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Résumé de l'article

Cette étude examine l'utilisation des médias numériques en réponse à des propositions de projets d'extraction de ressources naturelles au sein de deux communautés du Nunavut. En utilisant les concepts de contre-publics et de démocratie délibérative de Dahlberg (2011), l'étude lie les tactiques employées à Baker Lake et à Pond Inlet aux pratiques plus larges d'utilisation des médias numériques par des militants pour réorganiser la vie sociale, politique et économique. En nous inspirant d'une perspective postcoloniale, nous démontrons que les médias sociaux sont incorporés au développement de nouveaux imaginaires politiques.

Contestations of resource extraction projects via digital media in two Nunavut communities

Willow Scobie*, Kathleen Rodgers*

Résumé: Contestations de projets d'extraction de ressources naturelles via les médias numériques dans deux communautés du Nunavut

Cette étude examine l'utilisation des médias numériques en réponse à des propositions de projets d'extraction de ressources naturelles au sein de deux communautés du Nunavut. En utilisant les concepts de contre-publics et de démocratie délibérative de Dahlberg (2011), l'étude lie les tactiques employées à Baker Lake et à Pond Inlet aux pratiques plus larges d'utilisation des médias numériques par des militants pour réorganiser la vie sociale, politique et économique. En nous inspirant d'une perspective postcoloniale, nous démontrons que les médias sociaux sont incorporés au développement de nouveaux imaginaires politiques.

Abstract: Contestations of resource extraction projects via digital media in two Nunavut communities

This study examines the use of digital media in two Nunavut communities in response to proposed resource-extraction projects. Using Dahlberg's (2011) concepts of counterpublics and deliberative democracy, the study links tactics employed in Baker Lake and Pond Inlet to broader activists' use of digital media to reorganise social, political, and economic life. Drawing on the field of postcolonial studies, these cases demonstrate that social media are being incorporated into the development of new political imaginaries.

Introduction

In the summer of 2012 the *Feeding My Family* campaign, based in Canada's territory of Nunavut, registered 20,000 members on its Facebook page, produced widespread protests throughout the region, and garnered global media attention. The movement was a response to comments from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on

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the “Right to Food” that 70% of Nunavut households with Inuit preschool children are food-insecure (Egeland et al. 2010). Protesters focused on the high cost of food, the quality of some of the food being shipped, empty store shelves, the efficacy of the Nutrition North food program, and access to a diversity of food products in Canada’s North. Amongst their strategies, they grabbed public attention with online photos and protest signs depicting \$20 cabbages and \$65 chickens. Emerging at the same time as mega-movements with strong social media components like Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring, *Feeding My Family* seems almost insignificant in comparison.

In reality, however, the campaign was just as indicative that the Internet has come to play an important role in spatially disparate communities as a site for social play and as a tool for political mobilisation (Niezen 2005, 2009; Roth 2005). Platforms such as Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and others are spaces within which Canada’s most economically marginalised and geographically dispersed population may “meet,” share information, and use various elements of Web 2.0 technology to leverage support for their cause. Although other issues have garnered collective energy and/or outrage in the North (e.g., patriation of the Constitution, formation of Nunavut, and residential schools, to name a few), the case of *Feeding My Family*, was, up to that point, an unprecedented example of a populist movement with a central role for digital media. Celebrated Inuk filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk has stated that the Inuit have come to recognise the importance of digital media for expressing a political voice in decisions that affect their lives: “Inuit live in the modern world. We need to be up to date, not left behind. Twenty-first century media helps Inuit stay involved in what happens on our land” (in Cohn 2012). The tone of Kunuk’s comment is simultaneously one of resignation and resolve: contentious issues get discussed and debated in all sorts of places, including online spaces.

While some pundits have heralded the Internet as the panacea for the democratic deficit, others maintain that “the revolution will not be tweeted” (Gladwell 2010: 4). Clearly there is a tremendous middle ground for scholars. Digital media are seen as having two primary *affordances*,¹ or ways in which they support “democratic uses and outcomes” (Dahlberg 2011: 857). Specifically, these are the reduced costs for “creating, organizing and participating in protest” and the fact that participants are not required “to be co-present in time and space” (Earl and Kimport 2011: 10). As such, digital media hold the promise of being as well-suited to economically disadvantaged and/or geographically disparate populations as they are to any other population. In this article, we examine these arguments in the context of democratic expression² within Inuit communities in Nunavut. We draw from the framework provided by Dahlberg (2011) who outlines four main understandings of digital democracy, which he refers to as liberal-individualist, deliberative, counterpublics, and autonomist Marxist. Our goal

1 Gibson (1977) introduced the term “affordance,” which refers to a property of an object or environment that allows an individual to perform an action.

