

Inuit Women and Self-Government

by Pauktuutit

Pauktuutit, un organisme à but non lucratif qui représente les femmes Inuit du Canada, tente de trouver des moyens pour s'assurer que les femmes Inuit participent aux discussions concernant la mise sur pied d'un gouvernement autochtone autonome dans le Nord.

As self-government becomes more and more a reality in the North, Pauktuutit is searching for ways to ensure that Inuit women are included and their ideas about self-government are heard. Women and men do not always view government in the same ways. For example, a one-day Self-Government Workshop held during Pauktuutit's Board of Directors Meeting in June 1994 focused on the need to create safe communities. This is an interesting approach to self-government, one which needs to be explored further.

Background

Early in 1994, Ron Irwin, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, wrote to Martha Flaherty to ask Pauktuutit's views on how to proceed to implement the inherent right of self-government. He said that the "federal government is prepared to act on the premise that the inherent right is already contained in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982." Martha said she would consult with Inuit women and then respond to the Minister's question.

Section 35(1) of the Con-

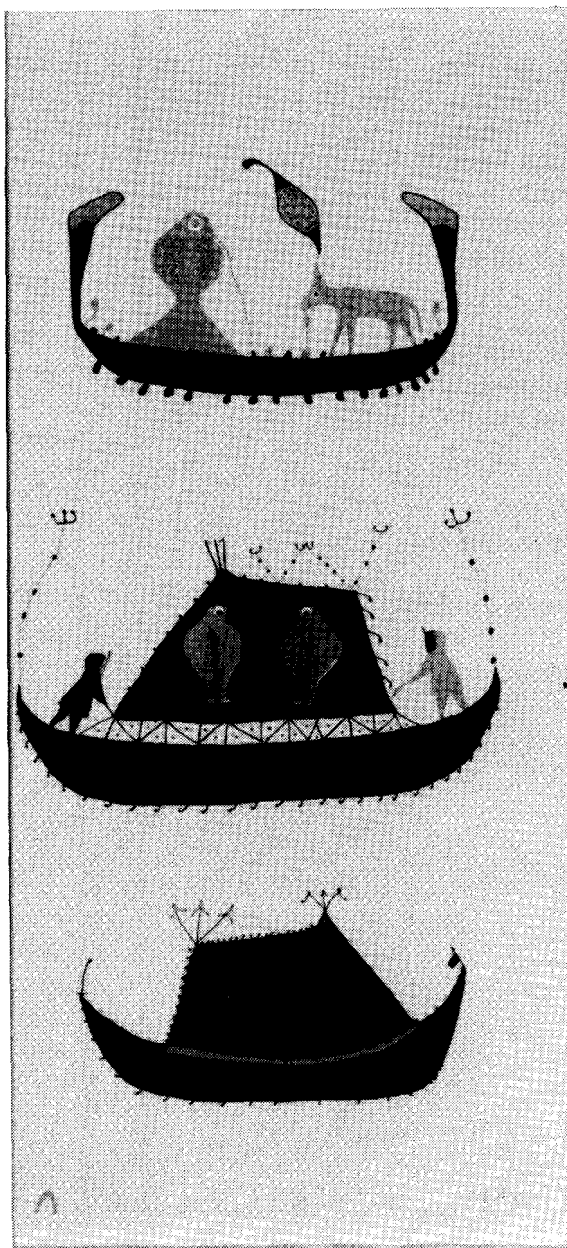
stitution states: "The existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed." Section 35(3) recognizes land claims as modern treaties. Inuit have tended to use land claims processes as a way of negotiating self-government and Mr. Irwin's commitment to implement "the inherent right to

self-government" could reinforce existing processes. Since these regional self-government processes already exist—and in most cases negotiations are underway—Pauktuutit decided to focus on what women imagine their lives will be like under self-government. This could provide us with goals to strive for and act as a starting point for building truly inclusive self-government structures throughout the North.

