

Athabasca University  Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

LOST OPPORTUNITIES AND FUTURE PROMISE: GENDER
EQUALITY IN NUNAVUT

By

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This paper examines the dramatic gender shift that has taken place in Nunavut. Traditionally, Inuit culture was largely egalitarian, and Inuit men and women were looked to equally for decision-making in their community. Today, Inuit men dominate hamlet councils, senior levels of government, and territorial politics, including bodies responsible for the implementation of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement and land management. The under-representation of women in decision-making bodies has resulted in the neglect of women's priorities and concerns in the territory, thereby exacerbating existing social problems. As the newest territory in Canada, Nunavut had the opportunity to avoid some of the problems existing governments have been grappling with, including the under-representation of women. This paper concludes that the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement and the gender parity proposal, introduced in Nunavut in 1997, were two important opportunities to address women's inequality in the territory that were missed, to the detriment of Inuit women and Nunavut as a whole. Further research on gender parity and organizing strategies would contribute to redefining Inuit women and their role as equal leaders and decision-makers in their community.

Inuit women play an integral role in governing our communities and our society. Inuit women are the links to the past and to the future; Inuit women are the vessels of culture, health, language, traditions, teaching, care giving, and child rearing. These qualities are fundamental to the survival of any society.¹

- Pauktuutit, Inuit Women's Association of Canada

Nunavut, the newest territory to be established in Canada, came into existence on April 1, 1999. The Nunavut Land Claim Agreement is considered one of the most comprehensive land claims of the modern era in Canada.² The topic for this paper came about from my experience living in Iqaluit, Nunavut from 2006-2009. During this time I had the opportunity to sit on the Board of Directors of the Qimaavik Women's Shelter in Iqaluit, which piqued my interest in gender issues in the territory. While living in Nunavut, I was struck by how little attention was paid to important issues such as violence against women, particularly given that Nunavut has the highest rates of violence against women in the country.³ Moreover, despite the fact that a growing number of Inuit women are recognized as leaders on the national stage (e.g. Mary Simon, Leona Aglukkaq, and Sheila Watt-Cloutier), Inuit women are vastly under-represented in leadership roles within Nunavut.

¹ Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. Keepers of the Light. Ottawa: Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. 2006. p. 1.

² Thomas Berger, "Conciliator's Final Report: Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Implementation Planning Contract Negotiations for the Second Planning Period", March 1, 2006. Accessed at: <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/al/ldc/ccf/fagr/nuna/lca/nlc-eng.asp>

³ "Federal Justice Minister Must Act Now." Nunatsiaq News. Editorial. August 10, 2010. Accessed at: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/federal_justice_minister_must_act_now/

This paper will examine the dramatic gender shift that has taken place in the territory. Traditionally, Inuit culture was largely egalitarian, and Inuit men and women were looked to equally for decision-making in their community; whereas, today, Inuit men dominate hamlet councils, senior levels of government, and territorial politics, including bodies responsible for the implementation of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement and land management. The under-representation of women in decision-making bodies has resulted in the neglect of women's priorities and concerns in the territory, thereby exacerbating existing social problems. As the newest territory in Canada, Nunavut had the opportunity to avoid some of the problems existing governments have been grappling with, including the under-representation of women. In that respect, the Land Claim Agreement and the gender parity proposal, introduced in Nunavut in 1997, were two important opportunities to address women's inequality and under-representation in the territory. Unfortunately, these opportunities were missed, to the detriment of Inuit women and the community as a whole.

This paper will offer a review of the available literature to better understand Inuit women's roles in the family and the community, both traditionally and today. Academic literature, where available, and Inuit authors will be referenced in this review. The Nunavut Land Claim Agreement and the gender parity proposal will then be discussed. Special attention will be paid to how women were involved in the Land Claim Agreement, as well as, how the Agreement addresses issues of importance to women in the territory. Following this, the paper will explore the gender parity proposal, including the outcome of the plebiscite. Finally, two social issues of importance to women in the territory will be examined to ascertain how these issues are discussed and addressed by members of the

Legislative Assembly and the Government of Nunavut. This latter examination will include some personal observations from my time working with the Qimaavik Women's Shelter.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS

The 2005-2010 U.N Beijing Platform for Action is used to guide nations in creating equal opportunity for women and men, and it calls on States to apply a gender-based analysis to achieve this goal. In 1995, as a precursor to this initiative, the Government of Canada created an action plan in which all federal departments and agencies were encouraged to conduct a gender-based analysis to integrate gender considerations into the government policy, planning and decision-making process. Gender-based analysis is founded on the premise that "every action, policy, program, project and socio-economic trend affects women and men differently." ⁴

Aboriginal women suggest that gender-based analysis should be taken a step further as they believe that it fails to adequately address their needs or reflect the realities of Canada's Aboriginal people. They argue, in large part, that by failing to consider the legacy and impact of colonialism, the Government of Canada does not fully address the issues plaguing Aboriginal and Inuit women.

Traditionally, many Aboriginal societies focused on family, community and the continuity of tradition, culture and language. Aboriginal women filled central roles as teachers, healers and mothers – and although Aboriginal men and women

⁴ Status of Women Canada. [An Integrated Approach to Gender-Based Analysis: 2007 Edition](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pol/gba-acsguide/2007/gba-acsguide-eng.html). Ottawa: Status of Women Canada. 2007. Accessed at: <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pol/gba-acsguide/2007/gba-acsguide-eng.html>

had distinct roles - they remained equal in value. With colonization came the denigration of the balance that existed between men and women.⁵ The desire to restore Aboriginal gendered roles has motivated the development of a culturally relevant form of gender-based analysis (CRGBA). Over the years, CRGBA has become a critical initiative of national Aboriginal organizations in Canada to identify the unique needs, perspectives and rights of Aboriginal women.⁶

GENDER REGIMES IN TRADITIONAL INUIT CULTURE

Traditionally, Inuit society was fundamentally egalitarian, without hierarchy or formal authority. Major decisions affecting the group were discussed among the adults, and all were free to voice their views and discuss issues until a final decision or a compromise was agreed upon. People with special skills, talents or knowledge, such as a respected hunter, shaman or Elder, could be solicited for their opinion on a particular issue,⁷ but it was immaterial whether the person was a woman or a man.⁸ Many authors (i.e. Billison and Mancini, Minor, Williamson, and Rojas) emphasize that the traditional relationship between women and men has been paramount for life in the harsh climate of the North. The roles of Inuit men and women intermeshed: “marriage was not an option, but a matter of life and death, the union of a hunter and a seamstress. Neither could live without the

⁵ Native Women’s Association of Canada. Culturally Relevant Gender Based Analysis: An Issue Paper, prepared for the National Aboriginal Women’s Summit June 20-22, 2007 in Corner Brook, NL. Accessed at: http://www.nwac-hq.org/sites/default/files/download/admin/nwac.crgba_june1707.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture. Ottawa: Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. Revised 2006. Pg. 30

⁸ Tina Minor, Political Participation of Inuit Women in the Government of Nunavut. Wicazo Sa Review. 17 (1). 2002. Pg. 72.

contribution of the other”.⁹ If the Inuit woman did not make clothing from seal and caribou skins then the man would freeze to death as he hunted. If the man could not hunt well, the woman could not make clothing that the family required for survival. Inuit roughly divided traditional labour into two categories: women as keepers of the camp, and men as keepers of the land.¹⁰ Within a marriage, the man and woman consulted each other on decisions, and often would defer to the other if an issue or problem fell within their sphere of responsibility. While the men were away hunting for extended periods of time, the women created small associations and looked after everything in the camps.¹¹

Inuit *Qaujimaqatuqangit* (IQ), an Inuktitut phrase meaning Inuit societal values, establishes gender equality in several different ways. IQ respects the balance between gender roles, the importance of family, and the fluidity of both gender and sexuality. There is no gender in Inuktitut grammar. Names too are not given based on the sex of the baby, but rather are from past Elders in the community. Namesakes are said to share the same soul and are therefore endowed with similar characteristics.¹² As one Elder explains, “no child is only a child. If I give my grandfather's *satiq* [soul-name] to my baby daughter, she is my

⁹ David Morrison and Georges-Herbert Germain, *Inuit: Glimpses of an Arctic Past*. Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization. 1995. Pg. 28.

