

From colonized region to globalized region? Challenges to addressing social issues in Nunavik in the transition to regional government

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Abstract

In a time of globalization, local knowledge critical to addressing social issues is becoming slighted for a more generic, disconnected, and transferable social work practice. This transformation of social work into a more tightly scripted, less skilled activity has implications for Indigenous communities that rely on local, specialized knowledge to adequately meet social needs. As the Inuit of Nunavik, Canada, move toward regional government in 2011 and take responsibility for the oversight and implementation of social service delivery, attention must be paid prevent the region's previously colonial-proscribed approaches to addressing social issues from evolving into globalized approaches. The paper briefly reviews globalization in a social context before exploring the political and social contexts of the Inuit in Nunavik and examining the extent to which a regional government with a colonized past can influence a return to more traditional practices and values to address social issues. Alternative paths toward a more respectful and rewarding engagement with Indigenous communities are suggested, based on

research findings regarding social work needs and social work approaches in Nunavik's largest communities.

Key words: Indigenous social work; Inuit; colonization; regional government; globalization

Introduction

In a time of increasing globalization, local knowledge critical to addressing serious social issues is becoming slighted for a more generic, disconnected, and transferable social work practice. Economic forces of globalization have blurred the divide between business strategies and social work, resulting in social work functioning within a “quasi-business discourse.” (Harris 2003) This transformation of social work into a more tightly scripted, less skilled activity has serious implications for Indigenous communities that rely on local, specialized knowledge to adequately meet social needs. As the Inuit of Nunavik, Canada, move toward regional government in 2011 and take responsibility for the oversight and implementation of social service delivery, attention must be paid to prevent the region's previously colonial-proscribed approaches to addressing social issues from evolving into globalized approaches.

The Inuit are one of three distinct Indigenous groups in Canada as defined by the Constitution Act, 1982, with distinct cultural heritage and language. Nunavik (population 9,565 Inuit) lies north of the 55th parallel in Quebec and is one of four regions in Canada that comprise Inuit Nunaat (Inuvialuit, Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, and Nunavut) – Inuit homeland. Two of these four regions have achieved regional government: Nunavut in 1999 and Nunatsiavut in 2005. This paper examines social implications of the intersection between colonization and globalization as Nunavik approaches regional government (planned for 2011) and the social work approaches needed to develop and implement social policies and programs in Inuit communities. The paper briefly reviews globalization in a social context before exploring the political and social contexts of the Inuit in Nunavik and examining the extent to which a regional government with a colonized past can influence a return to more traditional practices and values to address social issues. Alternative paths toward a more respectful and rewarding engagement with Indigenous communities are suggested, based on research findings regarding social work needs and social work approaches in Nunavik's largest communities.

Globalization and Social Context

Globalization in a social work context has been defined as “a process by which all peoples and communities come to experience an increasingly common economic, social, and cultural environment.” (Rotabi *et al.* 2007) Various accounts of the impact of globalization focus on benefits for what are termed “Western countries” (Payne and Askelund 2008) or on social welfare and social justice consequences in what is termed the “Global South.” (Polack 2004) Hall and Midgley described the South as being “those countries once labeled ‘Third World’... [while] the ‘North’ denotes the industrialized nations.” (Hall and Midgley 2004) Globalization discourse tends to make monolithic the “Global South” and, by extension, the static existence of a “Global North.” It is important, however, to focus attention on regions within the “Global North” whose contexts tend to be condensed with their more privileged neighbors. Within First Nations and Inuit communities of Canada, for example, critical social indicators that describe community health are commensurate with some of the poorer countries

of the Global South. As an example, life expectancy in Nunavik is 62.8 years while it is 79.5 for the total Canadian population (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2008). In comparison, estimated life expectancies are 60.78 years for Haiti and 62.89 years for Madagascar (CIA 2009).

