

Local Institutions and Citizenship Regimes in the Eastern Arctic

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It is well documented that nearly all the institutions of local governance that exist in what is now Nunavut have their roots in the period between the late 1950s and the 1970s. It has also been well documented that many of these institutions were transplanted from the south either directly by the federal and territorial governments or indirectly as they evolved in response to government policy. Government officials in the post-war period set out to bring the welfare state and democracy to the Canadian Arctic. Whether by deliberate colonialism or “well-meaning paternalism”, most of the institutions that were imposed upon Indigenous peoples, particularly in the Eastern Arctic, have endured in various forms since that time, even through major constitutional and political changes such as the settling of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, and the creation of a new territory and territorial government.

Predicated on their understanding of local governments as training grounds for democracy and citizenship, government officials and their advisers, first in Ottawa and later in Yellowknife, introduced and promoted local governing councils and committees as well non-government institutions, such as cooperatives, in the growing number of Inuit settlements across the Eastern Arctic. Local and regional institutions, initially conceived as instruments to create citizens in the North, were later used by Inuit to define and determine citizenship in their own terms within Canada.

Despite their colonial origins, the small and widely dispersed communities of Nunavut have played an important role in establishing and maintaining a citizenry in the territory. White has noted that, “in fundamental ways northern society is defined and politics are played out within the context of communities. It is impossible to underestimate their importance, both in

intangible, psychic ways, and in day-to-day social and political activities.”¹ In his autobiography, land claim negotiator and “father of Nunavut”, John Amagoalik asserts, “Inuit feel very strongly about their community and they feel strongly about regional identity, especially their dialects... Inuit are very protective of their cultural identity.”²

The concept and practice of citizenship has evolved rather dramatically over the last sixty years in Canada’s northern territories, following the establishment of communities and the introduction of local governments via the Canadian welfare state, and it is a primary objective of this paper to seek to understand and document the historical link between local governance institutions and the conceptualization and practice of citizenship in the Eastern Arctic. As a starting point, I take Jenson and Papillon’s definition of citizenship as “a dynamic relation between three complementary dimensions: rights and responsibilities, access and belonging.”³ Another concept, which has been fundamental to the development and evolution of notions of citizenship in the North is self-determination. In my view, self-determination includes the three dimensions of citizenship listed above but it is distinct from citizenship in that, in order for citizenship to be meaningful, it must follow from self-determination.

A *citizenship regime* is defined as “the institutional arrangements, rules and understandings that guide and shape concurrent policy decisions and expenditures of states, problem definitions by states and citizens, and claims making by citizens”⁴ In other words, a citizenship regime is the framework upon which the relationship between governance institutions (state and non-state), and citizens is built. According to Jenson and Papillon, a citizenship regime has four dimensions:

¹ Graham White, “Local Government in the Canadian Territorial North,” in John F. Young, ed. *Federalism, Power, and the North: Governmental Reforms in Russia and Canada* (Centre for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies: University of Toronto, 2007), 11.

² Amagoalik, 176.

³ Jenson and Papillon. http://www.rcrpp.org/documents/2096_fr.pdf

⁴ Jane Jenson and Martin Papillon, “Challenging the Citizenship Regime: James Bay Cree and Transnational Action” *Politics and Society*, 28. 2 (2000), 245-64.

1. It establishes the *boundaries of inclusion and exclusion* of a political community through formal recognition of particular rights and access to mechanisms for the exercise of those rights.
2. It prescribes the *democratic rules of the game* for a polity. This includes the institutional mechanisms giving access to the state, the modes of participation in civic life and public debates and the legitimacy of specific forms of claims making.
3. Through the recognition of formal status to individuals as well as its use of cultural and historical references to qualify the community, it also contributes to the *definition of nation* (nationality and identity); and finally,
4. It sets the *geographical borders of the political community* giving meaning to the frontiers between states.⁵

I draw on the concept of a citizenship regime to help guide the historical overview of the evolution of local governance and citizenship in Nunavut. The concept, and its four dimensions, help to bring to light both the structural as well as the relational aspects of citizenship. The concept also demonstrates the intrinsic relationship between citizenship and self-determination through mention of territory, nation and identity rooted in cultural and historical expressions of community, and recognition and exercise of rights and different forms of claims making.

Local government as “self-government” was sold to and later ultimately rejected by Indigenous peoples in the North. Unsurprisingly, these implanted institutions shaped, and in turn were shaped by the inhabitants of the Eastern Arctic. In earlier decades, local government featured prominently in the thinking about political institutional development in the Arctic but as the call for, and negotiation of, the modern treaties in the North evolved, new governance models and sites of civic participation emerged, first at the regional level and then at the territorial level.

With good reason, much attention has been paid to territorial and land claims political and institutional developments in light of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement signed in 1993, and the new territory of Nunavut, established in 1999. These developments undoubtedly altered the citizenship regime; however, amidst all this higher-level political institutional change, local governments and local institutions seem to have remained remarkably similar, which is both

⁵ Ibid. *original emphasis*.

reassuring and perplexing, given their importance as sites for the expression of local identity and belonging, and points of access to local decision-makers.

At the same time, many of Nunavut's leaders are nearing retirement and the territory is facing considerable challenges and opportunities— social and economic. Nunavut's population is incredibly young and the next generation of potential leaders were born and raised almost exclusively in communities; for many of them, it was their grandparents that negotiated the land claim, and they were young children when Nunavut was created. Do these young people identify with existing local institutions like the hunters and trappers associations, cooperatives and radio stations? Do they see themselves reflected in the local hamlet councils, or the regional associations and co-management boards? What do they see as *their* collective identity, and how do *they* conceive of citizenship in the territory created by their family members and neighbours?