¹⁰ Tina Minor, Political Participation of Inuit Women in the Government of Nunavut. *Wicazo Sa Review*, 17 (1). 2002. Pg. 71.

¹¹ Janet Mancini Billson and Kyra Mancini, *Inuit Women: Their Powerful Spirit in a Century of Change*. Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007. Pg. 56-62.

¹² Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. *The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture*. Ottawa: Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada. Revised 2006. Pg. 16.

grandfather. I will call her *ataatussiaq*, grandfather. She is entitled to call me grandson.”¹³

Gender roles within Inuit culture were delineated; however, these roles were not strictly held. Interviews conducted by Janet Mancini Billson, and Kyra Mancini reveal that if a woman was inclined to hunt, or forced to out of necessity, there was nothing forbidding her from doing so. If a man was drawn to tending the household or the situation called for it, his presence was accepted there. There were many women known for their hunting skills, and there were instances of male midwives.¹⁴ Inuit oral history has many stories about men and women crossing over into the opposite gender’s domain. Furthermore, many Inuit communities have raised children as if they were the opposite sex.¹⁵ This was often because a family required certain skills for their survival, such as a hunter or seamstress, and therefore taught their son or daughter to fulfill this role.

CONTACT AND SETTLEMENT PERIOD

Inuit society in Nunavut has experienced tremendous change over the last 50 to 60 years. Most notably, Inuit moved from largely self-reliant families and communities of about 40-50 people to settled communities and a modern wage economy in only a few decades. As such, these communities went from living on

¹³ Hugh Brody, The People’s Land. England: Pelican, 1975. P. 33.

¹⁴ Nicole Gombay, “The Politics of Culture: Gender Parity in the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut”. Etudes/Inuit/Studies. 24 (1), 2000. Pg. 131.

¹⁵ Laakkuluk Jessen Williamson, “Inuit Gender Parity and Why it was not Accepted in the Nunavut Legislature”. Etudes/Inuit Studies. Gender Issues Edition. Volume 30 (1), 2006. Pg. 54.

the land and moving with the animals they relied on for food and clothing, to sedentary settlements across the Arctic. During the 1960's the Government of Canada moved Inuit from small camps on the land into hamlets with the stated purpose of improving health, education, economic and social conditions.¹⁶

Forcing Inuit off the land resulted in the end of a nomadic hunting and gathering lifestyle, which also affected gender roles and the family. Inuit communities were obliged to deal with southern social, cultural and economic forces, including economic dependence on a distant central government. Inuit communities were also introduced to a European-style education system, including residential schools, and the banning of Inuit spiritual practices.¹⁷

The majority of non-Inuit who recorded Inuit oral literature and Inuit life were male missionaries, anthropologists, explorers, police officers, traders, whalers and government workers who often had little interest in, or access to, the female domain. This male bias often meant that there was a limited understanding of the role of women in the Arctic. Authors, such as Battiste and Henderson, suggest that this patriarchal viewpoint has had a negative impact on the status of Aboriginal women in the broader Canadian society, and within Aboriginal societies as well.¹⁸ Many Inuit and non-Inuit accept patriarchal biases or assumptions about Inuit populations uncritically.¹⁹ Williamson argues that

¹⁶ Erik Anderson (Ed), Canada's Relationship with Inuit: A History of Policy and Program Development. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. June 2006. Pg. 11.

¹⁷ Janet Mancini Billson and Kyra Mancini, Inuit Women: Their Powerful Spirit in a Century of Change. Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007. Pg. 386.

¹⁸ M. Battiste, M., & J. Y. Henderson, Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage. Saskatoon: Purich. 2000. Pg. 42.

¹⁹ Laakkuluk Jessen Williamson, "Inuit Gender Parity and Why it was not Accepted in the Nunavut Legislature". Inuit Studies. Gender Issues Edition. Volume 30 (1), 2006. Pg. 54.

Western values, attitudes, structures and regulations were imposed from Southern societies, which led policymakers and administrators, with little knowledge of the societies they were working with, to defer to males when assigning decision-making positions.²⁰ In her thesis, Aluki Rojas examines how Inuit women were portrayed in literature by non-Inuit visitors to the North. Rojas comments that Inuit women did not have a significant presence in narrative texts and, “are often seen in the shadows of Inuit men who are often portrayed as the central figure.”²¹ For example, Knud Rasmussen, a Greenlandic explorer and anthropologist who visited the Arctic and met with Inuit communities in the early 1900’s, wrote that while the women were busy looking after the camp, the men were often idle. This suited the researchers’ needs well because it provided them with more opportunities to gather the information they sought.²² Rojas therefore contends that,

the perception and acceptance of the subservient position of Inuit women in Inuit society has played an oppressive force that Inuit women today find themselves confronted with...It is, in my opinion, imperative that Inuit women are recognized in their rightful position as significant decision-makers within Inuit society.²³

²⁰ Laakkuluk Jessen Williamson, “Inuit Gender Parity and Why it was not Accepted in the Nunavut Legislature”. Inuit Studies. Gender Issues Edition. Volume 30 (1), 2006. Pg. 51-54.

²¹ Aluki Rojas, Iglumi Isumatait: A Reinterpretation of the Position of Inuit Women. M.A Thesis. Peterborough: Trent University. June 2001. Pg. 93.

²¹ Knud Rasmussen, Across Arctic America: Narrative of the Fifth Thule Expedition. Alaska: University of Alaska Press, 1999. Pg. 72.

²³ Aluki Rojas, Iglumi Isumatait: A Reinterpretation of the Position of Inuit Women. M.A Thesis. Peterborough: Trent University. June 2001. Pg. 93-94.

Explorers introduced the idea of Inuit males as the 'natural leaders' by seeking out only Inuit men for information, advice and decision-making. The views of explorers left a lasting mark on the Inuit communities they came in contact with, particularly with respect to gender roles. Government administrators, as will next be discussed, had a similar influence on Inuit communities.

