; for civilised men do not merely eat to sleep, and sleep to eat, like the Esquimaux; but they will be upheld under every suffering by a firm conviction that their countrymen are making almost superhuman efforts to rescue them' (*Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* 1852: 92–93).

Chambers's was not intended for upper-class readers. However, this does not explain its relatively enlightened stance. Far from being rejected at the higher levels of British society, the views of non-naval men like Rae, Penny, and Scoresby were echoed by Sir Roderick Murchison and by many periodicals aimed at an elite readership. In a May 1852 address to the Royal Geographical Society, Murchison firmly endorsed 'the idea that [some] of our countrymen (if only the most active portion of them) may have been eking out an existence in polar lands, cut off from all intercourse with civilized men.' As he observed, 'when such good Arctic naturalists as Richardson and Scoresby. . .and such a practical explorer of snow-clad lands as Rae, coincide in the belief, that animal food sufficient to sustain life may have been found, why are we not to indulge in the hope, that some of our long-absent friends may yet be alive. . .?' (Murchison 1852: lxxviii). Ainsworth commented in the *New Monthly* that the opinions of Penny, Richardson, Scoresby and Petermann were 'of the highest importance', while those who believed the lost explorers must all be dead (most notably, Austin) demonstrated 'the bias of men who have failed. . .and therefore, despair of everything' (Ainsworth 1852: 432). The *Athenaeum* agreed that the opinions of 'plain practical men' like Penny and Martin could not 'be satisfactorily disposed of by the supercilious smile of an officer of rank:—no, not if that officer were Captain Austin himself' (*Athenaeum* 1852b: 82). The *Dublin University Magazine* stated that it was 'glad to share' in the 'growing hope' that Franklin and his men were alive and eagerly watching for the appearance of relief ships (McGlashan 1852: 476).

In the spring of 1852, Sir Edward Belcher was sent to the Arctic with instructions to explore Queen's Channel. The next year an American expedition, led by Dr Elisha Kent Kane, set out for Smith Sound at the northern end of Baffin Bay. Kane believed that Smith Sound, not Queen's Channel, was the most likely gateway to the open polar sea. A veteran of the 1850–1851 De Haven expedition, Kane had already endeared himself to the British public by his vocal support for the Franklin search. He was a firm believer in what Stefansson would later term the 'friendly Arctic', observing that the resources of the far north were 'certainly surprisingly greater than the public are generally aware of', and that, in fact, 'food, fuel, and clothing, the three greatest contributors to human existence' could be found there in 'super-abundant plenty' (quoted in Mangles 1852: 66). Kane's ship, *Advance*, was frozen in on the coast of Greenland. A party sent to explore to the north saw open water, which Kane believed to be the open polar sea (it was, in fact, the strait now known as Kennedy Channel). During the second winter, Kane and his men adopted Inuit diet and dress. In the summer of 1855 they made a thousand-mile journey south to the Danish settlements.

Kane returned, as he had set out, an optimist about Franklin's chances of survival. 'I think of them ever with hope. . .I hold my opinions unchanged', he wrote in his narrative. To Kane it seemed entirely possible that, 'under the teaching of an Esquimaux', the lost explorers had 'set bravely to work, and trapped the fox, speared the bear, and killed the seal and walrus and whale' (Kane 1856b, I: 246–247). However, by the time Kane returned from Greenland, the belief in survival was dying out. In October 1853 the *Edinburgh Review* described the idea that Franklin and his men might have found 'some green oasis in [an] unexplored Polynia' as a 'forlorn hope' (Knox 1853: 346). 'The mournful conviction is now all but universal. . .that Franklin's missing expedition is hopelessly lost. . .It is natural to cherish hope, but it must be sorrowfully acknowledged that this fearful interval lays a solid foundation for its final abandonment,' agreed the *Leisure Hour* early in 1854 (*Leisure Hour* 1854: 8). Then in the autumn of 1854 both Belcher and Rae brought unwelcome news.