2 Our research is influenced by Chatterjee’s (2011: 195) description of *postcolonial democracy*: “political mobilization shaped by indigenous cultural forms” and strategic political actions that occur “within multiple networks of collective obligations and solidarities” (ibid.: 207) to engage critically with states and corporations.

is relatively simple: to investigate the affordances of digital media as employed by Inuit communities contesting resource-extraction projects.

We focus specifically on the mobilisation of Inuit communities around the issue of mining and the way in which digital media are being employed as a means of deliberating on, building a consensus around, disputing positions over, and/or resisting the benefits and impositions of mineral extraction. Mineral extraction on Indigenous lands was already an issue before this century, but climate change and the global demand for energy and minerals have renewed its importance in the northern regions of Canada. Many are keenly interested in the promise of jobs, investment, and wealth in communities plagued by high unemployment, poverty, and a range of social problems (Abele 2009; Czyzewski et al. in press). With this context in mind, we demonstrate that while social media have provided different affordances to each of the communities implicated in resource-extraction projects, in both cases the technologies have added a new layer of complexity to the fairly nascent governance procedures of Nunavut. Moreover, opponents of the projects have not been alone in their use of the new technologies; mining companies are also using social media as a means of directing public discourse, evident in their own presence on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

This latter observation encourages us to be sensitive to concerns that corporate investment by mineral firms threatens to undermine both the content and forms of debate that seek to preserve traditional lifestyles and practices of Inuit communities, and that this influence constitutes a form of neocolonialism.³ Corntassel (2012: 597), for instance, views economic investment in Indigenous communities within Canada's boundaries through this lens, calling our attention to economically-oriented activities that threaten to "disrupt relationships with their homelands, cultures and communities." In this way, the actions of mining companies are not only viewed as having long-term environmental implications, but also as projecting a "myth of the ultimate superiority of the social and political institutions, the economic arrangements, the lifestyles and the values" (Cox 2007: 100) of advanced capitalism. As Slowey (2001: 270) further argues, the neoliberal policies of governments are complicit in this process, acting as "the handmaiden of 'contemporary corporate imperialism.'"

Land claims and the shifting political context in Nunavut

The establishment of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) and the formation of the territory of Nunavut confer entitlements and benefits on the Nunavummiut in general and the Inuit of Nunavut in particular. Although each of these historic moments became official in 1993 and 1999 respectively, there had previously been decades of organised political organisation and resistance within Inuit

³ By neocolonialism we mean the idea that "where colonialism was the condition of the subjection of those whose lives were shaped by the institutions of imperialism, neocolonialism can be used to describe the condition of those whose lives are shaped by the institutions of economic globalization" (Cox 2007: 99).

communities, and between Inuit leaders and Canadian officials. In the broader scope of actively ensuring that members of their community were involved in relevant government decisions, Inuit expressed concern over “The failure of the 1969 White Paper on Native policy, the discovery of oil fields in Alaska, the impact of the Supreme Court of Canada’s *Calder* decision⁴ [...] and the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement” (Loukacheva 2007: 29). Under the auspices of a national organisation, Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, a proposal came forward in 1976 to establish a new territory. The territory would serve as an Inuit homeland across the Arctic (Loukacheva 2007) and give Inuit control over their “culture and language, resources, and environment” (Maaka and Fleras 2005: 193). Within the range of these issues, clarifying rights to wildlife and mineral harvesting (ibid.) as well as cultural and political autonomy (Loukacheva 2007: 30) were critical in a newly emerging social and economic framework.

When signed in 1993, the Nunavut Act and Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) accorded the Inuit 350,000 km² of land, including access to 35,257 km² with mineral rights (Loukacheva 2007: 41; Maaka and Fleras 2005: 193). As Jack Anawak, an Inuk leader, said, “What we have been seeking throughout the years is the acknowledgement by the Canadian government that this was, and is, our land and that we have the right to control what happens to that land, our homeland” (in Loukacheva 2007: 41). To this end, the Inuit have diversified their strategic political energies through both governmental and non-governmental organisations. Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA), and the Kivalliq Inuit Association, for example, represent the interests of the Inuit in various capacities and have responsibilities under the NLCA. NTI specifically fulfills a role as “watchdog” for the implementation of obligations under the NLCA (Loukacheva 2007: 60).

Furthermore, Article 12 summarises the specific provisions for giving Inuit a voice in the negotiation of resource-extraction projects in the territory, as outlined in the NLCA. As it states, the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) is responsible for overseeing the evaluation of project proposals that involve public hearings and adherence to established protocols. Under the mandate of the NLCA, the Nunavut Impact Review Board provides “opportunities for nominees of Inuit organizations and the government to realize, together, policy decisions relating to particular sectors of the economy and environment” (Henderson 2007: 33).