Naming of Inuit Families

Valerie Alia's research on colonization and Inuit culture reveals how government processes, such as the naming of Inuit families, have impacted Inuit women in Nunavut.²⁴ In 1941, Inuit were counted and identified for government records so that parents or guardians could receive a family allowance. Each person was given a number that either started with E (for those living in the east) or W (for those who lived in the west), and the number was put on a small disc and worn on a string around the neck. By the late 1960s, Simonie Michael, the first elected Inuk member of the Northwest Territories legislative assembly, stated that he and many other Inuit did not want to be known simply as a number. Project Surname was thus created, and, in 1970, the federal government hired Abraham Okpik to issue surnames for Inuit in the eastern arctic.²⁵ Often, it was assumed that the man (the husband or common-law partner) was the head of the household. As such, surnames issued to a family were often based on a husband/partner's lineage, or was related to his name in some way. Alia points out that in Western cultures, surnaming carries a social and economic significance as a woman's

²⁴ Valerie Alia, "Inuit Women and the Politics of Naming in Nunavut." Canadian Woman Studies. 14, 1994. Pg. 12-14.

²⁵ Ann Meekitjuk Hanson, "What's in a Name." Nunavut '99. Accessed at: <http://www.nunavut.com/nunavut99/english/name.html>

renaming at marriage represents the transfer of ownership from father to husband.²⁶ Inuit did not have surnames prior to the colonization period. As an Inuk woman in Iqaluit describes, "my mother was the head of the household-my father was always out hunting; she ran things at home. So why wouldn't they list **her** as the 'head' of the family?"²⁷ In a culture without gender-specific names or titles, a surname was considered very odd, and the naming process upset many Inuit women.²⁸

Janet Billson and Kyra Mancini's research and interviews in Nunavut illustrate how gender roles changed quickly when Inuit were forced into settled communities. As Inuit families were being relocated to hamlets, Inuit male Elders were often told to leave their dogs, sleds, and hunting equipment behind because they would not fit on the planes that transported them. Hamlets were often further away from traditional hunting areas, and the equipment being used for hunting became more expensive. Women, on the other hand, were usually able to bring the tools they used for harvesting and sewing because they were much smaller, and consequently did not see as much disruption to their traditional activities. The loss of the hunter and provider role was deeply felt by Inuit men. Alcohol and drug abuse increased as their self-esteem plummeted, even resulting in increased suicide rates.²⁹ Initially, men received most of the remunerated jobs in the settled hamlets and women continued to raise the children and look after the

²⁶ Valerie Alia, "Inuit Women and the Politics of Naming in Nunavut." Canadian Woman Studies. 14, 1994. Pg. 13.

²⁷ Alia, Pg. 12.

²⁸ Alia, Pg. 12-13.

²⁹ Janet Mancini Billison and Kyra Mancini, Inuit Women: Their Powerful Spirit in a Century of Change. Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007. Pg. 159-167.

household. However, in the second half of the transitional period, Inuit women began to embrace schooling and moved into the economic sphere. Many women held onto their traditional domestic roles while also taking on paid employment, and many became the primary provider in a household.³⁰ The increased involvement of women in the wage economy often provided the necessary financial support for male hunting activities.

Leadership was first introduced to Inuit men in the hamlets. White men held positions, including those such as missionaries, managers, whalers, shipmen and Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which were considered leadership roles. Undoubtedly, these gender role patterns influenced Inuit society. The communities began to assume that 'whoever took a leading role had to be a man.'³¹ In the early 1960's, the Department of Northern Affairs (DNA) proposed the creation of settlement councils for the Arctic; however, Jack Hicks and Graham White suggest that these councils were allowed no significant power.³² The Euro-Canadian administrators encouraged men - and not women - to run for election and sit on these councils.³³ Women instead got involved in community committees and generally focused on social issues.³⁴

³⁰ Janet Mancini Billson, "Shifting gender regimes: The complexities of domestic violence among Canada's Inuit." *Études/Inuit/Studies*, vol. 30, n° 1, 2006. Pg. 74-75.

³¹ Tina Minor, "Political Participation of Inuit Women in the Government of Nunavut". *Wicazo Sa Review*, 17 (1). 2002. Pg. 79.

³² Jack Hicks and Graham White. *Nunavut: Inuit Self-Determination through a Land Claim and Public Government?* August 2000. Pg. 24. Accessed at: http://caepn.anu.edu.au/system/files/Seminars/presentations/HicksJ_WhiteG_2000.pdf

³³ Tina Minor, "Political Participation of Inuit Women in the Government of Nunavut". *Wicazo Sa Review*, 17 (1). 2002. Pg. 78.

³⁴ Janet Mancini Billson and Kyra Mancini. *Inuit Women: Their Powerful Spirit in a Century of Change*. Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007. Pg. 208-209.

NUNAVUT LAND CLAIMS AGREEMENT

The key to sustained and effective Inuit participation in politics does not lie in further elaboration and consolidation of existing structures, nor in tinkering with existing mechanisms of decision-making. It lies in the formal constitutional recognition of Inuit's right to determine their own future and to develop the institutions and procedures most appropriate to the expression of their deepest concerns.³⁵

- Peter Itinnuar

By the late 1960's, a growing number of Inuit in the eastern arctic became concerned that social and economic problems were continuing to grow in the hamlets, despite federal programs and policies intended to meet or respond to their needs. A core group of Inuit began to discuss how Inuit could gain more control over their lives and traditional lands, and how they could harness the power to make decisions on social, economic, and political issues. It was quickly determined that the land claim process would be the best way to meet these goals.

In 1976, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC) presented a proposal for a Nunavut Land Claim to the federal government. The negotiation process that ensued took over a decade and a half to complete. The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement was signed on May 25, 1993 between Canada and the Inuit of the Northwest Territories. Justice Thomas Berger observed, "The Inuit forged a political

³⁵ Peter Itinnuar, "Inuit Participation in Politics, in Morris Zaslow (ed), A Century of Canada's Arctic Islands 1880-1980. Ottawa: The Royal Society of Canada. 1981. Pg. 298.

cohesiveness previously unimagined”.³⁶ A critical element in the Inuit position, which made it more palatable to a reluctant federal government, was their willingness to accept a ‘public government’ rather than ‘Aboriginal self-government’ in the new territory. Therefore, all residents could vote, run for office and participate in public affairs.³⁷ The Land Claim Agreement covers 2.2 million square kilometers of land in the central and eastern arctic. The Inuit hold the outright title to about 20 percent of this land; and, as such, they have the right to hunt, fish and trap across Nunavut, whether on Crown Lands or Inuit Owned Lands. The Inuit also received a capital transfer payment of 1.148 billion dollars, payable over 14 years, with interest, in exchange for relinquishing Aboriginal title to Nunavut land outside of the Inuit Owned Lands. Furthermore, the Inuit will receive a share of any royalties the Canadian Government receives from oil, gas and mineral development on Crown Lands, as well as, the right to negotiate with industry for economic and social benefits from non-renewable resource development on Inuit Owned Lands (called Inuit Impact Benefit Agreements). Finally, Article 23 of the Land Claim Agreement states that Inuit employment levels in the territorial government must be representative of the Inuit population in the Territory, which is 85 percent.³⁸

The Nunavut Land Claim Agreement was a momentous occasion for the Inuit; however, Inuit women’s interests and concerns were not adequately addressed

³⁶ Thomas Berger, Conciliator’s Final Report: Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Implementation Planning Contract negotiations for the Second Planning Phase. Indian & Northern Affairs Canada. Ottawa. 2006. Pg 8: Letter of Transmittal.

