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NUNAVUT

Whose Homeland? Whose Voices

Many political changes of the twentieth century have involved the rhetoric of nationalism, which continues to play a crucial role in present-day political discourses. In recent decades, Indigenous peoples' demand to be recognized as nations has stressed territory and power as fundamental collective rights. Despite the rich separate literature on nationalism and Indigenous peoples, little effort has been done to study the possible relation between the two. Even lesser attention has been paid to the relationship between Indigenous nationalism, gender, and tradition. This article explores how these connections have unfolded in Nunavut, Canada. An analysis from a nationalist perspective is useful to examine how tradition and gender are crucial boundary makers in the construction of Indigenous national identities and to consider what roles women play in the rhetoric of nationalism.

This article advances three related arguments. First, it argues that the construction of Indigenous nationalism is a political process in which traditional and historical models are evoked; gender roles are constructed; and symbols, customs, and political and social practices are selected in the assertion of the right to a homeland and self-determination. Second, the deliberative reconstruction of tradition mimics the rigid identity criteria demanded from Indigenous peoples by the nation state. In the case of Nunavut this is expressed in the contested visions of tradition, gender roles, and the ongoing struggle to maintain Inuit identity and symbolic control within non-Inuit forms of governance. Third, both Indigenous nationalist discourses and colonizing polices include boundaries of exclusion and silence that entrap men and women differently.

I suggest that an analysis of the connections between nationalism, gender, and tradition is essential for a textured understanding of Indigenous women's realities and political actions. There is an ambivalent position between nationalism and women. On the one hand, nationalism has promoted women's activism and visibility; on the other hand, it has limited women's political actions and horizons, especially when women's aspirations are considered to divide the nationalist movement (Hall 100). The nation requires a sense of sameness, unity, and strong commonality based upon tradition when representing itself through the language of nationalism.

INDIGENOUS NATIONALISM, TRADITION, AND WOMEN

In their efforts to turn their cultural difference into a political resource, Indigenous peoples have integrated tradition into politics transforming such tradition into a significant symbolic capital with different functions and values according to different contexts. In Indigenous nationalist discourses, forms of everyday tradition and historicity tend to be superseded by political and economic readings of tradition (Schroeder 13). In contrast to lived tradition that is place-specific, the abstract conception of tradition celebrated in the nationalist narrative is generalized and distant from its diverse local footing so that it can conform to rigid definitions of Aboriginal peoples and historical continuity.

From this perspective, the national narrative reconstructs traditional history as a meta-narrative of timeless cultural continuity that, nonetheless, clashes with dynamic cultural practices and social relations. According to Schröder (12) by being imbued with political, hegemonic meaning, tradition loses its very embeddedness in everyday life and is objectified as reflexively constructed and deployed. Thus, the codification of tradition is among the more effective sources of social and political control and approval as it is aimed at persuading the members of a community that their commonalities are more relevant than their differences (Schochet 309). The question is not whether there is such a thing as a homogeneous tradition or past, rather, the question is who is mobilizing what in the articulation of the past, deploying what identities and representations, and in the name of what political purposes (Shohat 110).

The codification of tradition and its enforcement can therefore be understood as attempts from the dominant group to institute homogeneity and conform to the identity demanded by the Western settlers. In this context, difference is often expressed in simple terms of black and white, and internal difference is rendered equally problematic. However, while this process is imagined in relationship with local subjects, the logic upon which this process is founded inhibits efforts to understand or empower those individuals who live "out of the way" (Tsing) or those who have a different understanding of tradition. Dominant discourses of tradition are aimed at concealing the conflicting power relationship between gender and tradition and at legitimizing the status quo, which generally excludes Aboriginal women and their concerns.