Visions of self-determination

During the Board of Directors workshop on the inherent right to self-government, Pauktuutit focused on self-government at the community level because that is where most people live out their lives. While Inuit women fully support and need self-governing structures at the regional level, and they want these recognized and protected in the Canadian Constitution, Inuit women also need to see and feel that they are self-determining at the community level. As a starting point, Board Members were asked to imagine what the ideal community would be like: "Imagine that you wake up one morning and find that your community has been transformed into the ideal community. What would it be like?"

The following is a sum-



*Ikayukta Tunnillie, "Umiatunait," Lithograph, 1978
Courtesy Ward Collection. Photo: Yukon Government.
Reprinted with permission of the West Baffin Eskimo Coop.*

mary of how Pauktuutit's Board of Directors responded to the question.

The ideal community is a safe community. Safe for women, children and elders.

No alcohol. No suicide. Zero sexual abuse. There would be nothing deviant—no fighting, no sexual abuse, no violence.

There would be enough money to survive. Inuit would have control over the economy, and people would have jobs if they wanted.

Looking around the community, we would see Inuit working as doctors, nurses, and teachers. At Council Meetings, women and men would participate as equals. Mental health services would be available, along with enough housing for everyone, and there would be a good hospital in the region so that the elderly and seriously ill would not be sent south for the medical care they need. We will have day care centres.

Self-determination includes the ability to "be yourself." Under self-government, Inuit will feel proud. We will have high levels of self-esteem. We will be using Inuktitut, and looking forward to a brighter tomorrow. Elders will feel useful, and traditional skills will be valued and passed on. Our children will be happy, we will be happy.

People will have the things they need to survive. Jobs, if they want them, but not necessarily just jobs. Communities will have sewing centres where women can make parkas and traditional fur clothing and elders will teach young women how to prepare skins. Everyone will have access to country food. People will be active, participating in a variety of traditional and contemporary activities and no one will be poor or hungry.

With Inuit teachers in the classroom, our children will be understood. Schools would be located in the commu-

nity with the proper equipment in them, and traditional skills will be taught as a part of the school curriculum. Schools will be Inuit-run. We also need Inuit colleges and universities in the North, and regional cultural centres where Inuit history can be recorded and taught. Children will be able to get a good academic education in both Inuktitut and English. Speaking English does not have to mean losing our Inuit-ness.

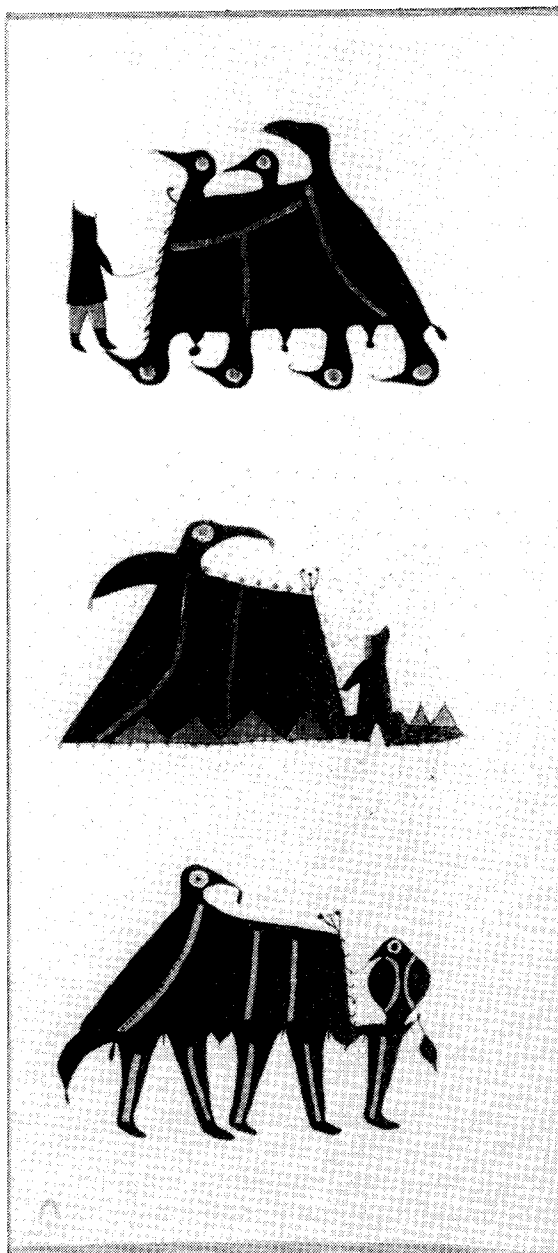
Self-government must promote and use Inuit culture. Inuktitut will be spoken in all government offices. Inuktitut will be the language spoken in day care centres, schools, social services, and in the home. The Inuit way of thinking