³⁷ Jack Hicks and Graham White, Nunavut: Inuit Self-Determination through a Land Claim and Public Government? August 2000. Pg. 29. Accessed at: http://caepi.anu.edu.au/system/files/Seminars/presentations/HicksJ_WhiteG_2000.pdf

³⁸ Erik Anderson (Ed), Canada’s Relationship with Inuit: A History of Policy and Program Development. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. June 2006. Pg.

in the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement. The federal land claims policy, and the fact that there were no mechanisms in place requiring that Inuit women play an equal role in the negotiation and implementation of the land claim agreement, greatly contributed to this problem. Mary Crnkovich argues that the federal land claims policy does not address women's concerns because its mandate is only to address the legal uncertainty related to the ownership of land and resources. Consequently, the "negotiation of political rights that address racial and sexual inequality [does] not appear to have a place in," such an agreement.³⁹ To address this issue, Indian and Northern Affairs introduced gender-based analysis in the department in 1999; however, the analysis only applied to new policies and programs and therefore neglected to redress the land claim agreement. Ms. Crnkovich therefore concludes, "women's inequality is a likely outcome of a land claims policy that promotes large-scale resource development and ignores the socio-economic and cultural implications of such development."⁴⁰ Martha Flaherty, a past president of Pauktuutit, the National Inuit Women's Association, also points out that employment opportunities available through non-renewable resource development are usually taken by men. The Nunavut Land Claim Agreement includes "no provisions to promote training or preferential hiring of Inuit women or incentives to encourage Inuit women's involvement in the business opportunities that may be available," from resource development projects.⁴¹

³⁹ Linda Archibald and Mary Crnkovich, *If Gender Mattered: A Case Study of Inuit Women, Land Claims and the Voisey's Bay Nickel Project*. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1999. Pg. 12.

⁴⁰ Archibald and Crnkovich, Pg. 12.

⁴¹ Elana Wilson, "Gender, Nationalism, Citizenship, and Nunavut's Territorial "House": A Case Study of the Gender Parity Proposal Debate". *Arctic Anthropology*, 2005, Vol. 42, No. 2. Pg. 84.

Meeka Kilabuk was the sole Inuit woman to participate in the larger group supporting the land claim negotiation⁴². The other woman, Mary Crnkovich, was a consultant who was brought in later as a researcher/negotiator, and went on to become the in-house legal council for the organization responsible for negotiating the land claim.⁴³

With constant pressure to settle the Land Claim Agreement, the inclusion of issues addressing gender equality may not have been obvious to those sitting at the negotiation table and making the decisions. For example, the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement emphasizes the continuation of men's traditional practices and subsistence activities, but pays little attention to women's traditional activities.⁴⁴ The presence of women could have broadened the scope of negotiations to include other issues considered to be important to women and the community as a whole. As noted in its submission to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Canadian Arctic Resources Committee suggests:

Land claims agreements would likely be broader in ambit and purpose if negotiating teams more accurately reflected both genders. We believe that a greater role for women in negotiations would heighten the contribution of agreements not only to social and cultural matters, but also to the

⁴² Paul Quassa, Paul Okalik, David Aglukark Sr., and Terry Fenge, served as the negotiators for the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. This group was also supported by Tagak Curley, Bob Kadlun, Allen Maghagak, Jack Kupeuna, John Amagoalik, James Eetoolook, Solomon Kugak, Eric Tagoona, Donat Milortuk, Thomas Suluk, Louis Tapardjuk, Mark Evaloarjuk, Simon Taipana, Louis Pilakapsi, Meeka Kilabuk, Ollie Ittinuar, John Merritt, Randy Ames, Bruce Gillies, and Mary Crnkovich.

⁴³ Keith Crowe., "The Road to Nunavut." *Nunavut '99*. Accessed at: <http://www.nunavut.com/nunavut99/english/road.html>.

⁴⁴ Isabel Altamirano-Jimenez, "Whose Homeland, Whose Voices?" *Canadian Woman Studies*; Winter/Spring 2008; Volume 26, Number ¾. Pg. 130-131.

promotion of sustainable development.⁴⁵

Those negotiating the land claim agreement did attempt to include a wildlife harvesting income support program, which would have subsidized Inuit households who chose to support themselves by living off the land, but, the Federal Government did not agree to have this program considered as part of the Land Claim Agreement. The program was designed to respond to the lost opportunities for many Inuit families to live off the land due to the increasing cost of harvesting. Instead, a parallel agreement for the Wildlife Hunters Income Support Program was developed with the Northwest Territories government during the land claim agreement negotiations. To reach an agreement, the Inuit negotiators decided to narrow the focus of the program from the “household” to the “hunter” as this fit within an existing government initiative. As such, hunters (primarily men) were provided with modest funds to subsidize the cost of gas, as well as necessary repairs to machines used for harvesting.⁴⁶ Contrastingly, a similar program to address the interruption of women’s labour in the harvest was never put forward.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, Aboriginal Peoples, Comprehensive Land Claims, and Sustainable Development in the North: A Brief to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Ottawa: CARC. October 1993.

⁴⁶ Linda Archibald and Mary Crnkovich, If Gender Mattered: A Case Study of Inuit Women, Land Claims and the Voisey’s Bay Nickel Project. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1999. Pg. 8.

⁴⁷ Isabel Altamirano-Jimenez, “Whose Homeland, Whose Voices?” Canadian Woman Studies; Winter/Spring 2008; Volume 26, Number ¾. Pg. 131.

In a 2006 letter to the Nunatsiaq News editor (the newspaper of the eastern Arctic) an Inuit woman comments,

as a woman, I feel not enough community and social affairs were adequately negotiated [in the land claim] to support community well-being strategies, education, culture and language and to protect our land and hunting rights, so we could flourish as a healthy, progressive Inuit nation, no longer dependant as wards of the state.⁴⁸

Inuit women's unequal participation extends beyond the actual negotiation and content of the land claim. The body mandated to hold and distribute the compensation funds provided through the Land Claim Agreement, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, does not guarantee equal participation of women and men within the organization or on its Board of Directors. This brings into question whether women's equal access to these compensation funds can be guaranteed. Further, those bodies responsible for land management (Institutes of Public Governance) in Nunavut do not guarantee the equal representation of women and men, which can prevent women from acquiring the experience necessary to fill the appointed and elected positions.⁴⁹ Women are still under-represented in the organizations and boards responsible for land and resource management in the territory. Therefore, decision-making in this area is based mostly on a male perspective, while also reinforcing the attitude that land and

⁴⁸ "How does the land claim benefit me?" Letter to the Editor. Nunatsiaq News. March 10, 2006. Anonymous. Accessed at: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/how_does_the_land_claim_benefit_me/

⁴⁹ Linda Archibald and Mary Crnkovich. If Gender Mattered: A Case Study of Inuit Women, Land Claims and the Voisey's Bay Nickel Project. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1999. Pg. 10-11.

resource management are not 'women's issues'. A 2009 Nunavut Economic Forum report concluded that economic development strategies in Nunavut were thus inconsistent with the priorities and interests of women, and warned this "can create conditions of female dependency on men."⁵⁰ Finally, the evaluation and monitoring of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement does not include a gender-based analysis, which means that socio-economic issues are not analyzed to determine the impact on women in the territory.⁵¹ Inuit women are often disproportionately impacted by the social problems associated with mining and development,⁵² and it is therefore of utmost importance that they have equal access to decision-making when it comes to resources development in the territory.