This paper is motivated by these observations and questions, and I consider it a first step towards what I hope will become a more intensive project seeking to understand what the impact of these major changes – perhaps best described as the processes of decolonization - has been on citizen engagement and the citizenship regime at the local level in the small communities that form the bedrock of Nunavut society.

In the pages that follow, I will trace the evolution of local institutions, using the citizenship regime concept as a framework. The intent is to provide the foundation for further questions about the salience of local institutions in Nunavut today in terms of their ability to engage and empower citizens, particularly the next generation of Northern leaders. In this early stage of inquiry, this paper will end with a few observations about historical trends and more questions for future research. First, a brief description of the origin of communities in the Eastern Arctic, to orient the reader.

*Origins of Communities*⁶

Today, communities are the foundation of northern societies. It is at the community level where Indigenous language are most commonly spoken and where people engage in “traditional” social and economic activities, keeping local knowledge and practices alive. However, for the most part these communities did not emerge organically: they were created primarily by an unfamiliar government, from an unfamiliar land very far away. Until the early 20th Century, the original societies of Northern Canada occupied large territories through which they moved based on the seasonal availability of food and other material resources necessary for survival. Only a small number of the communities that exist today are situated in places historically occupied by Inuit and other northern Indigenous peoples.⁷ For the rest, some communities grew up around trading posts, others around religious sites and missionary camps, while others still grew out of mining settlements. The vast majority, though, owe their formal existence to deliberate post Second World War state policies to induce northern Aboriginal peoples to live in settlements where services such as housing, education and health care could be provided.

The communities in what is now Nunavut - the majority of which are hamlets (as opposed to towns or cities) - have had public forms of local government for about sixty years. In addition, there is a strong network of cooperatives that provide services ranging from retail sales to water delivery, as well as housing associations through which the public housing in which most people live is administered, and a string of local committees for education, health, wildlife and economic development. Community life is almost everywhere amply institutionalized, and

⁶ This section is based in part on Frances Abele and Sheena Kennedy Dalseg, “Seeing Like a Community: Social Science Research in Northern Indigenous Communities,” A conference paper presented at International Polar Year: From Knowledge to Action (Montreal, April 2012).

⁷ For example, in Nunavut, the community of Igloodik is located in an area that has been inhabited by humans for 4500 years, and is recognized as an ancient cross-roads, where many people would come to meet, and trade resources, or hunt.

has been so for at least a couple of generations. Whether co-operatives or hamlet governments, the institutions themselves are imported. Over time, they have been adapted, in varying degrees, by the communities themselves, and in many places they now operate almost exclusively in the local language.

The Early Stages of Local Government: Creating Citizens

As mentioned in the introduction, many of the long-standing institutions of northern governance were implanted in the North during the period following the Second World War and this included the institution of local governments. Until World War II, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), the RCMP and the Churches carried out very limited administrative functions, on behalf of Ottawa. In 1954, Northern Service Officers (NSOs) were deployed to the emerging settlements across the Arctic for the purpose of training Indigenous people how to participate in the Canadian political system.⁸ Part of their task was to encourage the establishment of local councils that would, it was intended, foster an understanding of democracy and democratic processes across the North. By the end of the 1950s, the federal government had changed the name of these service officers to "Area Administrators" signaling a change in function from something like a development officer to a role more akin to settlement manager – a position with more authority and permanency. Dacks perhaps puts it best: "while the administrator was attempting to socialize the native people in his community in the norms of democracy, their experience with government was autocratic."⁹ Dickerson goes further to suggest, "administrators [in this period] were, in effect, involved in a process of social engineering for people with a different value system."¹⁰

⁸ Gurston Dacks, *A Choice of Futures* (Methuen Publications: 1981), 106.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mark O. Dickerson, *Whose North? Political Change, Political Development, and Self-Government in the Northwest Territories*. (University of British Columbia Press and The Arctic Institute of North America: 1992), 83.

At first, seats on the local settlement councils were occupied mainly by non-Inuit working in the communities, while separate Eskimo councils were established to act, in theory, as advisory bodies. The Eskimo councils sent representatives to the settlement council meetings and would report back any news or messages to the Inuit community in the area. Typically, a number of committees were created to address local issues and priorities but the level of autonomy of these organizations, both settlement and Eskimo councils, was limited at best. In 1959, the NWT Commissioner suggested that joint councils be formed instead but Inuit rejected this proposal on the basis of language.¹¹

Co-operatives were also beginning to emerge in the settlements at this time. Established primarily as producer co-operatives for Inuit art and other handmade goods, the development of these institutions was supported by the federal Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNANR). According to Vallee, the government supported the development of co-operatives because: they encouraged local decision-making; they contributed to the development of a local workforce; and they provided a training ground for adults who would not benefit from the education system being rolled out across the Arctic.¹² Cooperatives were formed mostly by non-Indigenous residents (government employees or missionaries) but were often closely aligned with the Eskimo advisory committees.

During this early period, the citizenship regime might be characterized as mostly one-sided. In 1949, Inuit were enfranchised – an important marker of citizenship in a liberal democratic state - but it was not until 1962, when the Northwest Territories (NWT) was

¹¹ Ailsa Henderson, *Nunavut: Rethinking Political Culture* (UBC Press: 2007), 75.

