

Sociality, temporality and locality in a contemporary Inuit community

Socialité, temporalité et localité dans une communauté inuit contemporaine

A. Nicole Stuckenberg

Volume 30, numéro 2, 2006

L'influence de Marcel Mauss
The influence of Marcel Mauss

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/017567ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/017567ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Inuksiutiit Katimajit Inc.
Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (imprimé)
1708-5268 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Stuckenberg, A. N. (2006). Sociality, temporality and locality in a contemporary Inuit community. *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 30(2), 95–111.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/017567ar>

Résumé de l'article

Mauss (1906) a suggéré qu'un des principes de la société inuit veuille que la dichotomie sociale saisonnière se traduise par des mouvements de la population, d'après la migration annuelle du gibier, soit par la concentration ou par la dispersion en petits groupes familiaux. Il supposait que ces mouvements et les différents modes sociaux ainsi créés sont indissociables quelles que soient les dimensions temporelles, spatiales, sociales, morales, légales et spirituelles dans la construction de la société nomade inuit. Au milieu du 20^e siècle, la distribution de la population inuit a radicalement changé. Les groupes inuit se sont établis de façon permanente suivant le mode de vie sédentaire occidental. Est-ce que dans ces conditions sociales et physiques, le mouvement et les variations saisonnières de la composition en groupe, ainsi que les modes de vie, restent l'élément clef de la société inuit? Les données ethnographiques de Qikiqtarjuaq suggèrent que les Inuit intègrent des façons de vivre modernes à un style de vie nomade créant, comme dans le modèle de Mauss, une continuation de la variation des modes de vie et des valeurs selon les contextes. Cet article vise à justifier et élaborer l'affirmation de la continuité. Il se sert du modèle de Mauss comme moyen heuristique pour étudier le changement social concernant l'association des pratiques et des perceptions du mouvement saisonnier dans la société inuit de nos jours. Ainsi, est-ce que les modes sociaux et les valeurs associées varient saisonnièrement dans la construction de la communauté inuit aujourd'hui?

Sociality, temporality and locality in a contemporary Inuit community

A. Nicole Stuckenberg*

Résumé: Socialité, temporalité et localité dans une communauté inuit contemporaine

Mauss (1906) a suggéré qu'un des principes de la société inuit veuille que la dichotomie sociale saisonnière se traduise par des mouvements de la population, d'après la migration annuelle du gibier, soit par la concentration ou par la dispersion en petits groupes familiaux. Il supposait que ces mouvements et les différents modes sociaux ainsi créés sont indissociables quelles que soient les dimensions temporelles, spatiales, sociales, morales, légales et spirituelles dans la construction de la société nomade inuit. Au milieu du 20^e siècle, la distribution de la population inuit a radicalement changé. Les groupes inuit se sont établis de façon permanente suivant le mode de vie sédentaire occidental. Est-ce que dans ces conditions sociales et physiques, le mouvement et les variations saisonnières de la composition en groupe, ainsi que les modes de vie, restent l'élément clef de la société inuit? Les données ethnographiques de Qikiqtarjuaq suggèrent que les Inuit intègrent des façons de vivre modernes à un style de vie nomade créant, comme dans le modèle de Mauss, une continuation de la variation des modes de vie et des valeurs selon les contextes. Cet article vise à justifier et élaborer l'affirmation de la continuité. Il se sert du modèle de Mauss comme moyen heuristique pour étudier le changement social concernant l'association des pratiques et des perceptions du mouvement saisonnier dans la société inuit de nos jours. Ainsi, est-ce que les modes sociaux et les valeurs associées varient saisonnièrement dans la construction de la communauté inuit aujourd'hui?

Abstract: Sociality, temporality and locality in a contemporary Inuit community

Mauss (1906) suggested that, as a principle of Inuit society, the seasonal societal dichotomy takes shape in movements of population concentration and dispersal into small family groups following the annual migration of game. He argued that these movements and the various social modes thus created inseparably connect temporal, spatial, social, moral, legal, and spiritual dimensions in the construction of Inuit nomadic society. In the mid 20th century, the mass and density of Inuit settlement population changed drastically. Inuit groups moved to permanent settlements that were developed and structurally based on Western models of sedentary community life. Under these changed social and physical conditions, does movement and seasonal variations in group composition, and in ways of life, continue to be a central component of Inuit society? Ethnographic evidence from Qikiqtarjuaq (Nunavut) suggests that Inuit integrate modern ways of life into a nomadic lifestyle thus creating, in analogy to Mauss's model, a continuation of variation in lifestyles and values depending on contexts. This article aims to substantiate and elaborate on this claim of continuity. It makes use of Mauss's model as a heuristic lens for studying social change in respect to the association of practices and perceptions

* Dickey Center, Institute of Arctic Studies, Dartmouth College, 6214 Haldeman Center, Hanover, NH 03755, USA. anja.nicole.stuckenberg@dartmouth.edu

of seasonal movement in present day Inuit society; thus asking the question: are seasonally varying social modes and associated values part of today's Inuit community constitution?