The discoveries of Rae and McClintock

Belcher's expedition returned to England in September 1854. Fearing that his ships were unlikely to be released from the ice, Belcher had decided to abandon them; the explorers sailed home in the depot ship *North Star* and the relief ships *Phoenix* and *Talbot*. Belcher reported that he had sailed up Wellington Channel and established a base just south of 78°N; however, no traces of Franklin

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had been found. Far more definite tidings were brought by Rae at the end of October. Rae had set out in 1853 to survey the Boothia Peninsula, the last uncharted portion of the North American coastline. Because of the concentration of effort in the north and west, the southern half of the peninsula had not yet been visited by any of the Franklin searchers. Rae himself was not looking for, or expecting to find, traces of the lost expedition. However, he 'obtained information, and purchased articles of the natives, which prove beyond a doubt that a portion (if not all) of the then survivors of Sir John Franklin's long-lost and ill-fated party perished of starvation in the spring of 1850, on the coast of America, a short distance west of a large stream, which, by the description given of it, can be no other than Back's Fish River.' Rae's informants told him that another group of Inuit had seen 40 white men travelling over the ice; later, 35 bodies were found by the natives. Despite 'an abundant stock of ammunition', the explorers had evidently died of starvation. The 'mutilated state of many of the corpses' showed 'that our wretched countrymen had been driven to the last resource—cannibalism—as a means of prolonging existence' (Rae 1854a).

The news caused considerable shock and dismay in England, since the public was hardly pleased to hear that some of its polar heroes might have committed cannibalism. In some quarters, there was strong reluctance to believe that Franklin's men had indeed been reduced to starvation. '[I]t has not yet been made clear to us how Englishmen well supplied with clothing and ammunition should not be able to live where any other human beings can subsist,' the *Athenaeum* declared on 28 October (*Athenaeum* 1854: 1305). Two days later, the brother of an expedition member inquired in *The Times*, 'Where the Esquimaux can live—where Dr. Rae's party could find abundant means—what should have prevented Sir John Franklin's party from subsisting too?' (Hornby 1854). In reply, Rae explained that at the time of year when the lost explorers arrived there, the mouth of the Great Fish River was 'notoriously the most barren of animal life of any of the Arctic shores'. Even at Repulse Bay, a spot 'remarkable . . . for the abundance of deer', it had been 'hard work' for Rae to procure enough food for his small party (Rae 1854b).

Although the allegation of cannibalism was generally either rejected outright or regarded as unproven, most people did accept that 35 or 40 men had died of starvation near the mouth of the Great Fish River. However, this left nearly 100 men unaccounted for. While many were content to assume that the fate of the entire expedition had been determined, others, including Lady Franklin, argued that the explorers would probably have broken up into small groups and travelled in different directions in order to increase their chances of survival. Therefore, the possibility of finding a few of the lost men alive could not yet be ruled out. An HBC employee, James Anderson, was sent to the mouth of the Great Fish River in 1855. Though he found clear indications that Franklin's men had been in the area, he saw no bodies at all.

This negative result revived the hope that there might still be survivors. '[U]ntil there is proof', declared Sherard Osborn, 'people are justified in saying Englishmen can live where Esquimaux can' (Osborn 1856: 326–327). Such writers could always point to the example of Kane, who had stated that if his retreat to the south had been unsuccessful, he would have 'taken to Esquimaux life' in order to survive. 'Strange as it may seem. . .we regarded the coarse life of these people with eyes of envy, and did not doubt but that we could have lived in comfort upon their resources,' he wrote (Kane 1856a). Kane's statement was cited in a letter to the prime minister, Lord Palmerston, signed by Murchison, Beaufort, and a number of other eminent scientific men, all of whom were in favour of another search expedition (Murchison 1856).