Indigenous nationalist movements construct women's rights and aspirations as "unauthentic," "untraditional," or threatening to the political and cultural liberation of Aboriginal peoples. Often, gendered struggles against colonialism have been reduced to "women's issues" by the formal male leadership and then presented as a wholesale threat to Aboriginal sovereignty (Lawrence and Anderson 3). Women's demands for inclusion and equality have been dismissed and conceived of as "individual concerns." Several scholars (LaRocque; Dion Stout; Green; Ramirez) have demonstrated that formal male leadership has refused to address colonialism when women, rather than men, are its target. Consequently, the mobilization for Indigenous self-determination in these

circumstances does not necessarily include the emancipation of Indigenous women.

From this perspective, dominant groups also control the rhetoric on tradition as well as subordinate groups whose discourse differs from that of the dominant. As the contestable issue of gender remains submerged in political struggles emphasizing self-determination, cul- tural difference, and experiences of material and social inequalities, Indigenous women's voices remain "muted." Nevertheless, as Shirley Ardener has explained in her introduction to *Defining Females*, muted groups are not deficient in their capacity for language, nor are they necessarily quieter than the dominant group. Rather, the "mutedness" of one group may be regarded as the "deafness" of the dominant group. Moreover, the latter group's deafness forces subordinated groups such as Indigenous women to create alternative spaces of action and strategies aimed at challenging the legitimacy and hegemony of such discourses and power.

Therefore, gendering Indigenous struggles helps to explain how Indigenous women relate to nationalism, tradition, and feminism. Andrea Smith notes that the discussion on Indigenous women's struggles and Indigenous nationalist movements have usually been framed in quite simplistic terms, emphasizing a gap between feminism and Indigenous women. Despite appearances, Indigenous women are complex figures to feminists, not only because of these women's double racial and gender identities but also because Indigenous women's actions and political positions seem to point in contradictory directions.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND FEMINISM

Postcolonial feminists (Spivak; Mohanty; Stasiulis) have contributed greatly to the discussion of the "double marginal" and have challenged other feminists to consider the intersections with other axes of difference. Nonetheless, Indigenous women differ in important ways from those of the so-called Third World analyzed by postcolonial feminism.

Chandra Mohanty's influential essay "Cartographies of Struggles" for example, redefines Third World not within any geographical boundaries but within particular socio-historical conjectures. Mohanty perceives important commonalities between Third World women and women of colour in the First World. However, as Radhika Mohanram argues, such redefinition reproduces a homogenous conception of the Third World by emphasizing global economy as an organizing principle. At the same time, it also underlines alliances that are relevant in multicultural contexts. This emphasis, however, tends to bypass Indigenous rights and to position Indigenous peoples just as any other minority. Although in the literature the term Third World has been superseded by the term postcolonial, which encompasses different national-racial formations, this term continues to neglect Indigenous colonization experiences.

The different issues that postcolonial feminists and Indigenous women raise are important when considering their perceptions of nationalist projects. Critical

differences between the perspectives of Indigenous women and postcolonial feminists result not only from their different racial experiences but also from their different worldviews. Indigenous women underline the continuation of colonialism—even within the context of independent national states—and gender equality by drawing on both cultural constructions honouring and valuing womanhood and non-Indigenous perspectives as well (McIvor 173). Indigenous traditions portrayed by women generally place women at the centre of communities, families, and political and cultural practices including the participation of the collective in achieving balance and consensus. Therefore, from Indigenous women's perspectives, issues surrounding the social reproduction of their collective identities and communities are crucial and connected to their struggles for self-determination.

However, an important body of literature reveals contradictions and ambiguities in Indigenous women's lives that defy easy generalization. Indigenous women within a community may experience a wide range of differences in their status, cultural settings, and voices, while individual women encounter considerable changes in their political position consequent to changing kinship status (Conte). These discrepancies between the actual functions Indigenous women perform and the roles imposed on them create further paradoxes in women's status relative to men. Despite the contradictions women have experienced and their unequal access to essential resources, women have often used their domestic functions and status as a means to facilitate rather than hinder their opportunities for political participation. Furthermore, while some Indigenous women have centred on building and reproducing communities as an extension of Indigenous women's responsibilities towards their communities, others have adopted other forms of political action in the political sphere.