Any positive economic benefits that may come from globalization are rarely felt in Indigenous communities, including those in Canada still grappling with the legacies of colonization. Moreover, the negative effects such as a depression on wages in the Western countries, reduced social expenditure and program retrenchment, and a weakening of governmental ability to protect the domestic economy are felt more acutely in vulnerable communities (Midgley 2007). While academics underscore the need for globalizing policies to “be developed to respond to social need and to benefit the welfare of the populations of the South,” (Payne and Askelund 2008) there is limited government recognition of the need to pay the same attention to Indigenous populations in North American countries. This is not surprising considering two key goals of colonialism were to institutionalize the marginalization of Indigenous communities and the exploitation and movement of commodities and resources away from those Indigenous communities. (Polack 2004)

There are multiple views on globalization and its myriad effects. One perspective holds that powers of globalization can be tamed to benefit humankind. Accordingly, a proposal for doing this is by “strengthening existing multilateral arrangements or establishing new arrangements that can effectively manage global economic as well as political processes for social ends.” (Midgley 2007) There is an assumption that a domesticated form of globalization can be used for good “out there,” in places deeply affected by the negative aspects of globalization such as debt and resource exploitation, as if globalization’s impact on social welfare and redistributive justice is functioning well “in here.” It is critical for governments of “Northern” countries to remember that they owe their own citizens what they advocate for in other, supposedly lesser developed countries.

Inuit Context in Nunavik

Until the early years of the 20th century, the Inuit of Nunavik were a semi-nomadic people with a subsistence-based economy. Contact with the outside world and enforced settlement triggered epidemics and a decline in reliance on traditional food sources. The end of the fur trade left Nunavik economically and socially dependent on subsidies from the province of Quebec (Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse 2007). Nearly as damaging as the destruction of their economy was the assault on the social fabric of communities that is still manifested today. The legacy of colonization has shaped contemporary life for the Inuit of Nunavik as for other Inuit communities in Inuit Nunaat and in the circumpolar regions. The loss of identity, traditional ways of life and culture are often expressed through substance abuse, violence, and child abuse and neglect.

Political Context

Section 35 of the Constitution Act of 1982 opens with the following words: “The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.” These words were the starting point for a process of self-determination, leading to the possibility of self-government for Indigenous peoples in Canada. By recognizing and affirming these rights, the Act put an end to speculation about the nature of Indigenous societies at the time of first contact. Indigenous societies

occupied their territories in a way that could be recognized by contemporary non-Indigenous groups; they cooperated in kinship groups in terms of hunting, trapping and fishing and organized these groups according to their own structures and laws. Native peoples should be considered a survival success story. Their cultures, languages and unique lifeways have survived generations of attempted assimilation by the Canadian mainstream. (Asch 1988)

Indigenous Rights in Quebec

The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA), signed in 1975, saw the creation of Nunavik by the government of Quebec as well as the creation of municipal entities in the newly formed region: Kativik Regional Government (KRG), Kativik School Board (KSB) and Nunavik Regional Health and Social Services Board (NRHSSB). Although these institutions were mandated to provide oversight and implement the region's educational, health, social, and other government-run programs and services, the legislative authority for all of these institutions still remained with Quebec's ministries. Thus, the province recognized Indigenous rights to regional government insofar as they did not exercise sovereign rights "that might jeopardize the territorial integrity of Quebec." (Hamley 1993)

Nunavik Commission

The Nunavik Commission was established in 1999 and met through 2000-2001 with the task of consulting with Inuit in Nunavik's 14 communities on their expectations of regional government. The Commission proposed a model of regional government which would see the amalgamation of KRG, KSB, NRBHSS and the Avataq Cultural Institute and would have an executive of 5 members including a leader. The Nunavik Assembly would be composed of at least 15 locally elected members. The Assembly would have exclusive law-making powers with respect to Inuit language and culture, and substantive and effective (shared) powers in other areas such as education, health, environment, land and resources. The government would be a public as opposed to an ethnic government representing all residents (Inuit and non Inuit) of Nunavik.

Towards an Agreement in Principle

On December 5th, 2007, Makivik Corporation (responsible for managing, administering and investing funding received through the JBNQA for the Inuit of Nunavik and for promoting cultural preservation and social, health and education issues in Inuit communities) and the governments of Canada and Quebec jointly signed a document entitled *Agreement in Principle (AIP) For the Creation of the Nunavik Regional Government*. In the May 2008 edition of Makivik magazine, negotiators made it clear that the Nunavik Regional Government would not be a school board or a health board or indeed a supramunicipality but a new form of government—the only institution of its kind in Quebec (Makivik Magazine 2008). Thus, KRG would become the Department of Local and Regional Affairs, KSB would become the Department of Education and NRBSS would become the Department of Health and Social Services. Administrative and financial support services from all 3 existing institutions would be regrouped into a Department of Central Administration and Finances.