A few days after the appeal was published, Murchison sent *The Times* a letter from able seaman John Pead, a veteran of Parry's expeditions. Pead recounted how he had been so attracted by the Inuit way of life that he had wished to remain among them: 'I studied their mode of living, was daily with them for many months, I considered their resources in clothing and food, and the effect it would have upon me, and came to the conclusion that, from the experiments of eating seal, seahorse, birds, deer, fish, &c., I should soon become inured to them, particularly as it would be by my own choice. As to clothing, the deer and seal skins would be more suitable for that climate than our own. . .The snow huts for winter and skins for summer would do very well, and no rent to pay.' Pead and many of his old shipmates were convinced 'that some [of Franklin's men] could hold out till this time, and if the ships were drove on shore. . .they would fare the better.' Murchison introduced the letter with the comment that Pead was 'a very trustworthy and respectable man, and it seems to me that the public should be made acquainted with the sentiments of so experienced an Arctic seaman' (Pead and Murchison 1856).

In a lecture given in December 1856 and a pamphlet published early in 1857, Lieutenant Bedford Pim recounted how he 'had lived with the Esquimaux, hunted with them, and fed upon their food', and how these experiences had convinced him 'that where the natives lived there the Europeans would be comparatively safe.' Franklin's men, Pim declared, 'must not be pronounced dead, for they had been traced to an inhabited land abounding in the animal creation.' He himself had 'often arrived at the native huts after a hard day's travel, and experienced great kindness at the hands of the inmates'. Pim had eaten 'train-oil and blubber', and he 'found it to answer the purpose as well as anything else: of course it was not very agreeable, but habit would soon reconcile a man to it.' Undoubtedly many out of such a large party would have perished, but, in Pim's view, it was entirely likely that a few remained alive (Pim 1857: 28–29).

Such arguments bore some fruit. Early in 1857, journalist Henry Morley suggested in *Household Words* that 'a few of the lost voyagers' might be found 'living in. . .snow huts, eating seal and walrus', just as Kane

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would have done (Morley 1857: 145). But a more sceptical writer in the *British Quarterly Review* felt that fundamental differences between Europeans and natives would inevitably have come into play after the lapse of a few years. It was undoubtedly 'wise' for explorers to eat and live as the natives did; nevertheless, 'Franklin and his associates were *not* Esquimaux: they were *not* born in snow huts, nursed on blubber, brought up on walrus' flesh, and exposed from infancy to. . .fierce frosts'. No matter what survival techniques had been adopted, as civilised men they could not possibly have endured such a primitive life for twelve years (*British Quarterly Review* 1857: 340, 350).

The government declined to sponsor any further expeditions, on the grounds that '[no] reasonable person entertained the expectation that any of the men of Sir John Franklin's expedition could be found alive' (Sir Charles Wood, quoted in Stone 1996: 214). Lady Franklin therefore sent out a private expedition commanded by McClintock. The record found by McClintock's second in command, Lieutenant William Hobson, at Point Victory on King William Island revealed that *Erebus* and *Terror* were trapped in the ice in September 1846. Franklin himself died in June 1847, and in April 1848 the ships were abandoned by the 105 men left alive. They all set off for the Great Fish River. Rae had received the impression that their encounter with the Inuit occurred in the spring of 1850. McClintock, however, was forced to the conclusion that they had all died in 1848, within a few months of leaving the ships. He found many abandoned possessions on the shores of King William Island. It seemed that the explorers had originally intended to take a great deal with them on their retreat, but their strength had deteriorated very rapidly, most likely as a result of scurvy and starvation.