¹² Vallee, 46. For an historical piece on cooperatives during this period also see: Lesley Pateron, “The Co-operative Movement in the Canadian Arctic,” in in *The North in Transition*. Nils Orvik and Kirk R. Patterson, eds. Kingston: Centre for International Relations, Queen's University, 1976.

established as a federal riding that Inuit were able (at least in theory) to exercise this right.¹³ Inuit access to the state was limited to interactions with RCMP officers and NSOs; and later to interactions with local councils and their affiliated committees, with mostly nominal decision-making authority and little or no autonomy. In 1966, the first Inuit member was elected to the NWT Council, a partially elected and partially appointed governing body for the territory, headed by an appointed Commissioner. These new positions helped to increase Inuit access to the state; however, these methods of inclusion and democratic participation by Inuit were still defined largely from above through structures and processes determined in Ottawa. Geography and other barriers, such as language, also limited access and opportunities for participation. One of the enduring themes of governance in Nunavut has been a link between the proximity of government to the people and perceptions about its legitimacy.

Differing Approaches to Local and Regional Self-Government?

Between the early 1960s and late 1970s, Inuit and other Indigenous inhabitants of the Northwest Territories experienced an “explosion of opportunities for public participation”¹⁴ as the number of committees, boards, and councils at the local and regional level proliferated. At the same time, the thinking about local institutions and the concept of citizenship in the North was evolving as Inuit began to assert their own interests via the imposed institutions by participating in them as much as possible, and they also began to develop their own institutions and structures. Towards the end of the 1960s, Indigenous peoples across the Arctic, including Inuit, were beginning to assert a collective voice both within and among various regional and ethnic groupings. What became clear during this period was that government officials and their

¹³ See Tester and Kulchyski's *Tammarniit (mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic 1939-1963* for a fuller account of this early period, and the challenges government and Inuit alike faced following the Citizenship Act, 1947.

¹⁴ Henderson, *Nunavut*, 79.

advisers, and Inuit had very different plans for the future of political development in the territory, and different ideas about how Inuit would fit into Canada as citizens.

Two commissions appointed in the 1960s are of particular relevance for their contributions to and reflections of the thinking about local governance and citizenship during this formative period: the *Royal Commission on Government Organization (1962-3)*, headed by J.G. Glassco, and the *Advisory Commission on the Development of Government of the Northwest Territories (1966)*, led by A.W.R. Carrothers.

The primary objective of the Glassco Commission was to recommend changes in the organization and methods of administration of government that would, “promote efficiency, economy and improved service in the dispatch of public business.”¹⁵ The Commission looked at the role of the federal government in the life of the country, including the territorial north, to which it dedicated a special report.

Although the Commission recognized that full provincial status (and thus more autonomy of government) was unlikely in the case of the northern territories, it did recommend that federal regulations in the North be relaxed to allow more flexibility for local administrators to respond to the particular challenges and realities of their area and region.¹⁶ Glassco saw the concept of territorial government as advantageous in that it allowed for “maximum flexibility in the adjustment of relations between the federal government and local authorities...almost complete tutelage in the east, and something like the Yukon in the west...”.¹⁷ The territorial and similarly the local administrators were perceived as extensions of a distant government. Flexibility and

¹⁵ J.G. Glassco, *Royal Commission on Government Organization* (1962).

¹⁶ Glassco, *Royal Commission on Government Organization*, 172.

¹⁷ Ibid.

responsiveness of local agents were desirable according to Glassco but the primary powers belonged in Ottawa.¹⁸

Two years following the Glassco Commission, then Minister of Northern Affairs, Arthur Laing, appointed the Carrothers Commission (1965) to look into the contentious proposal to divide the NWT; and to advise on the nature of the evolution of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT).

Local government and citizenship featured prominently throughout the Commission's report. As Dickerson points out, "members of that Commission saw the development of local governments in the NWT as a vital step in the political development of the region."¹⁹ Carrothers reported that local governments were "an integral part of developing a sense of citizenship in a democracy."²⁰ The Commission report is worth quoting at length here, as this passage summarizes the Commissioner's thinking about the role that local governments could have in developing the North.

We consider that a continuing and intensified program for the development of local government, in which *all residents* can be offered the opportunity of a meaningful role which they can understand, is crucial to the economic, social and political development of the north. In a sparsely populated country where the population is polarized into many small communities...*decentralization of government is of first importance*. Local problems handled locally run the best chance of being solved expeditiously and appropriately. In terms of education, too, local government...has an important role to play in the north at this time...Experience in public affairs at the local level provides a means to a greater interest in broader public issues and offices at the territorial and federal levels.²¹

Reflecting what he understood to be a strong sense of local identity after extensive travel throughout the NWT, the Commissioner's final report highlights the desire of the NWT residents

¹⁸ Glassco goes so far as to compare Northern Service Officers at this time to colonial governors without as much power.

¹⁹ Dickerson, *Whose North?*, 84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

²¹ A.W.R. Carrothers, *Commission on the Development of Government in the Northwest Territories*. Ottawa: Indian Affairs and Northern Development (1966), 189-190 emphasis added.

for local representation and responsibility. This included both a call for the seat of government to move to Yellowknife from Ottawa (which it did in 1967), as well as for more community-based, or perhaps community-reflective, local government.²² The irony of Carrothers' recommendation to move the seat of the NWT council to Yellowknife is that it resulted in the government actually being much further from where most Inuit lived and further entrenched the sense alienation from the GNWT that ultimately led to the proposal to divide the territories.