⁵⁰ "Nunavut Summit on the Social Economy Proceedings." Nunavut Economic Forum. November 25-27, 2009. Iqaluit, Nunavut. Pg. 27-28. Accessed at: <http://www.nunavuteconomicforum.ca/public/files/library/Draft%20Nunavut%20Summit%20on%20the%20Social%20Economy.pdf>

⁵¹ Linda Archibald and Mary Crnkovich. If Gender Mattered: A Case Study of Inuit Women, Land Claims and the Voisey's Bay Nickel Project. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1999. Pg. 10-11.

⁵² *Ibid.* Pg. 13.

GENDER PARITY PROPOSAL

“How the vote turns out will largely reveal what kind of society we are.”⁵³

- John Amagoalik, NIC Chair

When the Nunavut Implementation Committee (NIC) first discussed the design of the Nunavut Government in 1995, it saw the perfect opportunity to combine the issues of regional and gender representation.⁵⁴ The Nunavut Government is based on the Westminster parliamentary system and uses a single-member plurality to elect its legislators. Its major difference from other similar systems is that it is non-partisan, and in fact, there are no political parties in Nunavut. Once legislators are elected they operate on consensus to reach decisions.⁵⁵ The gender parity proposal was developed with the argument that,

as groups, men and women have different relationships with the laws and institutions created through public policy, and have different life experiences...The call for balanced representation in politics is therefore more a call for recognition of shared interests, it is a call for recognition for equality for a historically mistreated group in society.⁵⁶

⁵³ Laakkuluk Jessen Williamson, “Inuit Gender Parity and Why it was not Accepted in the Nunavut Legislature.” *Etudes/Inuit Studies: Gender Issues*. Volume 30 (1), 2006. Pg. 58.

⁵⁴ Williamson, Pg. 58.

⁵⁵ Graham White, “And now for something completely Northern: Institutions of governance in the territorial North”. *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 35(4), 2000. Pg. 84.

⁵⁶ Jackie Steele and Manon Tremblay, “Paradise Lost? The Gender Parity Plebiscite in Nunavut”. *Canadian Parliamentary Review*. Spring 2005. Pg. 34.

The NIC proposed 22 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), with one man and one woman MLA per district. It was felt two members per district would allow the members to time-share sitting in the legislature, so constituents would have more time with their elected member and still have representation in the Assembly. This would also allow MLA's to better balance their family with work and travel. The NIC conducted research on women's representation all around the world and found that no country had achieved anything close to parity, despite the variety of electoral systems that are in place. The NIC wrote: "what we learn from studying women's representation around the world is that the structure of the political system makes a big difference."⁵⁷ The gender parity proposal would have been the first example in the world of a mechanism to promote gender equality in a political system. The NIC saw links between women's under-representation and the lack of attention paid to areas such as daycare, healthcare, education and sexuality rights.⁵⁸ The NIC also argued that the gender parity proposal was consistent with traditional Inuit culture. Martha Flaherty, past president of Pauktuutit, stated:

In Nunavut we have the rare opportunity to design a government from scratch. We can try to avoid some of the problems with existing governments, one of the most significant problems being the under-representation of women... In the old days, Inuit survived in the harsh environment through

⁵⁷ Nunavut Implementation Commission. "Two Member Constituencies and Gender Equality: A 'Made in Nunavut' Solution for an Effective and Representative Legislature." Discussion paper. February 15, 1995. Pg. A-8.3. Accessed at: http://terra-firma.ca/user/image/10_1_10.pdf

⁵⁸ Janet Mancini Billison and Kyra Mancini, Inuit Women: Their Powerful Spirit in a Century of Change. Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007. Pg. 28.

cooperation, and NIC is now proposing to carry on this long-standing tradition of working together.⁵⁹

The Status of Women Council of the Northwest Territories also supported the gender parity proposal and suggested, “if we continue at the present rate of slow increases of women being represented in the electoral process, it could be several hundred years before we saw equal numbers...our northern society, with our serious economic and social problems, needs women’s voices in the Legislature now.”⁶⁰ The NIC decided to put the gender parity proposal to a vote and a plebiscite was organized at the end of May 1997.

Opponents of the gender parity proposal suggested the proposal would threaten traditional Inuit roles and therefore weaken the family unit. Moreover, they stated ignoring sexual, racial or other differences best ensured equality. Accordingly, an individual’s merit and ability was most important to ‘represent’ and advance the general interests of the population at large.⁶¹ One of the most prominent opponents of the proposal was Manik Thomson, one of the two female Northwest Territories Ministers at the time. Thomson asserted that the proposal was discriminatory (against men) by reserving seats for women who may not be

⁵⁹ Martha Flaherty. 1993 speech to Annual General Meeting of Tungavik Federation of Nunavut. As referenced by Linda Archibald and Mary Crnkovich. If Gender Mattered: A Case Study of Inuit Women, Land Claims and the Voisey’s Bay Nickel Project. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1999.

⁶⁰ Jack Hicks and Graham White, Nunavut: Inuit Self-Determination through a Land Claim and Public Government? August 2000. Pg. 72. Accessed at: http://caepr.anu.edu.au/system/files/Seminars/presentations/HicksJ_WhiteG_2000.pdf

⁶¹ Jens Dahl, “Gender Parity in Nunavut?” Indigenous Affairs, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen, Denmark. July-December 1997 issue. Pg. 3.

the best representatives, and discriminatory against women because it assumed women could not get elected without representational guarantees.⁶²

On May 26, 1997 the Nunavut gender parity proposal was put to a non-binding plebiscite and was voted down by 57%. Only 39 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote on this proposal. Many have weighed in on why the proposal was voted down: some suggest the public felt the NIC pushed the issue too hard. Others feel that timing was the problem. For example, the month of May is often the time when Inuit families leave the hamlets to hunt and fish – and, perhaps many did not want to miss their opportunity to be out on the land.⁶³ Alternatively, Gombay surmises that Nunavummiut were held back in their understanding of the political process by a lack of experience, and concludes that the Inuit public either did not like or did not understand what the political elite were doing and “punished them with what seemed to be a lack of interest,”⁶⁴ in the proposal. Jackie Steele and Manon Tremblay also suggest that the views of Maniok Thompson, a prominent woman at the time, who was so against the proposal that it may have led to confusion as to who constituted the legitimate voice of women’s equality concerns.⁶⁵ Others highlighted concerns about the increase in the unemployment rate among Inuit men, as well as the growing number of women becoming the sole breadwinner for the family at the time. Some men

⁶² Laakkuluk Jessen Williamson, “Inuit Gender Parity and Why it was not Accepted in the Nunavut Legislature”. Etudes/Inuit Studies: Gender Issues Edition. Volume 30 (1), 2006. Pg. 56.

⁶³ Jens Dahl, “Gender Parity in Nunavut?” Indigenous Affairs. International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen, Denmark. July-December 1997 issue. Pg. 3.