McClintock found only three bodies, but his own experiences convinced him that Franklin's men could not have survived for long. He met no Inuit on the western shore of the island, and the simple fact that the items left behind by the Franklin party had remained untouched for a decade indicated that the natives rarely if ever visited the area. McClintock's party spent 79 days on the island. By his own account, they 'never lost a chance of shooting anything', yet they were able to kill only 'two reindeer, one hare, seventeen willow grouse, and three gulls.' In a lecture given to the Royal Geographical Society after his return, McClintock stated bluntly that it was 'evidently an error to suppose that where an Esquimaux can live, a civilized man can live there also.' The only possible way to survive on King William Island was by hunting seals, 'a matter which requires such long training, that no European has ever yet succeeded in acquiring it. . .Esquimaux habits are so entirely different from those of all other people, that I believe there is no instance on record of either a white man or an Indian becoming domesticated among them' (McClintock 1859a: 12–13). William Hobson agreed with his commander that 'there were none of that unfortunate expedition now living. It was a barren and inhospitable coast.' With so few natives to teach the Europeans, Hobson considered it 'impossible for our seamen in the requisite time to have acquired the Esquimaux art of hunting. In a game country they might have trusted to their munition, but here there was no game for them to shoot. . . .With such scanty resources it was impossible for any body of men to have existed twelvemonths [*sic*] after abandoning their ships' (McClintock 1859b: 11).

McClintock's exploits won him immense and well deserved prestige. His opinions were therefore accepted almost without question. However, the few who did doubt them included experienced northern explorers. William Kennedy, for example, remarked after McClintock's lecture that he 'did not fall in with the view that Britons could not live where Esquimaux existed. On the contrary, he believed that Europeans could adapt themselves to native habits'. Kennedy recalled how John Hepburn, a veteran of Franklin's first overland expedition, had remarked that he (like Pead) would have been happy 'to settle down among the natives for life.' On the same occasion, William Parker Snow, who had also served in one of Lady Franklin's private expeditions, offered to lead another search, and to 'ally himself with the Esquimaux until the riddle was solved' (McClintock 1859b). However, there was no getting around the fact that the oral Inuit testimony heard by McClintock made no mention of survivors. McClintock accounted for the absence of bodies by suggesting that the men had been travelling on the sea ice when they died (McClintock 1859a: 12–13). Osborn accordingly declared that the Franklin story 'was now closed' (McClintock 1859b: 10).

McClintock's discoveries had a dramatic impact on journalistic discourse. Previously, many writers had stated that survival was possible in many, if not most, parts of the Arctic; now, however, the fact that Franklin's men had starved in a poor hunting area was seen as proof that the entire north was a desolate region hostile to human life. The *New Monthly Magazine* opened its review of McClintock's narrative with a vivid word picture of the barren north. Ships had been 'abandoned to the relentless frost' and 'gallant fellows' had 'paid for the heroic resolution to face and overcome difficulties. . .with their lives'. McClintock's book presented 'a picture of helplessness. . .in what remained of the crew[s] of the *Erebus* and *Terror*, dropping one by one' as they struggled to escape their icy prison. Clearly, there should be no more Arctic ventures: 'When Providence closes up a portion of the globe in ice and snow, and wraps it up in night for half the year, leaving all around without life, or movement, or light, it sets its seal upon that region as if it was tabooed of humanity, and marks it as a land on whose outskirts even the stubborn Esquimaux can only starve on precarious seals' flesh and blubber' (*New Monthly Magazine* 1860: 228). *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, another periodical that had once promoted a favourable view of the Arctic and its resources, now also described the far north as a realm of terror: 'Sea and land—sounds and straits—islands and continent—are alike shrouded in

ice and snow, and are scarcely distinguishable one from another. Surely, no good can come from the exploration of these hyperborean climes; and it is not a little lamentable to think of the waste of human life and money which has taken place in prosecuting researches so utterly worthless' (*Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* 1860: 39).

Conclusion

It is hardly necessary to take all the claims about a belief in survivors at their face value. Those who made such claims had many reasons for wishing to promote additional searches besides the hope of rescuing any explorers who might still be alive. For Lady Franklin, it was of great importance that the exploits of her husband's expedition should be made known to the world. Murchison, Brewster, Petermann, and Beaufort undoubtedly wanted to promote scientific and geographical research as well as to search for survivors. For junior officers like Osborn and Pim, Arctic service offered fame and the possibility of rapid promotion. While there is no reason to question the sincerity of the compassionate motives behind the search, compassion was not the only driving force. Both Osborn and another participant in the search, Richard Vesey Hamilton, admitted in 1869 that British geographers and naval men had 'put a Polynia up Wellington Channel in order to work an expedition there' (Hamilton 1868: 242).