NIRB procedural rules, however, establish strict conditions for participation in the decision-making process. Project proponents are, unsurprisingly, granted full standing at hearings and are not required to submit material for their oral and/or written presentations in advance. Alternatively, whether as individual community members or as Inuit organisation nominees, those who wish to give oral or written presentations at NIRB hearings must first apply for “intervener” status. To do so, intervener candidates must adhere to the application timeframe indicated in public notices, and include with the application a summary of the intervener’s interest. The application must also

⁴ The *Calder* decision recognised unextinguished Aboriginal title to land (Henderson 2007).

indicate whether the intervener will be represented by “counsel or an agent” (NIRB 2009: 15). The NIRB adjudicates the merit of the request for intervener status. Additionally, written questions are first submitted to the NIRB and may be disallowed by the Board because “in [the Board’s] opinion [the question] is frivolous or vexatious” (ibid.: 16). With respect to any evidence presented, “any party offering such evidence shall have the burden of introducing appropriate evidence to support its position” (ibid.: 18).

The NIRB *Rules and Procedures* guide specifies that the Board “shall give due regard to Inuit traditional knowledge” (ibid.: 21) and that elders alone are exempt from providing documentation to prove expertise when presenting technical and/or scientific evidence (ibid.: 22). However, by engaging with the specific institutional demands of the NIRB or the broader “democratic” possibilities of community consultations, the Inuit have become enclosed in a set of liberal and neo-liberal mechanisms. Indeed, the juridico-legal framework allows for Inuit testimonials that may reflect *Inuit Qaujimaqatugangit* (Inuit traditional knowledge), but only if the testimonials conform to the rules of engagement and, particularly, are not found to be “frivolous or vexatious.” Based on liberal democratic cultural values such as multiculturalism, individual rights, and universal equality (Maaka and Fleras 2005: 7), the NIRB hearings facilitate the management of community responses, rather than invite or incite disagreement, debate, or activism.

Social media and postcolonial democratic possibilities

In contemplating the potential for social media activity to incite activism, we critically examine assumptions about the latter. Arguments about the Internet and social media as sites for activist organising and other activities often raise the question: “So what?” But what do these websites and exchanges alter and what impact do they have? While Castells (2012) argues that social movements begin on the Internet and become true movements once they occupy (urban) space, Juris (2008: 269) encourages us to consider digital media as comprising their own landscapes that become “informational utopics”: spaces for developing “new political visions” and “collaborative practices.”

Rather than privilege the urban-centric, traditional notion of “taking to the streets” as indicative of a committed civil society and as an active expression of objection, we argue instead for an understanding of actions contributing to postcolonial democracy that include the circulation of information itself. Thus, by locating, collecting, translating, and disseminating information beyond a small “elite” in order to “challenge the cordons of hegemonic power” (Lim 2003: 274), activists are initiating and/or hosting a dialogue outside the rubric of formal (consultation) structures. We point, for example, to the work of Rothman and Oliver (1999) who show how the efforts of the anti-dam movement in Brazil to forge alliances with urban and international organisations only came after the establishment of a locally-based movement that linked disparate rural regions to a globalised right-to-land framework. In this same way, as the range of possibilities for resistance and rejection of project proposals are

largely unknown, Inuit activists are, by and large, experimenting with novel methods of strategic action. Where official community consultations are procedural rather than overtures to disrupt or reject projects, postcolonial democracy connects networks and creates solidarities via the forum of social media.

We thus argue that Twitter, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, and other websites encompass some of the tactical means used by Inuit to bridge geographic and social distances. Adopting Jackson's (2006: 15) assertion that we come into being by telling our own stories, social media sites may be viewed as platforms that foster a "sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances." The entries—text, photos, videos—constitute living archives, sometimes in the style of journalists and sometimes as witness testimonials, that altogether amplify the voices of the Inuit by virtue of transforming "private" viewpoints into "public" accounts.

To understand the role of social media in these methods of activism, we should also understand that the Web has the capacity to facilitate communication, to overcome the need for co-presence, and to assemble multiple perspectives and voices. The action potential of social media thus includes the dissemination of news and testimonials to a wide audience. The technology also fosters a continuous circulation of updates and new links within the network, as social media may meet a need for time-sensitive, multi-nodal, and multi-media communication.

Furthermore, dissemination of information is a non-confrontational form of resistance. Examining the range of options available in small, geographically isolated communities in the North, one cannot make comparisons to offline actions such as marches, blockades, or rallies. As Lim (2003) argues, when individuals and grassroots organisations disrupt the efforts of a small group to restrict the flow of knowledge and information, they engage in a process of democratisation. In the case studies below, we explore the possibility of advancing this process.