Carrothers' vision for local governments was that they would be modeled after their southern counterparts, the idea being that community government would evolve along a spectrum from unorganized and completely dependent settlements to hamlets to fully autonomous towns. He recommended the formation of a territorial department of Local Government which would implement representative government structures at the settlement level.²³

The degree of decision-making capacity of local governments was enhanced following the implementation of a community development fund by the NWT Council.²⁴ This fund helped to differentiate community councils from other local committees and bodies. As a result of this program, the now elected community councils took over increasing responsibility for "hard services".²⁵ As Henderson notes, "it was hoped that, by providing Inuit with formal political opportunities to deal with local affairs that might interest them and with which they might be familiar, a generation of political leaders might be trained."²⁶ Cameron refers to local settlement

²² Ibid., 188.

²³ Carrothers, qtd in Emilie S. Cameron *The Ordering of Things: Narrative Geographies of Bloody Falls and the Central Canadian Arctic*. Doctoral Dissertation submitted to the Department of Geography, Queen's University (2009), 200.

²⁴ Henderson, *Nunavut*, 77; Carrothers, *Commission on the Development of the GNWT*, 192.

²⁵ Dacks, *A Choice of Futures*, 106.

²⁶ Henderson, *Nunavut*, 76.

councils as “practice governments²⁷” rather than venues for meaningful representation or self-determination.”²⁸

The proliferation of local and regional political and administrative bodies during this period is staggering but something else was beginning to happen as well. Inuit began to develop their own mechanisms of access to the state, by establishing regional and national policy and claims-making associations. Government had tried to engineer political and economic development from afar in the territories through the development of local and regional committees but once Inuit began to organize outside of these committees, officials in Ottawa and Yellowknife were shaken. Henderson notes that the NWT Commissioner suggested that Inuit would become confused by all the political activity and organizing at the local and regional levels, and that it would detract from the authority of the community councils, which were under the thumb of the GNWT.²⁹

A dual system of sorts began to evolve as some Inuit rejected the existing institutions in favour of building their own representative bodies, separate from the public institutions promoted by the territorial government in Yellowknife. The respective visions of government officials and the Inuit organizations with regard to the future of government and governance in the territory were clearly divergent: government officials in Yellowknife and Ottawa “conceptualized local government structures as transformative bodies that would educate Inuit in democratic principles and processes, not as means for the articulation of distinct rights or claims.”³⁰

²⁷ The notion of the “readiness” of Indigenous peoples for self-government is a long-standing one in Canadian discourse. See, for example Peter Kulchyski, *Like the Sound of Drum: Aboriginal Cultural Politics in Denendeh and Nunavut*. (University of Manitoba Press, 2005); also see Tony Penikett, “A ‘literacy test’ for Indigenous government?” *Northern Public Affairs* 1.1 (Spring 2012).

²⁸ Cameron, *The Ordering of Things*, 200.

²⁹ Henderson, *Nunavut*, 82.

³⁰ Cameron, *The Ordering of Things*, 200.

In his account of the period during the late 1970s, John Amagoalik writes:

In the early seventies, I think that as Inuit, we finally found our organized voice. We established regional Inuit associations... We created a national organization. It was the Inuit who started speaking about the need to save our culture and to provide money for Inuit education.³¹

The dual political system was entrenched by the emergence the organizations Amagoalik mentions, including the Baffin Regional Inuit Association (BRIA), and of course the national Inuit organization - Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC) – as well as other constitutional and land claims organizations, such as the Inuit Land Claims Commission and the Nunavut Constitutional Forum. Through ITC, and its affiliate organizations from across Inuit Nunaat (the land where Inuit live), a near-instant national network for Inuit was created, headquartered in Ottawa where the organization’s leadership would have direct access to federal decision-makers.

The response of the GNWT to calls by Indigenous organizations for self-government was to decentralize some, and devolve other, responsibilities to the local or regional level in an attempt to enhance the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of Indigenous inhabitants. In 1977, the GNWT announced an official policy of decentralization, which involved, “placing more administrative authority in the hands of GNWT officials in the regional offices and of organizing local advisory committees on matters like education, healthcare, housing and hunting and trapping.”³² That same year, the Baffin Regional Council (BRC) was established, composed of members of all the local councils in the Baffin region. Communities used these regional councils as avenues through which to influence territorial programs and services but ultimately

³¹ John Amagoalik, *Changing the Face of Canada*, edited by Louis McComber (Nunavut Arctic College: 2007), 155.

³² Perry Shearwood, *Literacy and Social Identity in a Nunavut Community*. Doctoral Dissertation (University of Toronto: 1988), 137.

they, too, were viewed as extensions of a colonial GNWT, rather than places for independent Inuit voice and meaningful participation.

The myriad committees in existence by the late 1970s were established as part of the GNWT commitment to decentralization and were seen by many Inuit merely as mouthpieces of a distant colonial government. There was considerable tension between the regional councils, comprising representatives of local councils, and regional Inuit associations, led primarily by the young Inuit men who would go on to negotiate the NLCA.

In 1979, two significant documents were released, each one with a vision for the future of northern governance. The recommendations from the *Report of the Special Representative on Constitutional Development* (Drury Commission) centred around making government more reflective of, and responsive to, the priorities of the people of the Northwest Territories; while ITC's *Political Development in Nunavut*, outlined the position of the Inuit for the settlement of a land claim, and the creation of a new territory.