and doing things will be a part of our government. Regional dialects will be promoted and preserved, for we do not all speak the same dialect and our differences must be valued and respected. Traditional cultural activities will be revived and celebrated.

Government services will be available even in the smaller communities. There will be no need for people to go south for good medical care for we will have good regional hospitals. Community services will provide support and follow-up for seriously ill people. Proper and sufficient services will be available in each community so that people will not have to move to larger centres. We will work together to solve problems.

Men will learn to talk about things. Women and men will work together to solve family and community problems. Men will be more open about their feelings and we will be able to communicate with each other about the things that are important to us. We will all communicate with our children.

Each one of us will be able to stand on our own two feet. Physically, emotionally, spiritually, we will be strong and in control of our own and our community's future. We will be proud and



Ikayukta Tunnillie, "Strange Tents," Lithograph, 1978
Courtesy Ward Collection. Photo: Yukon Government.
Reprinted with permission of the West Baffin Eskimo Coop.

independent. We need our culture, language and traditions in the process of self-determination. Under self-government we will see Inuit-owned businesses, community-run services and administrations. At meetings, we will talk about reality, not visions.

In the ideal community women's voices will be heard.

This article was written for Suvaguuq, Pauktuutit's newsletter on Inuit social and cultural issues, by Linda Archibald, a social policy consultant whose work focuses on women's and northern issues. Reprinted with permission from Suvaguuq, Volume IX, Number 2, 1994.

Definitions

Inherent Right: An inherent right is something you are born with, something that exists as a basic and natural part of something else. Aboriginal peoples have argued that self-government is an inherent right which exists for Aboriginal peoples because they were the original inhabitants of this land. The federal government now accepts the fact that the inherent right to self-government is contained in the Canadian Constitution, but it remains unclear how this right will be implemented and what exactly it contains.

Self-government: Self-government is the term used to describe governments run by Aboriginal peoples. These governments can take many forms: Nunavut and Kativik Regional Government are two examples of Inuit self-government, but they are also public governments open to all long-term residents of the region.

Self-determination: On a personal level, self-determination is the ability to make decisions freely, without interference from others. Political self-determination is the right of a nation or people to determine its own form of government. This includes control of the financial resources needed to support and maintain that government.

Jurisdiction: The power, right or authority to legislate, govern and apply laws, as well as the geographical or political limits of one's responsibility or authority. Under the Canadian Constitution, federal or provincial governments have specific areas of authority or jurisdiction. Territories have areas of authority similar to the provinces, but these are delegated from the federal government rather than set out in the constitution.

Examples of federal jurisdiction: national defence, fisheries (inland and sea coast), Indians and lands reserved for Indians, criminal law, immigration, and federal programs such as Old Age Security and Unemployment Insurance.

Examples of provincial jurisdiction: natural resources, community and social services, tourism, education, provincial jails, municipalities, hunting laws and licences, marriage and adoption.

ANNE CIMON

Shallow Words

On the street
my mother speaks loud
words,
they tumble,
stumble
from her lips,
a cascade of words
that create
a watery vale
of safety.

Her words are jagged
and colorful
as coral,
broken shells,
half-lies
that sting,
or soothe.

Some turn to look
at us,
mother and daughter,
madly pulled along
on a mild afternoon
in a torrent of words,
soon polished smooth
as glass
in the salty waves
of emotion,
the panic
of parting again.

Anne Cimon lives in Westmount, Quebec.



Nellie Dale, Quilted Wall Hanging

Photo: Yukon Government