The Agreement in Principle, however, falls short of the proposals on intergovernmental relations proposed by the Commission. The commission proposed the creation of a trilateral Nunavik conference, comprised of members of the governments of Nunavik, Quebec and Canada; that the

members of the Nunavik Assembly maintain a continuing assembly-to-assembly dialogue with their counterparts in the National Assembly of Quebec and the Canadian Parliament; that the government of Nunavik maintain and strengthen its relations with other governments and institutions, both inside and outside Canada; that a Forum of Aboriginal Peoples of Northern Quebec be created; and that Nunavik be represented by a member of Parliament and by a member of the National Assembly of Quebec. The AIP proposes that a Minister in the Provincial government would be responsible for the general relationship between the NRG and the Government of Quebec. The NRG and each of its various departments and secretariat would maintain a relationship with their corresponding Provincial ministry. Wilson called this “nested federalism” and compared it to the relationships between autonomous okrugs (districts) in the Russian Federation States (Nilson 2008). Since 2007, negotiations have continued and the present timetable should see a final agreement at the end of 2009, followed by a referendum. The government could then be created in 2011/2012.

Social Context

This section provides an overview of the current social issues challenging Inuit communities in Nunavik and Inuit community members’ perceptions of these issues as well as social work approaches. Inuit communities in Canada are the site of debilitating social problems, well documented by researchers and government entities. However, they are also sites of resilience. Inuit live the challenges in their communities on a daily basis. Community members emphasized how Inuit traditions (“working person-to-person”, “working from the heart”) as well as current practices of helping and healing had to be integrated into the existing legal social work framework (“working by the book”) in order to have an authentic, effective approach to addressing social issues in Nunavik.

Current Statistical Background

Statistics underscore the serious issues facing Nunavik’s communities. Inuit communities have one of the highest rates of suicide among young people (Tester and McNicoll 2004). They also have high rates of alcohol and drug misuse (Plourde *et al.* 2007), nearly double the number of families under the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) rate compared to non-Indigenous families (Chabot 2004) and an elevated high school dropout rate (Richards and Vining 2004). The rate of family violence in Inuit communities is 10 times the Canadian average and teenage motherhood is prevalent and increasing (Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse 2007).

Educational statistics from the 2006 census reveal Nunavik’s need to increase its educational capacity, critical in the transition to and the implementation of regional government. Only 4% of the population in Nunavik aged 15 and over had college, CEGEP¹ or another non-university certificate or diploma (compared to 12% in Quebec) (Tait 2006). In that same age group, only 1.4% had a university certificate or degree, compared to 6% for the same group in Quebec (Tait 2006). For those aged 35 to 64, only 2.4% had a university certificate or degree (compared to 13.2% of the population in the same age group in Quebec) (Statistics Canada 2006). About 4% had a university degree, an increase from 2%

¹ *Collège d’enseignement général et professionnel* refers to a post secondary 2- or 3-year program prior to attending university.

in 2001, but still much lower than the percentage in 2006 for the total Canadian population aged 25 to 64 (23%) (Statistics Canada 2006). The 2001 census results showed that 52.8% of the population aged 20 – 34 had less than high school graduation as an indicator of educational attainment level. This trend continues throughout the age groups indicating that around 50% of the population does not complete high school (Nunivaat 2009). Economic statistics do not paint a brighter picture. In Nunavik, unemployment is 20.5%, higher than in the rest of Quebec and the average household income is lower than in Quebec as a whole (Statistics Canada 2006). Approximately 50% of the population is under 19 and almost 40% is between 0-14 (Statistics Canada 2006).

Overcrowding has serious social and health consequences, including an increase in the likelihood of childhood sexual abuse and lower respiratory illnesses. The Report of the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse observed that overcrowding creates conditions conducive to the emergence of social problems and makes it more challenging to eradicate them. The lack of privacy in itself creates situations in which the risk of abuse from family members who drink or are violent is greater. According to the 2006 Census, 31% of all Inuit in Canada lived in crowded homes (homes with more than one person per room), compared to 3% of the total population in the country (Tait 2006). Among Inuit children under the age of 15, 40% lived in crowded homes, which is six times the Canadian average of 7% (Tait 2006). Inuit children have the highest hospital admission rates globally for lower respiratory tract infections due to poorly ventilated, crowded homes (Kovesi *et al.* 2008).