The Drury Commission was established by the federal government to study the constitutional development of the Northwest Territories, and to make recommendations for its future. The report recognized that the existing political institutions in the territory were not necessarily reflective of the population and emphasized the importance of local or community government to the people of the NWT:

...despite the existence of fully elected representative bodies, there is a sense of powerlessness and a feeling that government is being 'administered' from afar. The principles of accountable and responsible government are not being fulfilled.³³

In light of this, Drury recommended the devolution of more decision-making power to the local level. Drury saw community government as more than:

³³ C.M. Drury, *Constitutional Development in the Northwest Territories: Report of the Special Representative*, (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1980), 95.

Simply an instrument, by which local services are delivered, but...also [as] a vehicle for meeting and reconciling conflicts within the community. Strong, autonomous government at the local level is critical to achieving citizen participation in government, responsive administrative and legislative bodies, and the accountability of government to the citizens.³⁴

Ultimately, the Drury report:

Rejected the idea that the N.W.T.'s political institutions be reshaped through the settlements of the native claims. Instead, it emphasized the devolution of powers from Ottawa to the territorial government and from Yellowknife to the communities, adding that, if the communities wished, they might band together to form regional governments to provide common services and a collective voice in dealing with the territorial government in Yellowknife.³⁵

Even though Drury concluded that the full potential of local government had not been realized, he was still careful to echo the federal and territorial position against dividing the territory along ethnic lines: “local government can provide a measure of the self-government which Native people seek but within the framework of a single territorial government. This would avoid an ethnically differentiated arrangement, which is anathema to Ottawa.”³⁶

Interestingly, although ITC and Drury had divergent visions for the future of governance in the North, their assessments of local councils and local governance more broadly shared common ground. On the issue of the imposition of southern models of local governance, the ITC report firmly states that:

In the south, local government has generally been a response to the needs of new communities and the types of local government vary amongst the provinces. In the north, however, local government has been imposed upon Inuit by non-Inuit who felt that there should be a system of self-government in the north along the lines of that system in the south. One major function of the imposition of local government in the north was to provide non-Inuit with a form of government suited to their need to reassure themselves that southern-directed government was “fair” to the original people – the Inuit.³⁷

³⁴ Drury, *Constitutional Development in the Northwest Territories*, 42.

³⁵ Dacks, *A Choice of Futures*, 118.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, *Political Development in Nunavut* (Report of the Annual General Meeting, Igloolik: September 1979), 13.

Moreover, ITC's report emphasizes the desire by Inuit to have a government that was geographically closer to the Eastern Arctic. Still, ITC conceded that local councils had become more autonomous since they were first introduced in the 1950s and 60s but the organization stressed that:

These councils are restricted in their power under the present status of the NWT. Under provincehood, the local councils would be creatures of the new provincial agreement. Local councils, then, are *not* the best way for Inuit to gain control over the issues, which affect them most.³⁸

Although ITC was committed to maintaining public forms of local government, they called for a review of the structure of local government - including councils, committees, electoral procedures and hamlet boundaries - once Nunavut was created, presumably to enhance their policy and decision-making powers.

At the end of the 1970s significant political and institutional change had already taken place but it was really only the beginning. The differing views of how to proceed were to play out in the two decades following. While bureaucrats and their advisors "displayed a clear preference for mainstream avenues of political expression,"³⁹ the Inuit leadership called for historic constitutional changes, which required a re-orientation from quasi "self-government" through existing channels and structures toward a new institutional framework rooted in the recognition and implementation of Inuit rights and self-determination.

From "Self-Government" to Self-Determination

Decolonization is a process, which involves two distinct methods of participation – creation and administration – of government. This means that mere reorganization of the existing territorial government is a denial of self-determination because the government remains essentially colonial in its nature.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., 4 *emphasis added*.

³⁹ Henderson, *Nunavut*, 101.

⁴⁰ The NWT Inuit Land Claims Commission, *Inuit Nunangat: The Peoples Land: A Struggle for Survival* (1978), 22.

This statement by the Inuit Land Claims Commission is among the first public uses of the term “self-determination” and represents a strong articulation of the Inuit position concerning their relationship with the state, and their desire for a jurisdiction of their own.

The majority of the 1980s was dominated by land claims negotiations between Inuit and the federal government as well as major debates over the boundary between the NWT and the potential new territory of Nunavut. At the same time, “while the government [was] not actively promoting the regionalization of its administrative functions and [did] not view this process as an alternative to division, NWT officials...responded to requests from communities for great local control”⁴¹

A series of policies related to devolution were introduced by the GNWT starting in 1981 with *Our Land, Our Future*, which “set out important themes...on devolution and local government...Among the policies and principles it set out were: ‘devolution to community governments...[and] the passing of political authority and responsibility and resources for the delivery of government programs and services from the GNWT to community governments.’”⁴² Legare points out that “the aim of devolution [in the 1980s and 1990s] was to get government and services closer geographically to Northern people so as to implant among Aboriginal people a common political identity favourable towards the GNWT...”⁴³

The regionalization of government that took place following the passing of the 1983 *Regional and Tribal Councils Act* has been seen by some as “an attempt to reduce the influence of Aboriginal groups who through the land claims process were trying to divide the NWT. The

⁴¹ Kenneth Coates and Judith Powell, *The Modern North: People, Politics, and the Rejection of Colonialism* (James Lorimer & Publishers, Company: 1989), 77.