As Indigenous nationalism may force communities to preserve a past and conform to the image and representation of resistance, emergent internal movements mobilize "discrepant" traditions in struggles around identity, place, and power. Indigenous women's resistance illustrates the conflicting relation between the representation of binary formulations and the mobilization of alternative visions of tradition. As a subordinate group, Indigenous women act to transform the interface between the discourses of place, tradition, and politics in Aboriginal decolonization struggles. In this process, Indigenous women are not merely subject to unified racial and gendered identities, but are agents claiming to construct and mediate meaningful complex subjectivities. Their discourses both reproduce Indigenous tradition and resist the hegemony of dominant representations of tradition.

Nunavut and Inuit nationalism is a relevant case in which the institutionalization of a new relationship between Indigenous peoples and the government was accompanied by important efforts and debates to redefine Indigenous traditions, self-government, and women's relationship to their communities. In this context, Indigenous women have emphasized the gendered experiences of colonialism. While formal male Indigenous leadership has associated resistance

and self-determination with land claims, constitutional protection, and western forms of governance, female activists have identified self-determination **to** a variety of issues connected to the community including cultural and economic development and gender-balanced relationships.

NUNAVUT: WHOSE HOMELAND?

Thanks to an active Inuit nationalist movement that started in the 1970s, on April 1, 1999, the eastern Arctic, equivalent to one-fifth of Canada's landmass, became a new territory: Nunavut ("Our Land" in Inuktitut), in which 85 percent of the population is Inuit. Under the language of nationalism, Inuit tradition and culture were closely associated with the homeland and the hunter. The economic, political, and identity focus given to the land and its resources positioned Inuit men's concerns at the centre of the nation-building process. Hunting is a social and cultural institution, so it is not surprising that the image of the hunter is a central expression of Inuit tradition and identity (Searles 124-25). Through this image, hunting skills and the ability to survive in the Arctic's harsh climate are condensed to portray a male-centered Inuit identity while women's dynamic social, cultural, and economic roles are left out.

The centrality of the image of the hunter and the economic and cultural emphasis on the continuation of traditional practices and subsistence used under the nationalist language contributed to place women and women's activities in a less valued position than that of men or, at least, in a position no longer considered "traditional."

Furthermore, the apparent neutrality of social and political institutions helps to conceal internal power structures and to make the contestable issue of gender taken for granted. For example, the political movement that gave birth to Nunavut emphasized the collective right to exercise authority over the land, which has been a traditional male domain (Schweitzer et al. 18). However, as Mark Nuttall argues, women in Arctic hunting societies fish, gather plants, hunt small animals, collect birds' eggs, and process meat, hence making vital contributions to the social and economic vitality of their communities. Thus, the construction of land use and occupancy as male-centred when the Nunavut land claims were negotiated has had important negative consequences for women.

When dealing with "traditional" land use and occupancy, the Canadian government asks Aboriginal peoples to demonstrate that they were at a certain level of social organization and that they had some notions of "property" in order to claim territorial rights (Pinkoski and Ash). At the same time, land claims processes are embedded in colonial representations of women as landless and domestically placed. As a result, negotiations have focused on validating statements of male traditional, and continuing, land use and occupancy of the specific areas claimed, rather than on both men's and women's contributions to hunter-gatherer economy. From this perspective, a male-centred nationalist

discourse is related and reinforced by the rigid definition of Indigeneity and historical continuity adopted by the Canadian state. This approach is also consistent with conventional southern Canadian notions of development, which emphasize the exploitation of non-renewable resources.

The indirect consequences of the gendered land claims negotiation process extend beyond the actual contents of a land claim. Inuit women had expressed concerns about an emphasis on the economic, social, and political roles and issues for men at the expense of those of women in Nunavut (Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association). For instance, as part of the Nunavut land claims the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut (TFN) negotiated wildlife income support with the Northwest Territories (NWT) government. The TFN agreed to narrow the scope of the program from the "household" to the "hunter" as this focus fit within an existing government initiative providing hunters (primarily men) with small amounts of funds to subsidize gas and repairs to machines used for harvesting (Archibald and Crnkovich 8). Although there may be income support programs for men whose livelihood of hunting is interrupted, the Inuit Women Association stated that no such programs for the interruption of women's labour in the harvest exist.