Perceptions of Social Issues in Nunavik

In 2006/07, the McGill School of Social Work undertook a qualitative research study in Nunavik entitled “Rethinking Social Work Education in First Nations and Inuit Communities.” The School had previously offered a 30-credit certificate in Northern Social Work Practice which was terminated in 2006. Funded by a grant from the Ministère de l’éducation, du loisir et du sport, the study sought the views of certificate program graduates and participants, community members and Elders on the future social work education needs of Inuit communities. Twenty-two community members were interviewed in Nunavik. Interviewees included certificate program graduates and participants, community members working in social service agencies in Nunavik, and Elders. Nineteen of the 22 interviewees were Inuit. Interviews explored the ways in which people thought that social work education should be delivered in their communities, although interviewees were also asked, by way of context setting, a number of questions eliciting their views on the region’s social issues.

Social programs and services delivered in Nunavik represent a significant public expenditure and an important component of Quebec’s strategy to reduce social exclusion. Despite this investment, however, the people of Nunavik continue to experience poor social outcomes relative to the non-Indigenous population. Study findings largely confirmed what is already known about social issues in Nunavik: Substance abuse was frequently considered to be at the heart of many social problems. Nunavik is a “dry” region, meaning that alcohol is on sale only in the hotel and bar in the largest community of Kuujuaq; it is unavailable for public purchase anywhere else in the region. Residents are, however, able to order alcohol from Southern Quebec, and bootlegging is common. Many interviewees also considered alcohol abuse-related issues such as fetal alcohol syndrome and family violence to be endemic in Nunavik’s communities. Thus, substance abuse and the lack of facilities for

treatment was also a critical issue. There is currently only one addictions treatment center for all of Nunavik's 14 communities. Interviewees' responses revealed that many families rejected relatives struggling with drug-related addictions, and there was limited capacity within the region to provide support to families and treatment to those addicted. When addiction problems are combined with overcrowding, they are particularly serious. Domestic abuse was considered by many interviewees to stem from the interaction of substance abuse and overcrowding.

An Inuk interviewee saw many social problems having their origins in stress and noted that there was little understanding about stress and how to address it by the largely white, non-Indigenous health and social services work force. She believed that stress could lead to substance abuse and family violence which in turn could cause child neglect and general family tension:

People are so stressed over everything. They don't know it. They may be stressed over financial problems. They may be stressed over health problems. They may be stressed over any little thing, a child in the school, past history, family history...

This interviewee felt that any attention paid was to the consequences of stress but not its etiology. Mental illness as a result of the stress brought about by substance-related issues was also mentioned repeatedly, along with the lack of resources to offer help.

A general trend in the interviews was the sense of powerlessness and defeat that many community members felt in the face of so many problems and so few resources. Moreover, they felt that as Inuit approaches to social wellness were being eclipsed for mandated, imported Qallunaaq² interventions, they were bearing the brunt of community members' negative attitudes toward those involved in the provision of social service programs. Inuit community workers recalled being insulted and verbally attacked at gatherings where community members met to discuss community problems. Some interviewees also mentioned a more subtle perception that social workers had the reputation of interfering in people's lives. Issues faced by Inuit working in their own communities and having to intervene in the lives of family members and neighbors were also problematic; these were not issues faced by white social workers from outside Nunavik. Many interviewees thought that in order to improve the social work recruitment crisis in Nunavik, the image of social work and social workers would have to change: it was not seen as an appealing career path for Inuit young people.

The Importance of Indigenous Solutions

Based on interviewees' responses, there was evident tension between "Northern" or Inuk and "Southern", Qallunaaq, or white ways of intervening to resolve social issues. This was often expressed as "two worlds" or "two world views." When these two different ways of practicing social work come together, there is an opportunity for a fruitful blending which produces both mutual respect and results. Both the Southern-trained social workers and the Inuit community workers could maintain their own identities and, as one Inuk interviewee phrased it, "mix the knowledge and the understanding that

² Qallunaaq is an Inuit adjective describing a non-Inuit, European or "white person"

makes a nice offering to the community.” However, it was clear from the interviews that there were major differences in intervention styles and practices, making reconciliation of the views a challenge. Inuit community workers put a great deal of emphasis on listening skills and on involving extended family in conflict resolution. They also stressed the need to use traditional wisdom and learning, noting that their ancestral values and practices have as much, if not more, answers to Inuit social needs today. One interviewee highlighted their historical abilities to address needs in their own communities:

In the old days, when Inuit were all by themselves, there was no suicide; Inuit were very motivated to live. When they saw a misbehaving person in their communities and families, they used to take action to correct the problem immediately. Inuit had their own ways to deal with social problems, positive and healthy life values and conflict resolutions.