⁴² Katherine Graham, “Devolution and Local Government,” in Gurston Dacks, ed. *Devolution and Constitutional Development in the Canadian North* (Carleton University Press: 1990), 207.

⁴³ Legare, *The Evolution of the GNWT*, 43.

GNWT hoped that decentralization towards regional councils and administrations would have convinced Aboriginal leaders to pull away from the division option.”⁴⁴

The three areas in which the greatest decision-making power was devolved were: health, education and resource management but power and responsibilities were granted to regional bodies, and not down to the community level.⁴⁵ Therefore, despite increased regional control over these three areas, “local government institutions...[still] evolved more as a mechanism for effective service delivery than as autonomous decision-making bodies.”⁴⁶

Formalizing and Implementing a New Citizenship Regime

The 1990s saw the culmination of twenty years of negotiations between Inuit and the federal government. The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (1993) and the creation of a new territorial government in 1999 changed Canada forever. These important developments did not, as I suggested earlier, change institutions at the local level all that much.

The 1991 Beatty report, *Strength at Two Levels* called for the strengthening of local governments through decentralization and limited devolution, just as Carrothers and Drury had before. Although his mandate was to find ways to reduce government spending in light of the recession, Beatty also saw an opportunity to empower communities through devolving both responsibilities *and* resources to local governments, and to provide training for Indigenous community members to run the community governments.⁴⁷

The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (1993) does not have much to say about local government or local institutions, per se but it does establish a number of regional boards, responsible mainly for renewable and non-renewable resource management. The NLCA also sets

⁴⁴ Andre Legare, *The Evolution of the Government of the Northwest Territories (1967-1995)* GETIC Université Laval Collection Recherche (1998), 23.

⁴⁵ Graham, “Devolution and Local Government,” 196; Legare, *The Evolution of the GNWT*, 22.

⁴⁶ Franks (1987), quoted in Legare, *Evolution of the GNWT*, 22.

⁴⁷ Legare, *The Evolution of the GNWT*, 31.

out municipal lands and boundary clauses related to future development and land management.⁴⁸

The creation of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) – the organization responsible for overseeing the implementation of the NLCA – and its subsidiaries and affiliate organizations increased, and perhaps further fragmented the political landscape in Nunavut.

Local government and other local institutions appear as features of the Nunavut Implementation Commission (NIC)'s report *Footprints in New Snow* (1995), which made recommendations about the implementation of the NLCA, and the creation of the new territorial government. The NIC echoed Carrothers, Drury and Beatty, stating: “decision making should be as close as possible to the people being served in order to promote the greatest accountability to the electorate.”⁴⁹ Moreover, the NIC report makes the case that, “community government is the level of government most visible to the residents being served. Through community governments, local residents have the opportunity to elect their leaders and hold them responsible for the effective and fair delivery of the programs.”⁵⁰

The NIC's report uses the language of local governments for the purpose of “community and personal self-reliance”⁵¹ and it also resurrects the idea that participation in community governance offered an opportunity for Nunavummiut to gain valuable experience in political and public affairs, to prepare them for employment in the new territorial bureaucracy.⁵² Perhaps one of the most controversial elements of the NIC's report was the recommendation to reduce or eliminate the regional health and education boards. The NIC reported that:

⁴⁸ Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act, SC (1993). Available online at: <http://www.gov.nu.ca/hr/site/doc/nlca.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Nunavut Implementation Commission, *Footprints in New Snow: A Comprehensive Report from the Nunavut Implementation Commission to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Government of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated on the establishment of Nunavut Territory* (Iqaluit: 1995), 25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 25.

Regional health and education boards were established essentially in response to the early physical, social and political distance of GNWT headquarters from Nunavut, and the manner in which they developed over the years was very much a function of pre-Nunavut political realities. The key question, then, is the degree to which the political realities of Nunavut alter, and perhaps displace, the rationale for the existence and operation of the boards as they are today.⁵³

Instead, the NIC endorsed the devolution of further authority and responsibility in the fields of education, renewable resources, economic development, social services, health, justice and social housing to community governments; and the decentralization of territorial government jobs and service delivery.⁵⁴

Local Institutions and Citizenship through Nunavut's First Decade

Much of the last twelve years has been an experience in trial and error with respect to governance in the territory. Like all institutional arrangements, the NLCA and Government of Nunavut (GN) have had some unintended consequences but they also represent an achievement for Inuit self-determination. There are important issues to address and decisions to make, and attempting to judge the “success” or “failure” of Nunavut seems premature, and perhaps, fruitless.

Today, local governments employ a large number of people in most communities; and they continue to provide the majority of the essential services, from water delivery, to garbage collection to airport management. Each community in Nunavut has a District Education Authority, responsible for helping with curriculum development, and liaising between the schools and the community, and a Local Housing Authority, responsible for administering Nunavut's housing programs. The practice of having regional organizations and associations has continued, institutionalized by the land claim. Indeed, regional structures have a great deal of political power, particularly the Regional Inuit Associations affiliated with NTI.

⁵³ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 27.