Thus, the shift from the "household" to the "hunter" not only values the continuation of men's traditional activities as opposed to women's but also contributes to conceal important economic and social transformations experienced by Inuit society. For example, Inuit women have increasingly become the main economic supporters of the household by stepping into the wage economy and continuing with their traditional activities such as harvesting. This suggests a clash between the reconstruction of traditional history as a metanarrative and the dynamism of live tradition, cultural practices, and social relations.

Besides the conceptualization of gendered territorial struggles, other events involving the creation of national institutions also reveal the gendered vision of the nation and the constant struggle of the Inuit to maintain their identity and symbolic control within non-Inuit forms of governance.

The fundamental idea behind the Nunavut land claims was that territorial institutions, state structures, and political process should reflect the nature, values, and tradition of Inuit society. However, such nationalist aspirations had to be accommodated into a public model of self-government. In the context of institution-building, the Inuit leaders also introduced the gender-parity vote proposal. While the public model of government was successfully adopted, the gender-parity proposal failed in the middle of a heated debate around the meaning of tradition and its role in contemporary Inuit society. Although the discussion focused mainly on these intersections, I argue that the outcome of the referendum was also closely related to the competition between unelected and elected leaders for political legitimacy and the institutionalization of contemporary Inuit politics and government.

In 1994, the Nunavut Implementation Commission (NIC), the entity in charge of overseeing the creation of a government for the new territory, released

a document proposing that the new government should be gender-balanced by creating two-person constituencies, with one male and one female representative (Nunavut Implementation Commission). The proposal recognized the systemic barriers to women's participation in the political process and governance structure within Inuit society and outlined the need to eliminate such barriers in order to create balance and mutual respect between men and women in the decision-making process (Nunavut Implementation Commission Report).

The centrality of gender and tradition in the national institution-building process in Nunavut was articulated clearly during the gender-parity referendum. On May 26, 1997, the inhabitants of Nunavut voted on a proposal that would have guaranteed gender parity within the Nunavut Legislative Assembly. However, the proposal was rejected by 57 percent of the voters (Bourgeois; Hicks and White; Laghi). The proposal, a radical and unique idea in the world, and the public debate that developed previous to the vote, contested not only the relationship between men and women, but also their place in modern Inuit society.

Three arguments were put forth during the debate regarding the gender-parity proposal: (1) gender parity would help restore traditional equal value between women and men; (2) gender equality is foreign to Inuit society; (3) the proposal is against the "Inuit spirit," which is based on commonality not individualism; and (4) equality is best ensured by ignoring gender and racial differences.

Inuit male and female leaders who negotiated the land claims endorsed the first argument. During the weeks leading up to referendum representatives for Nunavut Tungavik Incorporated (NTI), NIC, and Pauktuutit (the Inuit women's organization) ran a campaign and visited a number of communities in the territory. These **organizations** argued that Inuit tradition used to be gender-balanced. According to this argument, gender roles were different yet complementary. Therefore, gender equality in the legislature would best reflect the division of labour and equal sharing of responsibility between women and men in Inuit society before westernization ended this society's nomadic lifestyle. However, the plebiscite results do not indicate that the campaign had any positive effect. In fact, many people felt intimidated by what they perceived was a one-sided campaign. Some people questioned who had paid for the campaign and why the opponents were not part of it. Furthermore, while Inuit tradition invokes complementary gender roles, increased unemployment among men and participation of women in wage labour is such that men saw gender parity as a further limitation to the traditional role of men as providers (Steele and Tremblay 36).