Case studies of communities facing large-scale mining projects

The spectre of Uranium Mining in Baker Lake and the formation of Nunavummiut Makitagunarningit

Our first case study focuses on the politics surrounding a proposed uranium mine in Baker Lake (Qamani'tuaq), Nunavut, and the non-governmental organisation Nunavummiut Makitagunarningit (Makita) that has opposed its development. Given the historic and growing economic importance of mineral extraction in the North, this case study provides an excellent opening for considering the interplay between contemporary online and offline indigenous politics surrounding resource extraction. Baker Lake is a settlement of just under 2,000 people in the Kivalliq region, where most residents continue to rely on hunting and fishing for subsistence, although tourism is a rapidly growing source of economic activity. When Agnico-Eagle opened the

Meadowbank gold mine in 2010, it became the first mining company to begin extracting minerals in the region. While many Inuit are grateful for the economic benefits, others view the gold mine and potential subsequent projects as impinging on traditional ways of life and threatening the ecological integrity of the land. Consequently, the development of deposit sites into mining projects remains contentious.

At present, the proposal of the French mining consortium AREVA Resources Canada Inc. to develop a uranium mine (Kiggavik) in the region is highly controversial. As in the case of IsumaTV and the Mary River mine (see subsequent discussion), following the settlement of the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement (NLCA) the shifting politics of Nunavut has shaped the debates over uranium mining. Just as governance structures have altered local-level politics, the affordances of digital media are also changing the dynamics of local political conflicts. On the one hand, new economic incentives have emerged under the terms of the NLCA, thus costing uranium opponents key allies. A further blow came in 2006 when NTI reversed its long-held moratorium on uranium development in Nunavut. At the same time, digital media have been providing the main opposition group, Makita, with the ability to re-frame uranium mining in Baker Lake. By structuring it as an issue of concern to *all* Indigenous and marginalised communities around the world impacted by uranium mining and nuclear waste, Makita is forging global solidarities rather than discussing it as an exclusively local conflict.

To understand the current conflict over the Baker Lake proposal, we need to examine the history of this issue in the region. Beginning in the 1980s, with the support of the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND),⁵ the German company Urangesellschaft (UG) announced its intention to develop the Kiggavik Uranium Mine near Baker Lake. At the time, widespread opposition to the mine existed within the community as well as within the Inuit organisations Kivalliq Inuit Association (KIA) and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI). To convince the community of the benefits of the mine, DIAND, territorial officials, and UG company executives held an information session in Baker Lake. As journalist Paul McKay (1989: 2) wrote, however, the proceedings were actually “a two-day cheerleading session on uranium mining, good corporate citizenship and the unimpeachable credibility of Canada’s nuclear industry regulators.” Community members, he argues, “were not even given their own place on the agenda” nor were documents translated into Inuktitut (*ibid.*).

The information session ultimately failed to convince community members and Inuit organisation representatives. Instead, it prompted locals to identify and solidify their common opposition to uranium mining. One participant summed up the opposition, stating:

⁵ Now called Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC).

What I am hearing from Urangesellschaft is like, you know, as long as they take the uranium, the ore, whatever they sell, whatever they take out of the ground [...] they don't care even if the people of the Keewatin are dead or shot [...]. Even though we try to tell the company that this is how we feel and this is our concern and really believe in it, but they don't seem to believe in the native people. I am not against development and mining [...], but the thing is I'm very concerned about a danger that might come up to the people of the north (Louis Pilakapsie in INAC 1989).

In the end, the information session did more to raise concerns among locals than it did to calm their fears. Members of the local Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) were particularly alarmed about the potential impact on wildlife habitat. HTO member Joan Scottie, for example, in collaboration with NTI and KIA, formed the Baker Lake Concerned Citizens Committee (BLCCC) to organise opposition. In 1990, the BLCCC successfully pressed for a municipal plebiscite in which residents voted overwhelmingly (over 90%) against the mine. Subsequently, UG's claim went unexplored for decades. Using classic community-based activism, the BLCCC and the people of Baker Lake kept uranium mine development out of their community and the North. In her address to the World Uranium Hearing in Salzburg, Austria in 1992, Joan Scottie accounted for this success:

Yesterday I talked to a reporter from a magazine in Germany. He said he just couldn't understand how a small group of Inuit could stop a big foreign company, especially when we have 80% unemployment and they're offering us jobs. I told him that the Baker Lake Concerned Citizens Committee gave a voice to the ordinary people—the ones that the government and the powerful people in the community wanted to keep quiet (Scottie 1992: 2).

Twenty years later, the political context in the region is dramatically different. Amongst other changes, additional layers of decision-making structures have rendered the possibility of a group successfully launching this type of counter-measure unimaginable. The NLCA awarded the Nunavummiut clear, but limited, surface and subsurface rights, and thus inserted clauses for consultations and benefits. Although mechanisms such as the NLCA officially recognise the rights that Inuit have *vis-à-vis* activities in Nunavut, small, isolated communities must now negotiate with powerful, multinational corporations. In addition to the challenges of engaging critically with complex, technical information on mining and other developments, communities must do so within market-based frameworks that embed them in new forms of colonial relations (Budds 2004; Slowey 2001, 2008).