The 2009 *Qanukkanniq? The GN Report Card* was intended as a retrospective citizens' evaluation of the first ten years of Nunavut and it captures many of the challenges and concerns that Nunavummiut have about their territory. Unsurprisingly, the GN report card calls for community empowerment through the strengthening of local institutions. A short list of some of the report card's recommendations provides interesting insight into what changes Nunavummiut would like to see to their government: strengthen District Education Authorities; reinvigorate local health, education and justice committees; provide capacity-building support for local housing associations; provide state-of-the-art radio equipment for each community and encourage MLA's to go on the radio more; prioritize community-based economic development initiatives; and evaluate decentralization to make it work better for Nunavummiut.⁵⁵

The idea that the creation of the GN – a government both geographically and culturally closer to Inuit – would reduce the need for special purpose bodies, such as regional health and education boards, or local authority over community matters, for example, was not met with enthusiasm. A statement from the GN report card in 2009, shows that community governments and local bodies are still preferred by many Nunavummiut:

There are many departments within the government where Nunavummiut feel that they no longer have a voice. The GN must recommit to a governance model that brings decision-making closer to the people affected by those decisions. Operationalizing this means delegating authority to local bodies that currently exist, or once existed but are now defunct.⁵⁶

It is probably clear by now that governance in Nunavut is incredibly complex, especially when one considers the size of the population. The two concurrent "systems" of government – public and Inuit – create a network of institutions, structures and actors that interact with one another, and with Nunavummiut. Political and economic decisions are played out at the regional

⁵⁵ North Sky Consulting Group. *Qanukkanniq? The GN Report Card: Analysis and Recommendations* (October 2009) <http://www.gov.nu.ca/reportcard/analysis%20and%20recommendations.pdf>.

⁵⁶ North Sky Consulting, *Qanukkanniq?*, 22.

and territorial levels, to be sure but as the GN report card highlights, Nunavummiut still feel deeply connected to their communities and want to see this reflected in the political and institutional structure of the territory, and they want to be able to engage in a meaningful way at the local level.

Engaging Citizens through Non-Government Institutions

I have dedicated a great deal of attention in this paper to governments but there are other institutions, which have facilitated active citizenship over time by providing opportunities for civic engagement. Perhaps one of the most enduring and intriguing of these is community radio, and its multimedia successors. Radio has been, and continues to be “a focus for participation in settlement life: almost everybody talks, and listens to their fellows talking on one kind of radio or the other, or both. So radio...draws the diverse and fragmented community together in more than one way.”⁵⁷ As part of the federal government’s move into the North, CBC was established in the larger centres in the late 1950s. In 1960, CBC’s first Indigenous program aired in Inuktitut from Montreal -the following year, Inuit in the Eastern Arctic started their own programming.⁵⁸ Government has provided support for communications technology since this early period in recognition of its importance for communication and civic engagement. In 1973, CRTC created the Native Communications Program to help communities establish their own community radio stations, which would go on to offer:

Magazine format programs or records interspersed with community announcements, weather reports, interviews with visitors, reports by community officials, etc. Some stations have also organized regular programs on community health, the school system, the legal system, native affairs, [and] religion.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Jean Briggs, “Modern Inuit Community,” in Peter P. Schweitzer, Megan Biesele, and Robert K. Hitchcock, eds. *Hunters and gatherers in the modern world: conflict, resistance, and self-determination*. (Berghahn Books: 2000)

⁵⁸ Valerie Alia, “Canadian Indigenous Radio.” in Andrew Crisell, ed. *More than a music box: radio cultures and communities in a multi-media world*. (Berghahn Books United Kingdom: 2004), 79.

⁵⁹ Hudson, 133.

In his account of the land claims negotiation process, John Amagoalik writes about the radio as an instrument that Inuit used to communicate and consult with people in the communities about the claims process.⁶⁰ Both community radio and CBC, allowed Inuit to talk to one another and to debate publicly the issues that were important to them. Indeed, one student of Northern communications noted, “one cannot be a functional member of the community without participation in this form of the radio.”⁶¹

In 1980 the federal Department of Communications offered ITC access to the Anil B satellite and that year the first television broadcast was aired from Frobisher Bay to five Inuit communities as part of the so-called Inukshuk Project. The satellite technology allowed people watching in the communities to send audio signals back to Frobisher Bay, which were then broadcast to the other communities:

This interactive capacity led to some of the Inukshuk project’s most innovative and important programming. For example, interactive programs to discuss game management were held among HTA’s and officials of the GNWT met with local education committees via the system. [It] it was also used to link six Northwest Territories communities with four in Northern Quebec to discuss aboriginal rights during the process of reforming the Canadian constitution.⁶²

The Inukshuk Project, which has been referred to as a “pan-northern town hall” only lasted a mere eighteen months; according to John Amagoalik it was the precursor to the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC), which became an important institution for cultural preservation and public affairs in the region.⁶³

Today, online fora are available through Internet platforms and social networking sites, such as IsumaTV and YouTube. Inuit youth, in particular, use YouTube to reach out to one another within and across Nunavut’s communities. While these mechanisms may not provide

⁶⁰ Amagoalik, *Changing the Face of Canada*, 80.

⁶¹ Hudson, 57.

⁶² Debbie Brisbois, “The Inuit Broadcasting Corporation,” *Anthropoligica* 25.1 (1983), 109.

⁶³ Amagoalik, *Changing the Face of Canada*, 112.

access to the state, as such, they are important sites for civic engagement and public participation. They also tell us something about the issues that are important to young people in Nunavut, and should not be overlooked as mechanisms of participation, or markers of inclusion into the political community.