⁶⁴ Nicole Gombay, “The Politics of Culture: Gender Parity in the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut”. Etudes/Inuit/Studies, 24 (1), 2000. Pg. 137-40.

⁶⁵ Gombay, Pg. 137-40.

saw the gender parity proposal as a further encroachment upon men's traditional roles within Inuit culture.⁶⁶ Finally, strong conservative religious beliefs in Nunavut also appeared to be an important factor in the vote outcome.⁶⁷

Nunatsiaq News reflected on the gender parity vote and proclaimed,

compared to most of Nunavut's men, Nunavut's women are more literate, more level-headed and more skilled... A self-governing Nunavut will need leaders who know how to read, write, count and compute in both our major languages...[T]ake a look at who shows up the next time your regional Inuit association or community council holds a meeting...Observe who's doing the typing, the interpreting, the translating, the minute taking, the bookkeeping and the telephone answering. Observe who's doing the work that actually takes brains to do. If you do that, you'd understand what the people of Nunavut really lost on Monday's vote. You'll understand that the gender parity proposal was not created for the benefit of women – it was created for the benefit of all.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Jens.Dahl, "Gender Parity in Nunavut?" Indigenous Affairs, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen, Denmark. July-December 1997 issue. Pg.

⁶⁷ Jack Hicks and Graham White, Nunavut: Inuit Self-Determination through a Land Claim and Public Government? August 2000. Pg. 49. Accessed at: http://caepr.anu.edu.au/system/files/Seminars/presentations/HicksJ_WhiteG_2000.pdf

⁶⁸ "Throwing it all Away". Editorial. Nunatsiaq News. May 30, 1997. Accessed at: <http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/back-issues/week/70530.html#10>

In 1999 a one-member constituency system, with 19 constituencies and no gender guidelines was established. The gender parity proposal was put aside and leaders focused their energy instead on creating the government departments and bodies needed to manage the territory.

THE NEED FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN NUNAVUT

Rapid social changes brought about by colonization have resulted in a deep gender shift and the devaluation of Inuit women in Nunavut. Despite Inuit women's move into higher skilled and higher paying employment, Inuit men continue to dominate hamlet councils, senior levels of government, and territorial politics. Today, only two of the 19 Members of the Nunavut Legislative Assembly are women, and this is only after a recent by-election in April 2010 when Jeannie Ugyuk was elected.⁶⁹ At the municipal level only five out of 25 mayors are women. Men make up the majority of the senior ranks of the Government of Nunavut, despite the fact that a higher number of women overall work for the Government of Nunavut. According to the Government of Nunavut statistics bureau, only 27 of 182 senior management positions were filled by Inuit women as of March 31, 2011. The land management boards in Nunavut also have a much higher number of male employees. While living in Nunavut, I observed that Inuit women were only equally represented on community committees and boards of directors. This could be because the structure of many community committees is more cooperative and less hierarchical. The number of women in leadership positions today is far from representative of the

⁶⁹ Jeannie Ugyak. Nunavut Legislative Assembly. Accessed at: <http://www.assembly.nu.ca/node/1336>

female population in Nunavut. In 2010, women made up 48 percent of the population in Nunavut.⁷⁰ Sylvia Bashevkin suggests that democracy seems “impaired, partial and unjust when women, as a majority of citizens, fail to see themselves in leadership.”⁷¹

The Nunavut Land Claim Agreement negotiation illustrates that when women are not ‘at the table’ their issues and concerns are not addressed. Inuit male leaders, on behalf of the collective, negotiated the Land Claim Agreement, but paid little attention to issues of importance to women, nor did they propose ways to address gender inequality in the agreement. One woman in Iqaluit recounts,

as negotiations had taken over 20 years, women’s groups and organizations didn’t exist, and women supported their men’s movement for land claims, wanting to be complementary rather than in conflict as it was important that Inuit in Nunavut are seen in solidarity. Women in the end suffered: as it was more important to concentrate on our Inuit identity, we gave up the right to safety, equality and opportunities. Women are no better off now than before — still too few women are involved in politics today...⁷²

⁷⁰ Government of Nunavut Statistics Bureau. Accessed at: <http://www.eia.gov.nu.ca/stats/population.html>

⁷¹ Sylvia Bashevkin (Ed), *Opening Doors Wider: Women’s Political Engagement in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009. Pg. 10.

⁷² “How does the land claim benefit me?” Letter to the Editor. *Nunatsiaq News*. March 10, 2006. Anonymous. Accessed at: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/how_does_the_land_claim_benefit_me/.

Williamson argues that since Article 23 (requiring the Government of Nunavut to have 85 percent of its positions filled by Inuit employees) was negotiated in the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement as a controlled method of correcting inequality, it would not have been a stretch to implement equality between men and women as well. In fact, “gender parity would have been a concise representation of the intersection of Inuit egalitarianism with a Western electoral system”.⁷³ Women’s interests and concerns are not being addressed in Nunavut because women were not ‘at the table’ during the Land Claim Agreement; the gender parity proposal was not supported; and women continue to be indirectly excluded from all levels of decision-making in the territory.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Inuit women have identified major social problems in Nunavut since the resettlement period, including the breakdown of the family structure, alcohol and substance abuse, inadequate economic opportunities, insufficient daycare, housing, and violence against women. These issues continue to concern and affect women to this day. Through an examination of the Hansard of the Legislative Assembly over the last ten years, in addition to Government of Nunavut programs and policies, it becomes clear that many of these social issues have not received sufficient attention. Consideration of two social issues of particular concern, housing and domestic violence, in Nunavut today illustrates this point.

⁷³ Laakkuluk Jessen Williamson, “Inuit Gender Parity and Why it was not Accepted in the Nunavut Legislature”. *Etudes/Inuit Studies: Gender Issues*. Volume 30 (1), 2006. Pg. 65.

Housing

There is a severe housing shortage in Nunavut, and 49 percent of Nunavut residents currently live in housing units that are crowded, and are not considered to meet appropriate housing standards.⁷⁴ Not only has overcrowding been linked to higher incidences of communicable diseases, but it has also been found to exacerbate social issues. Housing has been a regular topic of discussion in the legislative assembly, although leaders have failed to address how housing has impacted women in particular. In 2007 The Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council conducted a study on women's homelessness in Nunavut, which revealed that homelessness and the risk of homelessness was indeed a major problem for women. In addition, the majority of women interviewed in the study reported being victims of violence. In fact, the two issues are often inter-related. For instance, several women indicated that they had become homeless because of their decision to flee an abusive family member, often their intimate partners. Nunavut's harsh climate makes homelessness an invisible issue, as women do not live out on the streets but rather have to find temporary places to stay with friends, family or with men. Services or programs for homeless women in the territory were not available until two years ago when a women's homeless shelter was built in Iqaluit with funding from YWCA Canada. It is worth noting that a 20-bed men's homeless shelter has been operating for many years in Iqaluit. Female interviewees also revealed that their housing unit had often been listed under their partners name exclusively, and when the relationship ended, became