In addition to pressures from different levels of government and from corporations to support the development of market-based economies, KIA and NTI—the Inuit organisations that had opposed uranium extraction in the region prior to signing of the NLCA—now stand to benefit directly from mining revenue. Consequently, early in the 2000s they reversed their original anti-uranium stance. In 2008, NTI became part owner of Vancouver-based Kivalliq Energy Corporation, standing to benefit directly through royalties and profits (Thompson 2008). Bernauer (2011: 9) argues that endorsement was necessary for NTI and KIA if “they are to remain stable and viable

political bodies.” Speaking to the current climate, Jim Paterson, the CEO of Kivalliq Energy, describes his impression:

Nunavut is a fantastic, mining-friendly jurisdiction, especially in regards to uranium exploration and development. There is enormous importance placed on resource development in the territory of Nunavut. They have a clear policy for the permitting process, certainly better than many other jurisdictions. It rates very highly. The permitting policy is clearly laid out for mining companies and investors, detailing how companies need to move through that process (in Pistilli 2013).

Based on the experiences and failures of UG to convince locals of the benefits of a uranium mine, in 2006 AREVA⁶ Resources Canada Inc. launched an intense public relations campaign in Baker Lake (Bernauer 2011). The company began by opening an information office with materials in English and Inuktitut, and eventually stationed a liaison officer in the community (ibid.). AREVA now also gives youth over \$130,000 in scholarships, provides free training for the mining industry, has built websites to publicise its contributions and its role in the community, and makes use of online platforms like YouTube to broadcast testimonials from Inuit youth who have been supported by AREVA.

In response, uranium opponents have found new methods of strengthening the power of their existing supporters and appealing to new allies. In 2009, there emerged from the ashes of the Baker Lake Concerned Citizens Committee, Nunavut’s first and only non-governmental environmental organisation, Nunavummiut Makitagunarningit (‘Nunavummiut can rise up’), also known as Makita (Windeyer 2009). The organisation “formed to spark debate on the emerging uranium mining sector across Nunavut” but has focused its concerns on Baker Lake (ibid.). Specifically, Makita has launched a blog that acts as a public clearinghouse for information on the Kiggavik proposal, and it has created a Twitter account and a Facebook page.

Amidst the circulation of information about uranium mining, Makita engages directly with the activities of the NIRB. While the NIRB is meant to be a local regulatory board that makes recommendations and decisions on resource-extraction project proposals, it must also make all relevant documents available to the public to ensure transparency (Nunavut Government 1993: article 12). While screenings, reviews, and monitoring of proposed and existing projects are available online, the website is an FTP site—a maze of endless folders and files with numerically coded names, where every file must be downloaded before it can be read. It is thus virtually inaccessible to public scrutiny. Our research team, for example, downloaded thousands of pages of documents when searching for relevant content. Much determination is required in order to glean information and make an informed decision. In contrast, Makita’s blog is a portal for informed and democratic decision-making. With a user-friendly format, the site presents much material: historical documents on the Kiggavik proposal; up-to-date news on the political context of the decision-making process

⁶ AREVA purchased the claim from UG in 1992, explored the site until 1997, and then submitted their proposal to develop the mine in 2007.

(including changes to board membership); ministerial decisions on mining projects in Nunavut, proceedings of public consultations; opinion pieces; Makita's own technical presentations to the NIRB on AREVA's Environmental Impact Statement; and related news coverage. Moreover, by using videos and speeches, Makita aligns itself with technical experts and advocates on the issue of uranium, including representatives from the non-governmental organisation Mining Watch Canada, while also maintaining coverage of grassroots opponents.

Through their social media sites, Makita has shown its support and concern for the dangers of nuclear power production in Japan, India, France, Niger, and the United States, and expresses solidarity with local activists in those countries. While framing itself as a participant in these global initiatives, Makita is also careful to draw comparisons between Baker Lake and similar Indigenous populations around the world that are faced with the consequences of resource extraction. In the area of national Indigenous politics, Makita has expressed solidarity with the *Idle No More* movement. On January 10, 2013, Makita posted an article on its blog, taking aim at Inuit organisations, government, and corporations by presenting the Nunavummiut as actively resisting mining, in keeping with *Idle No More*:

Nunavummiut Makitagunarningit stands in solidarity with our Indigenous brothers and sisters who are standing up for their rights. We back Inuit organizing flash mobs in Iqaluit, marching in cities across Canada, and continuing to stand up in communities across Nunavut to voice their concerns about the pace and scale of resource development on our lands [...]. Nunavummiut increasingly recognize that, despite our land claim, our rights are also at stake as part of the Indigenous community in Canada. Resource development projects are approved no matter what is being said by Nunavummiut, with little regard for the protection of land, community control over resources, or the incorporation of Inuit culture into decision-making processes that Inuit fought so hard to secure. The land claim agreement was about Inuit having a say on what happens to us and our land, we continue to stand up and demand better [...]. Nunavummiut are deeply concerned that the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated have both passed pro-uranium mining policies without any public votes or proper discussion through a public inquiry.