Introduction

In the past, Inuit were a society of nomadic hunters that followed a seasonal cycle of movement, concentration, and dispersion. In 1906, Marcel Mauss, in collaboration with Henri Beuchat, published an article titled "Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés Eskimo. Étude de morphologie sociale" in the journal *L'Année Sociologique*. Since the publication of this article on Inuit social morphology, the organisation of social life has been one of the most debated issues of anthropological research among Inuit.

Based on a rather fragmentary ethnographic foundation, which synthesises data from Canada, Alaska, Greenland, and Russia, Mauss had the intuition that seasonal variation in group size and density, and the directly associated patterns of religious, moral and legal life were core features of Inuit social organisation. Finding that social relationships were organised into a temporary framework and embedded into seasonally shared localities, Mauss considered summer and winter socialities as two different modes of the same society. Inuit groups of the Canadian Arctic certainly vary in the specific expressions of their social organisation in respect to climate. Mauss's "summer" and "winter" societies can be best used as models for the core features of Inuit society rather than exact blueprints of any given Inuit group. The heuristic application of the models helps to outline basic group formation; location dynamics; and ways of life in relation to the seasons.

Discussing the assumption of the *-miut* group

Mauss based his analysis on the assumption that the *-miut* group¹ forming the winter camp was the most important organisational level of Inuit society. The image of a society pulsating between social concentration and dispersion emerges; the pulse itself being part of the society's construction. While being aware that "Eskimo society is [...] somewhat vague and fluid," Mauss (1979: 27) saw in this societal configuration

¹ The postbase *-miut* can be attached to names of various geographical scales thereby denoting either small dispersed camp groups or the larger winter aggregation. It can also be used when referring to Inuit groups of a larger region, such as Baffin Island.

the most cohesive unit of Inuit society, not only in territorial and social terms, but also in religious terms. He found that:

The true territorial unit is [...] the settlement. By this we mean a group of assembled families who are united by special ties and who occupy a habitat in which they are unevenly distributed [...] at different times of the year, but which constitutes their domain (Mauss 1979: 27).

Mauss's concept of the *-miut* group as a more or less stable social unit can be challenged in respect to the denotation of the postbase *-miut* and to a more radical emphasis on movement in regards to Inuit social dynamics. The *-miut* postbase, in combination with a place name only indicates a link between people and the place they inhabit. While expressing plurality, the postbase does not specify social relations between the inhabitants of the camp. The place name itself gives expression to the intimacy of the link between Inuit and a place (Collignon 2006: 199, 202ff). Similarly, "the emphasis [in place names] is usually more on the relationship between one place named and others, named or not, or between place and people, than on the place itself," (*ibid.*: 204) the emphasis on fluidity, flexibility and relationship provides a better approach to studying Inuit society than starting out with a group-oriented concept (see Dorais 1997; Stevenson 1997; Stuckenberg 2005).

Guemple (1971) also suggested that more than anything else, shared locality constituted the basis for Inuit social organisation. Social relationships were temporal due to the seasonality and the flexibility of camp membership, and the locality of camps could change annually (*ibid.*). In principle, relationships needed to be continuously (re)established between the people who at a given time shared a locality usually by drawing on relationships based on kinship, alliances, ritual partnerships, the acceptance of the camp leaders' authority, and the viability of a certain camp size in a particular environment. Those relationships were to a large extent maintained through proper social and cosmological conduct.

While shifting emphasis, the features of the *-miut* group discussed above do not derogate from the argument that seasonal movement in general was an important principle of Inuit society. They actually extend the relevance of the notions of "movement" and "space" as constitutive parts of the character of Inuit social relationships.

The seasonal variations of Inuit society

In southern Baffin Island, the annual celestial race of Brother Moon chasing Sister Sun signifies the Arctic seasons, and animal migrations on land, ice and water. Before the time of permanent settlements, Inuit had to follow the game and organised their social life and hunting strategies accordingly. In the physical reality of daily life, these migrations were a necessity for survival. The migrations also have a cosmological reality developed in Inuit mythic time from which society evolved as not the "other"

but as profoundly interwoven with nature, using a formulation Kramvik (2003) developed to discuss Sami relations to their environment. For example, myths, such as the stories of the Moon and Sun, Narssuk or Sedna, tell about how Inuit rules of social life co-evolved with the diversifying universe that had early on also produced humans. Thus, the model of contrast between summer and winter developed by Mauss refers to a complex reality in which the interconnection of the physical, social and cosmological domains constitutes the fabric of Inuit society.