Addressing social issues effectively within the community had been present before public social service delivery. Elders had been more integrated into public problem solving, being called on to resolve myriad community issues. Another interviewee described her community’s traditional approach to problem solving, and envisioned a two-world approach as a path forward:

I was born in a snow house and I remember the old Inuit way of treating social relationships...situations where there was social discord were mended by Elders in whom they believed. There should be a complementarity between the Qallunaaq way and the Inuit way, by starting to turn more towards the Inuit Elders. If this could be done, if the Qallunaaq program could incorporate the participation of Inuit Elders who remember and could give advice as to Inuit approaches...

Safeguarding Elders’ knowledge and wisdom is critical to understanding traditional approaches to problem solving. However, respect for and the place accorded to Elders and Elders’ knowledge, skills and wisdom is being seen as slipping away. This could be attributed to the loss of generational transmission of knowledge due to the residential school system as well as a diffusion of cultural characteristics in response to acculturation with non-Indigenous regions. One interviewee noted that Inuit communities used to “[recognize] Inuit Elders’ wisdom and counseling methods. We gave them great respect and honor until today.”

Increasing Inuit communities’ capacity to address social issues from a local perspective also involves ensuring that Inuit community members with gifts and skills are being used appropriately. Some interviewees saw the arrival of white people as a time when Inuit lost confidence in their ancestral ways. People who had previously been regarded as wise and natural social workers were intimidated by “white knowledge” and began to believe that their traditional knowledge was inferior to Qallunaaq knowledge. Interviewees voiced a strong belief that most community members could contribute to community wellness but that spirit needed to be fostered to enable them to intervene. It is critical for Inuit community workers to be able to utilize that wisdom and feel internal validation when integrating it into their practice. From the interviewees’ perspective, a “two-world” approach does not privilege degree-based preparation for social work. There is only one Inuk Bachelor of Social Work graduate in

all of Nunavik's 14 communities, although this has more to do with program accessibility (culturally, academically and geographically) than with a lack of motivation for post-secondary education. Without a validation of Inuit traditions and norms, as one Inuk community worker put it, they will feel as though they are "a mere servant providing others with translations services..." referring to their work with white social workers. There was much hurt expressed at the deeply felt injustice of a situation which saw Inuit workers constantly coping with crises in the communities, being on perpetual call by their own communities, eventually burning out because they put other peoples' problems before their own health and well being, and yet still being referred to as social work assistants by white social workers and administrators. While it is a reality that community workers must operate within the Quebec social welfare system with its rules and regulations, it is imperative to legitimately create space for Inuit intervention approaches. Without this validated space, the system will continue to be ineffective due to its colonial-based foundations.

At the core of "cultural sovereignty" (Coffey and Tsosie 2001) is having the "rights to practice traditional ways of life, including language, religious beliefs, property values, and social systems toward relatives and family." (Fenelon and Hall 2008) Central to this is not second guessing one's own cultural teachings based on the marginalization of these teachings in the colonized past; one interviewee pointed out that "as an Inuk, without being told, I know when I do right and wrong. We still follow our ancestral beliefs and taboos." Part of colonization is marginalization or elimination of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, seen by the colonizers as inferior. Thus, as one interviewee noted, Inuit "started to believe that their old values were lower and less powerful than those of Qallunaaq values..."

Research findings confirm that overcoming Nunavik's enormous social problems that stem from social, economic and political exclusion and cultural marginalization can only happen with region-grounded interventions by people who know and understand the communities and who are able to understand and relate to Inuit ways of knowing, being and doing. The major challenge in terms of Inuit regional government is the potential for significant change in terms of social and economic policies which will contribute to the improvement of the social and economic situation in the region. A large body of literature, analyzed by Salée, suggests that Aboriginal quality of life depends largely on the space of political and institutional autonomy that communities ultimately succeed in securing for themselves in accordance with their own cultural sensitivities and priorities (Salée 2006). Légaré's analysis of the creation of Nunavut, Canada's newest territory, is that its only real success has been the Inuit reassertion of their collective identity (Légaré 2008). He indicated that the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and the Nunavut Act gave the Inuit the legal jurisdictional and political tools to confront the social challenges of Inuit society but he blamed the failure to overcome poverty, alcoholism, unemployment, inadequate housing, family violence and suicide on Nunavut's fiscal dependency on Canada and its weak economy. Developing a healthy economy is Nunavut's biggest challenge, and Nunavik faces the same issues: Communities with little economic base, high living expenses, lack of qualified personnel, absence of markets, difficulty in obtaining resources and exorbitant transportation costs. If we add to these challenges high birth rates, a young workforce with low educational levels, high levels of unemployment and dependence on social assistance, inadequate public services and public housing,

poor health conditions and rates of substance abuse, violence, suicide and incarceration which continue to escalate, the task is daunting.