Since then, Makita has regularly posted information on Twitter with their usual hashtags #uranium and #nuclear, but now including #Idle No More and #INM.

By circulating information, groups such as Makita fuel dissent and build solidarity through social media, thus facilitating greater scrutiny and broader involvement in activities in Canada's most remote regions. This effort complements the ongoing role of groups such as the HTO in actively critiquing both the AREVA project and the regulatory process itself. For instance, the chair of the HTO submitted the following comments to *Nunatsiaq News*:

The HTO is concerned that the structure of the meetings resulted in a biased discussion, so the NIRB may not have an accurate picture of what the community feels about Areva's proposal [...] a public vote is the only thing that could accurately determine how the majority of the community feels about Areva's proposal (in Ikoe 2013).

The HTO and AREVA operate on larger scales that require the additional involvement (and knowledge) of interested parties outside the region. Where those who oppose uranium mining in Baker Lake feel they are not represented within the process of the NIRB, social media affords the HTO and Makita a counterpublic (Dahlberg 2011) tactic via circulation of information, expression of alternative political visions, and collaborative practices.

Turning on the cameras: Negotiating “participation” in the Baffinland consultation process

Further north, on the northeast tip of Baffin Island, the community of Pond Inlet (Mittimatalik) has also faced the challenge of engaging with a proposal for large-scale mining at Mary River. Here, IsumaTV has played an important role in transforming how community members may participate in NIRB hearings, and in re-circulating the content of these and other testimonies via their website. IsumaTV distributes information on a range of issues that concern Indigenous peoples globally and Inuit locally, including mining in the Inuit Nunangat. Within the context of new media and activism, Isuma has evolved from a film production company based in Igloolik, Nunavut, into an international portal for Indigenous films, audio recordings, and texts. Specifically on the subject of Baffinland’s Mary River Project, it operates as a hub and a host for a number of community members who post and broadcast news, testimonials, and community discussions from various sites, particularly around Baffin Island.

Born of the film-based initiatives of Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn at Isuma Productions, IsumaTV has created a Web 2.0 space that fosters a “bottom-up platform” for a “participatory culture” (Burgess and Green 2009: 6, 11) for Inuit and Indigenous people around the world. The site contains over 5,000 videos created in over 50 languages, approximately 400 audio recordings, over 1,500 collections of images, and more than 26,000 documents. Looking at the means by which Indigenous people have been using information technologies to advance their own agendas, Brown and Nicholas (2012: 313) argue that digital media enable them to become “generators” of cultural information in a landscape where content provision can be more democratic.

By also creating their own content in the form of digital projects on climate change and the protection of Inuit languages, IsumaTV operates as both a producer and a broadcaster. In the communities around the proposed site for the Mary River mine, IsumaTV has come to play a central role in recording and collecting Inuit testimonies, as a repository for multimedia contributions from Inuit in and around the region, and has actively facilitated community engagement via video and audio technologies. On the site, the channel, “My Father’s Land” consolidates and arranges text, audio, and video content about the Baffinland mine. There are links to written responses submitted to the NIRB on community concerns, to audio archives of call-in radio shows, and radio interviews where Baffinland has been discussed, and a series of video recordings of community events and individual interviews about the Baffinland mine. Created and

supported by the Digital Indigenous Democracy (DID) project,⁷ content is regularly uploaded by Igloolik film producer Norman Cohn, Arctiq performer and video producer Derek Aqqiaqiuq, an individual who goes by the username “samcc,” Mark Airut from the radio station in Igloolik (host of the Igloolik call-in show), and filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk. To explain his interest in the mine and in facilitating community responses, Kunuk says,

Before Steensby Inlet, before they found any minerals there, towards Mary River, we formed a committee or a party of some type to ensure the Human Rights impact assessment [...] to participate in the human rights process. We wanted to be organized. We wanted to ensure that Inuit had the same equal rights as other employees that are going to be working at the Mary River site (Zacharias Kunuk in NIRB 2012).

A human rights perspective shapes the expressed desire to have an organised, and eventually an officially sanctioned, voice in the hearings and consultation process. There is growing concern that social impact assessments and related consultation processes are more performative than solicitous, and this concern speaks to the desire to organise a group in advance of the mining proposal meetings. This proactive strategy reflects a feeling that social impact assessment meetings within the communities are only about circulating attendance sheets and delivering information to those present and are not about soliciting the opinions of community members.