⁷⁴ Statistics Canada. An Analysis of the Housing Needs in Nunavut: Nunavut Housing Needs Survey 2009/10. Carried out for the Nunavut Housing Corporation. Accessed at: <http://www.eia.gov.nu.ca/stats/Housing/Other%20Documents/Analysis%20of%20the%20Housing%20Needs%20in%20Nunavut,%202009-2010.pdf>

abusive or their partner passed away, the woman was expected to evacuate her home.⁷⁵ In addition, there are no second-stage transitional housing units that have been established in Nunavut by the Nunavut Housing Corporation (i.e., the body responsible for building and maintaining all public housing in the territory) for women and their children leaving a shelter or temporary housing arrangements. The Qullit study concluded that a gender-based analysis needs to be applied specifically to housing corporation policies. The importance of this recommendation is reinforced by the 2009/10 Housing Needs Survey that was carried out by the Nunavut Housing Corporation. In spite of the Qullit report on women's homelessness in the territory, which revealed the housing-related problems faced by women, the Housing Needs Survey did not ask any questions related to women and housing, and actually failed to mention women at all in their final report.⁷⁶ Like many Government of Nunavut departments, men make up most of the senior positions at the Nunavut Housing Corporation. For programs and services to be responsive to women and their needs, women must be involved in the development and management of these programs and services. The Government of Nunavut must therefore strive to increase the number of Inuit women filling positions at all levels and across all departments.

⁷⁵ Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council. The Little Voices of Nunavut: A Study of Women's Homelessness North of 60 Territorial Report. Iqaluit: Qullit Nunavut Status of Women Council, 2007. Pg. 7.

⁷⁶ Statistics Canada. An Analysis of the Housing Needs in Nunavut: Nunavut Housing Needs Survey 2009/10. Carried out for the Nunavut Housing Corporation. Accessed at: <http://www.eia.gov.nu.ca/stats/Housing/Other%20Documents/Analysis%20of%20the%20Housing%20Needs%20in%20Nunavut,%202009-2010.pdf>

Domestic Violence

“Violence against women sounds the alarm that gender regimes – power relations between males and females – are far from balanced.”⁷⁷

While it is estimated that only 30 percent of violence against women cases are reported in Nunavut⁷⁸, rates are still six and a half times higher than the national average, and, shockingly, the death rate for women by violence in Nunavut is five times the rate for all women in Canada.⁷⁹ Billson contends that the significant changes in gender roles and power experienced during the resettlement period led to increased violence toward women.⁸⁰ Moreover, the patriarchal values of explorers, missionaries, government administrators, and traders influenced Inuit communities and replaced their egalitarian values with an overlay of male domination and control. Pauktuutit, the Inuit Women’s Association of Canada, was the first organization to break the silence about the high rates of violence against women in Inuit communities, and this issue continues to be the organization’s number one priority. Pauktuutit has also challenged leaders of the Government of Nunavut for failing to take action on violence against women. The fact that several members of the legislative assembly have been charged with violence against women over the last ten years could be one of the reasons

⁷⁷ Jane H. Bayes, Mary Hawkesworth and Rita Mae Kelly, “Globalization, democratization, and gender regimes”, in R.M. Kelly, J. Bayes and B. Young (eds), Gender, Globalization, and Democratization. Lanham and Oxford, Rowman and Littlefield. 2001. Pg. 2.

⁷⁸ Statistics Canada. Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile. Statistics Canada. Government of Canada. 2009. Accessed at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2009000-eng.pdf>

⁷⁹ Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association. Family Violence in the Canadian Arctic. Ottawa: Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association. 2009. Accessed at: <http://www.pauktuutit.ca/index.php/home/publications/>

⁸⁰ Janet Mancini Billson. "Shifting gender regimes: The complexities of domestic violence among Canada's Inuit." Études/Inuit/Studies, vol. 30, n° 1, 2006. .Pg. 70.

for so little action. In 2000 Pauktuutit's Executive Director Veronica Dewar remarked,

I was deeply concerned that the speaker of the Nunavut government, the premier [Paul Okalik], and 18 other MLAs did not immediately call for the resignation of a member convicted of sexual assault. Now that the minister of education has resigned from Cabinet after being charged with assault causing bodily harm, I am shocked and saddened that the premier has only congratulated Mr. Arvaluk on his contributions to the Nunavut government and said he will be missed... What this says to women is that the Nunavut government looks the other way when it comes to violence against women.⁸¹

Discussions in the Nunavut Legislative Assembly also underscore the lack of understanding and concern many MLA's have displayed for women trying to escape violence. As an example, in 2002, Mr. Nutarak, MLA for Pond Inlet, commented, "usually what happens is when a woman is sent out, is the children are left behind and they have to be taken care of by their grandparents and her relatives. Sometimes when the women are sent out to the shelters...many end up drinking and some end up having extra-marital affairs."⁸² Ironically, members of the Legislative Assembly have often been accused of excessive drinking and inappropriate behaviour while in Iqaluit for sittings of the Legislative Assembly.

⁸¹ Veronica Dewar. "Pauktuutit: GN is Failing Nunavut Women." *Nunatsiaq News*. September 1, 2000. Accessed at: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/nunavut000930/nvt20901_02.html

⁸² Nunavut Legislative Assembly. Fifth Session, First Assembly. Hansard: Official Report. February 20, 2002. Pg. 2446. Accessed at: http://www.assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/20020220_Final.pdf

Moreover, MLA's have suggested abusive husbands should have more access to their wives while in a women's shelter, and have tried to contact the women at the Qimaavik shelter in Iqaluit on their constituents' behalf.⁸³ This shows the members lack of concern for the female victims.

In contrast, when Eva Aariak became the first female premier in Nunavut, she demonstrated she would take action on the issue of violence against women. In 2009 Premier Aariak made the decision to take the justice portfolio away from Minister Louis Tapardjuk when he wrote a letter suggesting Canadian law unfairly targets men when domestic disputes turn violent.⁸⁴ Aariak commented that the government of Nunavut does not condone violence and that Tapardjuk's comments were completely inappropriate. On International Women's Day this year, Jeannie Ugyuk, the only other female MLA, stood up in the legislative assembly to share a story about two female victims who had recently been killed by their spouses and commented simply, "let us remember the two victims here because spousal assault is a very big problem in Nunavut."⁸⁵ Just a few days later Adamee Komoartok, the MLA for Pangnirtung was charged with the assault of his wife. This time all MLA's voted quickly to suspend Komoartok and he later resigned.⁸⁶ A review of the Nunavut Legislative Assembly Hansard

⁸³ Nunavut Legislative Assembly. Fifth Session, First Assembly. February-March 2002.

⁸⁴ Nunatsiaq News. Minister apologizes for remarks about spousal abuse, suicides. January 29, 2009. [Nunatsiaq News Online](http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/Minister_apologizes_for_remarks_about_spousal_abuse_suicides/). Accessed at: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/Minister_apologizes_for_remarks_about_spousal_abuse_suicides/

⁸⁵ Nunavut Legislative Assembly. [Members Statement: International Women's Day](#). Nunavut Hansard. May 8, 2011. Pg, 5. http://www.assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/20110308_Blues_English.pdf

⁸⁶ CBC News. Nunavut MLA Komoartok Resigns. May 15, 2011. [CBC news online](#). Accessed at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/story/2011/03/15/nunavut-adamee-komoartok-resign.html>

over the last ten years confirms that the issue of violence against women in the territory has only been discussed in recent years. Elected officials are in a position of authority and trust, and serve as role models for children and adults in Nunavut. Action or inaction by officials influences how issues are discussed and prioritized within the territory. It has only been when women have been elected to the Nunavut Legislative Assembly – which has occurred more recently - that the issue of violence against women has been raised and discussed in any detail.