“Southern” solutions mentioned by community respondents in our study have had little impact on the ongoing decades-long struggle with social problems in Nunavik (and other Inuit homelands). There now seems to be fairly wide consensus within the research and policy communities that the significant erosion of social capital brought on by various state policies, cultural disintegration, displacement and the wearing down of traditional knowledge is largely responsible for the difficulties many Indigenous communities and individuals experience (Salée 2006). If these communities are empowered to reclaim control over their lives and their sociocultural assets, assert their cultural sovereignty and have opportunities to use traditional values and knowledge to reestablish social cohesion then there is a chance for the communities to heal and move forward. However, even under a regional government where traditional values and knowledge are reinstated, social work practices will still be circumscribed by the legal context of Quebec and Inuit social workers will still have to meet the requirements of the Ordre Professionnel des Travailleurs Sociaux du Québec to practice in their communities.

Even the establishment of self government is a contested issue within Indigenous communities. Monture-Angus finds that western concepts like “self government” and “sovereignty” are not useful for achieving justice because they remain rooted in the colonialist history of Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state (Alcantara 2007). Instead, Monture-Angus advocates for Indigenous “independence,” a word that she argues is free from the taint of the Crown’s unjust treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada. An Inuk political commentator noted that

No individual makes or enforces law. No group of individuals can speak on behalf of other individuals. No group of individuals constitutes an assembly or equivalent to government. The individualism of the culture is a barrier against any form of organized domination; the egalitarianism a barricade against competitive individualism.
(Frideres and Gadacz 2008)

While the negotiators for the Nunavik Government consider that regional government is the only way forward, personal communication with some Inuit community members suggests that not everyone is convinced. One community member was very specific and said, “...this is not the Inuit way...we do not choose one person to be the Leader...not everyone supports this form of government.”

Conclusion

Historically, vast numbers of people have been “othered” by European colonialist thought, constructed as backward and inferior depending on the production of binaries such as civilized/uncivilized or rational/primitive (Lomba 1998). Nasu suggests that

one of its (globalization) essential points can be said to be a global adaptation of a set of so-called global standards to almost all areas of the globe. It can also be expressed in such slogans as “All Together” or “Everyone is Equal”. Therefore globalization can be characterized as a process of reduction or disappearance of “otherness.” (Nasu 2006)

Social work practice with a “globalized perspective” can “[incorporate] conceptions of interdependence, responsibility and reciprocity, and cultural competence.” (Rotabi *et al.* 2007) For Inuit and other Indigenous peoples, this is a globalized perspective informed by the colonized experience. Nunavik’s policies and programs must be culturally relevant and authentic to the Inuit reality in order to be effective in addressing the region’s pressing social issues. Sharing respective histories and struggles with other Indigenous peoples across the globe can contribute to the creation of “new sites of resistance, new forms of cultural survival, new types of indigeneity, and continued social change.” (Fenelon and Hall 2008)

An important step on an empowering path could be opening a dialogue with communities to explore their understanding of their own capacity to heal and to build social cohesion using a blend of traditional Inuit ways and the political will of the new Nunavik Regional Government to implement social policies which support this direction. Gathering and mobilizing this community input will contribute to the goal of having solutions based, first and foremost, in community realities. (Ives and Aitken 2008) This could contribute to the development of a new relationship among Inuit community members, the NRG, the province of Quebec and the Euro-Canadians who are living and working in the North, a relationship which privileges capacity-building, community development and genuine partnership.

Regional government for the Inuit of Nunavik will provide a significant measure of freedom to oversee their own political, social, economic, and cultural spheres. However, a colonizing/colonized relationship does not produce fixed, stable identities but is characterized by a “hybridity” of identities (Bhabha 1994). For better or for worse, there has been acculturation. It may be seen as more of a diffusion of Inuit culture in Nunavik than an integration of Inuit culture into European-Canadian cultural backgrounds however. There are Inuit who find themselves comfortable in both Inuit and mainstream Canadian worlds and reshape their Inuit culture to include elements of a North/South hybridity. How this hybridity is negotiated within regional governance and then translated into the implementation of locally developed social policies and programs will be important for other Indigenous peoples facing similar struggles with colonial pasts.

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