Included on the site are news texts, along with links to the original, longer *Nunatsiaq News* articles. There is also a blog entitled “Baffinland Witness,” with content provided by Ashleigh Gaul.⁸ The blog includes a history of the Mary River project, going back to the early 1960s. Murray Watts, then head of Ungava Explorations Ltd, discovered the iron ore deposit from the air in 1962. In 1986, Baffinland Iron Mines took control of the Mary River mine and in 2004 it went public. It began to test the site and discovered that the deposit was 65-70% pure and contained 337 tons of iron ore. Between 2006 and 2012 there were struggles over the purchase and control of rights to the Mary River site, as the hearings and environmental assessments proceeded.

On the blog homepage, Gaul has uploaded a series of entries that date back to May 2012, the most recent one being posted on July 26, 2012. The entries are journalistic accounts about the discussions at the Mary River hearings, the contributions of intervenors Zacharias Kunuk and Lloyd Lipsett, and the conditions that the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA) has requested. Gaul’s entry from July 18, 2012 entitled, “QIA requests more studies, monitoring and discussion in Igloolik on fuel storage at Steensby” reports on QIA president Okalik Egeesiak’s submission to the hearing

⁷ This project is a joint effort between Professor Frances Abele and students at Carleton University and IsumaTV.

⁸ Financially supported by IsumaTV (specifically through the DID project), Ashleigh Gaul takes full responsibility for the content. According to the blog site, she has a master’s degree in journalism from Ryerson Polytechnic University. The tagline at the top of the page describes this blog as “An Outsider’s Inside Account of Mining Development in Nunavut” (Gaul 2012a).

process. According to the report, the QIA representative highlighted concerns that included the overwintering of a fuel vessel at the Steensby port and asked whether the company would be conducting a risk assessment of ballast water (Gaul 2012b). The entry briefly mentions that a Baffinland Corp. representative contested the substance of several of the QIA's PowerPoint slides, pointing out that the company has already made certain commitments to address issues mentioned in QIA's presentation. The Mary-River-related activities carry over from the IsumaTV site to their page on Facebook. Two columns of text and links provide almost daily updates on a number of political issues, including mining.

The pressure brought by community members and through IsumaTV on the final agreement has produced results. In a press release put out by IsumaTV and the Digital Indigenous Democracy group on September 25, 2012, they highlight the "groundbreaking" addition that the "Proponent" (the mining company) make use of new media to "inform, consult and connect Inuit communities" as outlined in the Final Hearing Report on Baffinland's Mary River Project. As further stated in the press release, digital media recorded participants' responses to the Mary River Project, either on film or on radio, and thus improved the level of participation of those accustomed to an oral culture (Isuma 2012).

Zacharias Kunuk, with the support of human rights lawyer Lloyd Lipsett, "urged NIRB and Baffinland to use 21st century media to increase Inuktitut information and participation at the community level, to meet today's constitutional and human rights standards of informed consultation and consent" (Isuma 2012). In addition to involving community members directly in the consultation process and filming at the public hearings, radio call-in shows were broadcast to all Inuit communities and around the world. In the press release, Kunuk is quoted as saying, "Inuit live in the modern world. We need to be up to date, not left behind. 21st century media helps Inuit stay involved in what happens on our land. Thanks to NIRB for confirming Inuit rights to have our say at the community level" (in Isuma 2012).

As the press release shows, new media technologies play an important role in information dissemination and community engagement. Although four *Specific Conditions* are mentioned in the press release that accompanied the Final Hearing report, *General Condition* #12 states, "The Proponent shall establish a Project-specific web portal or web page as a means of making all non-confidential monitoring and reporting information associated with the Project available to the general public. This does not limit what the Proponent may be required to submit to the NIRB or other regulatory authorities to meet reporting requirements" (NIRB 2012: 241). Additionally, Term and Condition #143 (ibid.: 289), #162 (ibid.: 295), and #163 (ibid.: 296) emphasise technology-facilitated contact between employees and families, ongoing and consistent involvement of elders and other community members, and, more broadly, provisioning of Nunavummiut with information about management, monitoring, and other activities.