In 2012, community radio is still being used nearly everyday for the purposes of citizen engagement, and decision-making. For example, in response to a desire to open up the regulatory review process to ordinary Nunavummiut, multimedia organization IsumaTV, together with university and community partners founded a large project called *Digital Indigenous Democracy*⁶⁴, a component of which involves a radio series called *Nipivut Nunatinnii* (Our Voice at Home).⁶⁵ *Nipivut Nunatinnii* is a network of community radio stations connected by Internet intended to improve Inuktitut information, participation and decision-making about a large mining development project that is currently under review in the Baffin region. To date the radio series has aired several successful information and call-in shows with listeners from Alaska to Greenland.

Working Conclusion

In this final section, I will try to draw together some of the themes, or trends that arose from the historical account of Nunavut's evolving citizenship regime, described above, and conclude with some questions for future consideration.

⁶⁴ "Digital Indigenous Democracy (DID) is a network of Isuma Distribution International Inc., with Nunavut Independent Television Network (NITV), Municipality of Igloolik, Nunavut Dept. of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth, Carleton Centre for Community Innovation, Mount Allison University and LKL International. DID is led by Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn of Isuma Distribution and NITV, and Human Rights Assessor, Lloyd Lipsett. DID uses local radio, TV, multimedia and social networking tools to insure meaningful community participation *in oral Inuktitut* in public hearings and in environmental impact and benefits decisions affecting Inuit for generations to come." Norman Cohn and Zacharias Kunuk, "Our Baffinland: Digital Indigenous Democracy." *Northern Public Affairs* 1.1 (Spring 2012).

⁶⁵ More information about *Nipivut Nunatinnii* can be found at: <http://www.isuma.tv/DID/radio/igloolik>

First, it is clear that communities are central to the vision Nunavummiut have for the future of governance in the territory, and are perceived to have an important place in Nunavut's citizenship regime. Throughout each period described above, government officials, advisors and Inuit representatives all stressed the need for autonomous and responsible local government, even though their ultimate goals for governance may have differed considerably. Decades later, following major constitutional and institutional change, Nunavummiut are still very much concerned with enhancing the level of local autonomy and control over the issues that are close to home and close to heart. And yet, the institutions, structures and processes of governance and engagement, established by the NLCA and the GN do not seem to reflect this strong sense of community or the import of local institutions. This has become even more evident, through projects like *Digital Indigenous Democracy*, that seek to engage ordinary people and bring them into the decision-making process in a more open and direct way.

Second, there is a critical link between citizens' understanding of their own identity, and whether or not the political institutions around them reflect that identity. One of the lessons from the history of local institutional development in the Eastern Arctic is that participation and civic engagement is challenging, if not impossible, if citizens do not see themselves reflected in the institutions. We saw that it did not matter how much devolved decision-making authority the GNWT proposed to the Inuit communities in the East; Inuit did not see the GNWT as an institution that could or would appropriately represent their interests, or meet their needs. In the case of the GN report card, we saw that Nunavummiut desire more local decision-making authority to better address the priorities and challenges of their individual communities where unique dialects and histories form the bedrock of their political identities.

Third, the citizenship regime in the Eastern Arctic became increasingly complex in a very short time, and the dual system of governance I alluded to above has endured, with the Government of Nunavut – a public government – on the one hand, and the so-called Inuit system headed by Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated. Between these two “systems” there are countless positions to fill and opportunities for Nunavummiut to practice and enjoy their citizenship, however, the institutional framework they must navigate in order to this may serve more to alienate than to engage. For many, Nunavut’s capital of Iqaluit where most of the policy and decision-making takes place for the territory, is both geographically and psychologically far away. The decentralized GN offices in communities sit on the edge of town, away from the day-to-day lives of community members and many wonder what goes on inside. The organizational chart for NTI is complicated, to say the least, and without local offices or representation, most of the activities of land claim bodies take place in the regional centres or the capital. Those who do choose to sit on regional or territorial boards and committees spend a considerable amount of time traveling to and from meetings.

Lastly, for most of the last forty years Inuit have been focused on a process of decolonization that involved asserting their right to self-determination, negotiating a land claims agreement, and creating and building a new territorial government. Much of this journey has involved an articulation and institutionalization of a new relationship between Inuit and Canada. Over this period of time, other changes have taken place in Nunavut – social, economic, and environmental – that have, perhaps, also altered the political landscape. Nunavut society is more stratified than it was, with political and economic elite in positions of authority just as they are elsewhere in the country. Major resource development projects are back on the table in Nunavut, bringing with them questions about how well the new institutions – both public and Inuit – are

serving Inuit. Underlying these sometimes difficult discussions and decisions are, I think, questions and uncertainties about the vision for citizenship *within* Nunavut: what are the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion among Nunavummiut; what are the democratic rules of the game; what are the components or factors contributing to a collective sense of identity? Quite simply, what does it mean to be a citizen, not *of* Nunavut, but *in* Nunavut?

Putting Nunavut's citizenship regime in historical perspectives leaves me with a number of questions:

1. As many of Nunavut's current leaders begin to retire their posts, will those who replace them re-orient institutional development to the local level once again?
2. Why was local government, for all intents and purposes, left out of the Inuit system, established under the NLCA?
3. To what extent are local institutions – government and non-government – perceived as sites, or mechanisms, of self-determination?
4. In the south, we tend to think of the three orders of government as a hierarchy with arrows going up and down to signify transfers of power and resources. What does this diagram look like in Nunavut? And does this have implications for the way that Nunavummiut think of citizenship?
5. I started with Jenson and Papillon's definition citizenship - rights and responsibilities, access, and belonging – is this appropriate?

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