Sitting on the Board of Directors for the Qimaavik Women's Shelter in Iqaluit provided me with an intimate knowledge of the services and programs available to women escaping violence in the territory. The Qimaavik Shelter was the only shelter serving the entire territory, and women from other communities were often flown in to the shelter. In addition, most of the smaller communities in Nunavut did not have counseling services available for women. During my time on the Board of Directors the shelter was usually full, and many times had a waiting list. One of the biggest challenges for the shelter was negotiating a reasonable funding level each year from the Government of Nunavut, which was the shelter's primary funder. There are limited organizations and businesses in Nunavut to approach for funding partnerships, which is one of the reasons there are so few non-governmental organizations in the territory. In addition, federal funding for women's shelters is only available for shelters on reserve, and Nunavut therefore does not qualify for federal funding available to other Aboriginal communities. Shelter staff and board members confirm that

fundraising has been a time-consuming activity over the shelter's years of operation. Fundraising was required to raise money for basic and necessary items like kitchen equipment (e.g. blenders, appliances, etc), food for the women and their children, and diapers for children living in the shelter. In addition, staff salaries at the shelter are not competitive with other organizations in town, making staff retention an ongoing and recognized problem.⁸⁷ In 2006 the Board of Directors of the Qimaavik shelter announced they would have to close the shelter at the end of the fiscal year if more funding was not secured for the shelter.⁸⁸ Board members had several tense meetings with Government of Nunavut officials to look at options to prevent the closure of the shelter. In the first few meetings the Government of Nunavut did not promise any extra money for the shelter. In fact, the Government would only commit to not penalizing the shelter by reducing the amount of current funding it provided if the Board of Directors found other sources of funding. This was an incredulous response for Board members given the demonstrated need for the shelter in the territory. The Government of Nunavut finally agreed to provide additional funding equal to the amount the Board of Directors was able to fundraise from other sources. While this was much less commitment than the Board had hoped for, Board members also felt strongly that the shelter was such an important service it would do whatever it could to keep the shelter open. Funding for programs and services is an example of how a government prioritizes issues. Based on the amount of funding and support provided to the shelter, I would suggest that services for

⁸⁷ "Are MLAs victimizing the victims?" Editorial. *Nunatsiaq News*. March 1, 2002. Accessed at: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/are_mlas_victimizing_the_victims/

⁸⁸ John Thompson. "Marchers Plead for Qimaavik". *Nunatsiaq News*. October 20, 2006. Accessed at: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/archives/61020/news/nunavut/61020_01.html

women escaping violence in the territory do not appear to be a top priority for the Government of Nunavut.

CONCLUSION

There are those who seem to believe that the creation of Nunavut should bring about a restoration of absolute power to traditional male leaders. But Nunavut was created to bring power to all Nunavummiut, male and female, young and old. If that doesn't happen, then the creation of Nunavut will have been a waste of time.⁸⁹

- Editorial, Nunatsiaq News

Before colonization, Inuit enjoyed balanced gender roles. Traditionally, men and women worked hand-in-hand, and respected each other's skills, knowledge and expertise in different spheres of work, which helped the family and community survive. Today, women have been disproportionately affected by a deep gender shift that has occurred in Nunavut - women are under-represented at all levels of decision-making - resulting in women's interests and needs not being adequately addressed by leaders in the territory.⁹⁰ Kate Young's research on electoral systems around the world confirms, "the type of electoral system is the most significant predictor of the number of women elected."⁹¹ Nunavut had two

⁸⁹ "Are MLAs victimizing the victims?" Editorial. Nunatsiaq News. March 1, 2002. Accessed at: http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/are_mlas_victimizing_the_victims/

⁹⁰ Janet Mancini Billson. "Shifting gender regimes: The complexities of domestic violence among Canada's Inuit." Études/Inuit/Studies, vol. 30, n° 1, 2006.

⁹¹ Kate Young. Electoral Systems and Representative Legislatures: Consideration of Alternative Electoral Systems. Ottawa: Canadian Advisor Council on the Status of Women. July 1994. Pg. 71.

important opportunities to correct the gender imbalance that has taken place.

The gender parity proposal considered in 1997 would have been a practical way to “eliminate the informal mechanisms that have gate-kept women out of politics,”⁹² and ensure Inuit women had equal access to political decision-making processes. When Premier Eva Aariak was elected in 2008 she mused that it might be time to reconsider the gender parity proposal.⁹³ One can only hope this idea begins to gain support again. MLA Jeannie Ugyuk recently challenged all Inuit organizations in Nunavut to take a stronger stand to address issues that directly concern and affect women. Ms. Ugyuk commented, “too often, it feels as if the focus of their initiatives are driven by the old boys’ club and do not take all beneficiaries (Inuit) into account”.⁹⁴ The Nunavut Land Claim Agreement illustrates the importance of guaranteeing an equal role for women in the negotiation, implementation and evaluation of land claim agreements. A woman’s perspective on a particular land claim issue is likely to bring forth a holistic analysis that evaluates not only the economic and governance consequences that will arise, but also the social, cultural and environmental factors that arise. Culturally relevant gender-based analysis is required in the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement evaluation, and must be adopted by all Government of Nunavut departments and land management bodies. Only then will initiatives, programs and policies truly reflect women’s needs and perspectives in Nunavut. In this regard, it is important to note the lack of

⁹² Steele, Jackie and Manon Tremblay. “Paradise Lost? The Gender Parity Plebiscite in Nunavut”. Canadian Parliamentary Review. Spring 2005. Pg. 36.

⁹³ “Reconsider Gender Parity, says lone Female Nunavut MLA.” CBC News online. October 29, 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/story/2008/10/29/nunavut-women.html>

⁹⁴ Nunavut Legislative Assembly. Members Statement: International Women’s Day. Nunavut Hansard. May 8, 2011. Pg, 5. http://www.assembly.nu.ca/sites/default/files/20110308_Blues_English.pdf

literature and research currently available on Inuit women in Nunavut. Further research on gender parity and organizing strategies would contribute to redefining Inuit women and their role as equal and, “significant decision-makers within Inuit society”.⁹⁵ As an example, cooperative, non-hierarchical organizing strategies, where decisions are based on consensus, hold a lot of promise for Inuit women in Nunavut. These strategies promote the full participation of the community, and are also in line with traditional Inuit egalitarian ways of organizing. Serious social problems, such as violence against women, will only be solved in Nunavut when women and men alike have equal access to education, politics, economic development and health and social services. I believe new female Inuit leaders will be instrumental in bringing about positive changes in Nunavut, and they are already showing their ability to raise awareness and support for issues that until recently, had received little attention in the territory.

⁹⁵ Aluki Rojas, Iglumi Isumatait: A Reinterpretation of the Position of Inuit Women. M.A Thesis. Peterborough: Trent University. June 2001. Pg. 93-94.

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