The second argument was used by conservative groups to oppose the proposal. They claimed that the notion of equality between the sexes was foreign to Inuit society and instead invoked Christian gender roles as part of their argument. Accordingly, men belonged to the outside world and, as hunters, they were the

providers. Women, in contrast, belonged to the household and were in charge of childbearing, skin cleaning, midwifery, and sewing. According to this argument, the role of women within the nation was limited to their roles within the home. To elect women to the legislative assembly would have meant taking women out of the home and preventing them from fulfilling their duties. Many Inuit women lined up with this argument for fear that female participation in politics would increase violence and social problems. Jens Dahl (46) points out that Inuit women's opposition to the proposal reflected their commitment to maintain strong families and also their fear of increasing social problems.

The third argument was also used by the opponents of the proposal to argue that women could not be seen as a separate collectivity, because such a perception jeopardized the viability of the whole. According to this point of view, community decisions are geared towards unanimous consensus even if that means exercising strong forms of discipline among the members of a community. Since individuals cannot be abstracted from the community, the whole goal of statecraft is to transcend individual interests and to work for the community's public good.

The fourth argument was also advanced by the opponents of the gender-parity proposal, who took a liberal view of democracy. Among the most vocal opponents were the elected politicians, including the Director of Community Affairs and the Women's Directorate, MLA Manitok Thompson. The assumption behind this argument was that equality was best ensured by ignoring sexual or other differences and by emphasizing individual merit and commitment to advance general interests. From this perspective, good laws and public policy were viewed as a means to secure the equal opportunity of all individuals to compete for the role of representing the society at large. As Jackie Steele and Manon Tremblay argue, equal representation was, in this position, measured in terms of the procedural equality of competition. The fact that a prominent Inuit female advanced this view and the idea that the proposal was discriminatory both against men (by reserving seats for women) and against women (by assuming women could not win without representational guarantees) increased concerns as to who constitute a legitimate voice of women's equality concerns.

Although the debate preceding the gender-parity referendum focused on issues regarding gender roles, collective versus individual rights, and descriptive versus substantive representation, the proposal was part of the nationalist process of creating government institutions and legitimizing political leadership. The proposal was advanced by the old leadership, who negotiated the land-claims agreement and who sought to retain some symbolic control within non-Inuit forms of governance. In contrast, many of the vocal opponents were elected politicians who had been socialized in the NWTliberal mindset. From this perspective, the debate prior to the referendum was also a battleground about the power accorded to elected leaders as opposed to unelected leaders operating within Inuit forms of governance and, about the legitimization of elected leaders, who would better fit Nunavut's "Canadianized" government

institutions and principles. Ultimately, the debate around the gender-parity proposal was a battle over who has the right to speak on behalf of whom. In the end, the gender-parity initiative failed, showing that Inuit nationalism is not only a political process in which tradition and gender are highly implicated, but also an ongoing struggle to maintain cultural identity and symbolic control within non-Inuit forms of governance. Furthermore, it is a struggle about different visions of the nation. While elected leaders may move more comfortably within a public government, for many Inuit, Nunavut the idea of "homeland," continues to be unfulfilled promise."

CONCLUSIONS

This article argues that the construction of nationalism is a political process in which historical models are evoked, gender roles are constructed, and symbols, customs, and political and social practices are selected in the assertion of the right to a homeland. In nationalist discourses, gender does not constitute a legitimate component because Indigenous nationalism's emphasis is on the distinction between "them" and "us" and on conforming the terms demanded from Indigenous peoples by the national states. From this perspective, both Indigenous nationalist discourses and colonizing polices include boundaries of exclusion and silence that entrap men and women differently and contributes to the unequal representation of men and women.

While the adoption of a public model of government did not represent a challenge to Inuit "tradition," the gender-parity proposal and its debate centred on the theoretical foundations of gender equality, the contested visions of Inuit tradition, and on who has the right to speak on behalf of whom. From this perspective, the political choices facing Inuit society are not between self-determination and fragmentation or between collective rights versus democratic individual rights. Rather, they are about different ways of understanding self-determination, nationhood, Inuit identity, and the place of men and women within the nation.

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