Also of interest in the *Nunavut Impact Review Board Final Hearing Report, Mary River Project, Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation, NIRB File No. 08MN053* is the acknowledgment that IsumaTV (Z. Kunuk) was granted intervenor status at the hearings on July 1, 2012 and specifically granted permission to “film the Mary River Final Public Hearings in Iqaluit and Igloolik to document and increase public awareness and participation” (NIRB 2012: 44). This note is followed by a statement:

In addition to the consultation activities of the NIRB and the Proponent, increasingly, over the past decade, with better public access to the internet and Northern-based media outlets, the media have an important role in support of the NIRB’s goals of enhanced public awareness and participation by providing notice of meetings and hearings, disseminating information and, in some cases, providing interactive discussion forums that allow people to express their opinions and increase their understanding. In the Review, the Board notes the significant contributions of the media with respect to the Final Hearing, specifically in the communities of Iqaluit and Igloolik. It is hoped that the presence of local, national and international media in these venues and live streaming of proceedings contributed to a heightened level of public awareness of both the Project and the NIRB’s Review process (NIRB 2012: 44).

In pursuit of establishing a role in the process and by making use of digital technology portals, activists in attendance and engaged in the hearings won two key victories: a two-way opening between the hearing proceedings and community members, and an institutionalised role for social media in the direct dissemination of information from Baffinland Corp to all interested groups. Unlike the case study from Baker Lake involving Makita and AREVA, the case of IsumaTV and Baffinland shows how social media can be used to bring transformative change *within* the process and procedures. As Dalhberg (2011) describes it, this case is an example of deliberative democracy. Rather than using social media to distribute counter-narratives, IsumaTV facilitated engagement and information distribution (for both sides), and thus advanced practices that would “hold decision makers accountable” (ibid.: 859).

Conclusion

The conditions for consultation, as outlined in the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, pull the Nunavummiut in two opposing directions by empowering individuals and groups to express their concerns while controlling the form and forums in which disagreements take place. This tension has become apparent in relation to recent large-scale resource-extraction projects that present economic opportunities alongside real challenges to Inuit communities. For those who wish to resist efforts to extract minerals in the North, the Baker Lake example demonstrates how the NLCA and the NIRB have made their resistance more complicated.

Our case studies reveal the extent to which social media present multiple affordances for Inuit communities that contest resource extraction by mobilising community members’ thoughts, concerns, and actions. Just as social movements become effective by marching and protesting en masse, the aggregation of responses

via social media is a tactic that both generates and demonstrates involvement. The Baker Lake case exemplifies the counterpublic functions of digital media in fostering political group formation, activism, and contestation. The Baffinland example, with its emphasis on the inclusion of multiple communities, viewpoints, and languages, highlights the role of interactive social media in creating a “deliberative democratic public sphere of rational communication and public opinion formation” (Dahlberg 2011: 859).

In contrast, the NIRB website is virtually impenetrable. It provides attendance sheets and written comments from community consultations but these documents are embedded in FTP files. Users cannot search the site, nor can they circulate links to specific content. As a result, the site does not foster a sufficient level of openness, nor does it render community members’ input accessible in remotely the same way as the public forums presented by Makita and IsumaTV. We thus argue that existing mechanisms do not democratise the process but instead channel and control community residents’ engagement in the discussions over mining proposals and projects. Just as the long-term resistance to uranium mining in Baker Lake produced the organised efforts of Nunavummiut Makitagunarningit, there is a recognised need to go beyond simply showing up at community meetings with mining company representatives.

Some Inuit communities recognise these consultative deficiencies and have turned to digital media as a means of adding new dimensions to a calculated process. If we return to Dahlberg’s typology, we conclude that social media serve both deliberative and counterpublic affordances for Inuit communities that contest resource extraction. Juris (2008) has similarly described these processes as “the cultural logic of networking” and emphasises that the Internet has the potential not only to serve the mechanical functions of organisation and communication, but also to create social laboratories and “new political imaginaries.” In this regard, both Nunavummiut Makitagunarningit’s and IsumaTV’s social media activities circumvent the “gatekeeping” role of the mining company media advisors, mainstream journalists, and governments and use the “hierarchically collapsed” and thus “open” space of the Internet (Brown and Nicholas 2012: 316). They do so in order not only to freely disseminate their arguments and information, but also to develop discourses on contemporary Inuit life, the role of corporations in their communities, and the impacts of resource extraction. Coming back to Jackson’s argument about bringing ourselves into being through stories or, in this case, through an account of our experiences from our own perspectives, the Inuit are using social media in order to transform ontological narratives. Alfred describes Indigenous politics in Canada as one in which,

The instruments of domination are evolving and elites are inventing new methods to erase Indigenous identities and presences. While on the surface subtle and non-violent, these strategies deny the ability of Indigenous people to act on their authentic identities, severing Indigenous lives from vital connections to land, culture and community, and offer Indigenous people only one option: dependency or destruction (Alfred 2013: 1).

The dynamics described here reach far beyond State-Indigenous relations. By transforming ontological narratives through digital technologies, Inuit can now develop political imaginaries, work collaboratively, and forge local attempts to counter ongoing processes of colonisation and to envision postcolonial versions of democracy.

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