In terms of Arctic history and current historiography, the significance of the discourse surrounding the search efforts lies mainly in the fact that men from all classes could publicly announce their positive feelings about the Inuit way of life without fear of censure. Rae was not the solitary British advocate of going native; instead, he was only one of many who proclaimed that Inuit diet and clothing were the keys to survival in the north. Rae's fall from public favour after 1854 could not, therefore, have been caused by his views on this subject. Kane's popularity in Britain was unimpaired, and indeed was enhanced, by his use of Inuit survival techniques on the second Grinnell expedition. Even lower class Arctic veterans such as Pead and Hepburn could speak in positive terms of adopting the native way of life and still be deemed 'respectable' by their social superiors.

That the discourse contained strong elements of racism cannot, of course, be denied. Indeed, the innate superiority of Europeans was a constant theme. Henry Morley wrote in *Household Words* that it would be only natural for the lost explorers to prefer 'the companionship of the poor savage tribes' to starvation (Morley 1857: 145). For these British writers, the one advantage of the 'poor savage tribes' lay in their almost animal-like adaptation to their environment. Though Europeans might usefully learn from the Inuit when in that environment, it went almost without saying that their reasoning powers and use of technology placed them in a higher category overall. This was racism of a more complex type than the stiff-necked prejudice described by Stefansson. It should perhaps be noted here that Stefansson's own views were remarkably similar to those found in British journalism from the early 1850s: he wrote that if only Franklin's men had been more adaptable, 'they would have out-Eskimoed the Eskimos, for in addition to the primitive knowledge recently acquired they would have had the white man's knowledge and equipment — they would have known such things as the principles of angles which make an acclimated white man better than an Eskimo in finding his way about. They would have had compasses, firearms. . .and many other details of superior ability and equipment' (Stefansson 1938: 127).

The novels and stories of Rudyard Kipling offer many depictions of white men going native in India. For Kipling, this was evidently a fascinating activity, dangerous in many ways, but ultimately of great benefit to the cause of British imperialism. Both the Indian-born white boy Kim O'Hara and the police officer Strickland obtain much useful information by learning how to pass as natives. (Strickland appears in several of Kipling's short stories — for example, 'Miss Youghal's sais', 'The Bronckhorst divorce-case', 'The mark of the beast', and 'The son of his father' — and in *Kim*). However, the key point is that Kim and Strickland always remain white men at heart. Far more perilous, in Kipling's eyes, is the process of 'go[ing] native altogether' — that is, giving up the British point of view for that of the Indians, and cutting oneself off from the white community (Kipling 1920: 204). In the story 'To be filed for reference', the wastrel McIntosh Jellaludin has gone native entirely: he is married to an Indian woman and has converted to Islam. McIntosh knows so much about native life that he can 'laugh at Strickland as an ignorant man'. However, he dies of drink, leaving behind a book manuscript that can be published only with 'much expurgation' (Kipling 1911: 346, 350).

It seems entirely reasonable to conclude that British Arctic explorers would have made a similar distinction. Going native when circumstances demanded it could be considered an acceptable survival strategy even among those who would have recoiled in horror from the idea of going native altogether. Despite the elements of racism in the British discourse on Arctic exploration, the various arguments in favour of survival clearly indicate that the great majority of other explorers, as well as geographers, scientists, and journalists, expected that Franklin and his men would adopt the Inuit way of life. The current image of the lost explorers as fools who preferred to die rather than betray their cultural standards by going native is, then, clearly an unjustifiable caricature: there were no such cultural standards for them to betray.

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