Winter-Time

There is fear in
Feeling the winter
Come to the great world
And watching the moon
now half-moon, now full
Follow its ancient ways.
(Rasmussen 1927: 266)

Annually, the largest group configuration of a winter camp was comprised of several Inuit families. In the Cumberland Sound area, these camps usually consisted of between 40 and 70 members, and the groups were frequently changing in composition and location (Stevenson 1997). In Mauss's (1979: 70 ff.) model, this configuration was associated with specific seasonal architecture, hunting technology, and forms of property rights that served to shape social life in a mode of general and public collectivity. For example, various regional forms of winter architecture connected several families in semi-private settings within a building (*ibid.*: 46). To some degree, the nuclear family dissolved into the larger group and the community itself became a focus of Inuit practices:

Their social interactions become frequent, more continuous and more coherent; ideas are exchanged; feelings are mutually revived and reinforced. By its existence and constant activity, the group becomes more aware of itself and assumes a more prominent place in the consciousness of individuals (Mauss 1979: 76).

These extended domestic, as well as settlement, assemblages are incidentally coordinated by camp leaders who were selected on the basis of their age, gender, capability, and family relations. Their influence in the community, however, was limited basically to decisions on logistic and social issues (*ibid.*: 66, 72ff.).

Creating moral unity was an important component of Inuit spiritual life. Mauss wrote about continuous religious exaltation, mythical story telling, and frequent interventions of the shaman whenever a rule has been, or was suspected to have been, transgressed. During the time of community concentration, slips in conduct seem to have been particularly dangerous to the group. These issues were dealt with in a public setting, often by confession or shamanic rituals (*ibid.*: 57ff.) The time of population concentration was also a time of major festivals, such as the Sedna feast celebrated by

those living in the southern Baffin region. While “one can thus describe winter life as one long celebration” (*ibid.*: 58), late fall and winter were periods when access to food was by no means certain and hunting in the cold was arduous. The celebration of these festivities in an extended public space signified the renewal of the group, which is based on functioning relationships between the people present and the cosmos (*ibid.*: 58). While the winter configuration highlights togetherness and the removal of conflict, it was a double-edged sword insofar as the concentration of people was also perceived to create the ground for increased spiritual and social tensions (see also Balikci 1970: 175; Boas 1888: 574, 1900: 630; Hawkes 1916: 110; Rasmussen 1929: 227). Hence, Mauss considered that:

We might almost say that social life does violence to the minds and bodies of individuals which they can sustain only for a time; and there comes a point when they must slow down and partially withdraw from it [...]. We know in fact that the Eskimo are delighted with this change [from winter to summer] (Mauss 1979: 79).

Reviewing the winter features marking the winter camp, the co-occurrence of a large group with an intensified social and spiritual life is striking. Inuit belief is that each person is connected to the land (*e.g.*, through the place of birth and land use); the seasons (*e.g.*, through the time of birth or personal preferences); the animals; the people; and the spirit world in his/her own way. All these relationships are brought by each individual into the winter camp. In this respect, we could speak about the compression of time, space, spirit and human worlds in the winter camp. Each camp member's relevant relationships are present, and subject to renewal and improvement. This may be too much of a mechanistic view, but it appears that at such a time of social and cosmological concentration, the opportunity for tension, just like the opportunities for cooperation, increase, each of which having potential effects on the entire group.

Summer-Time

There is joy
In feeling the summer
Come to the great world,
And watching the sun
Follow its ancient way.
(Rasmussen 1927: 266)

The focus on the group, collectivity, and the intensity of public religious life dissolve with the dispersion into family based summer camps. These tent settlements consisted of a nuclear family and occasionally other relatives such as widows and their families, and guests. Organised using more patriarchic household structures, the summer camp strongly contrasted the more public domesticity of the winter camp. Property was assigned to individuals and families, and food was shared primarily with the inhabitants of the tent. While ritual prohibitions still required attention, spiritual

practices were to a large degree confined to the family or the individual (Mauss 1979: 37, 63, 70-71)².

While the winter camp could be seen as a compression in the space and time of all relevant relationships associated with all the members of the camp, the summer camp, resulting from close kin relationships and those established during winter, is marked by re-dispersion and re-connection of these relationships covering various extents of space. Summer sociality is somewhat more strongly directed and defined through its patriarchic structure, and is less socially and spiritually intense within the small household group—the core configuration of Inuit society.

Mauss's model of the seasonal variations in Inuit society appertains to the nomadic Inuit society of the camp times. This was a society profoundly physically dependent on and holistically interconnected with its environment. Is the model still relevant to the ethnography of contemporary Inuit society situated within sedentary Western style and globally connected settlements that make Inuit largely physically independent from their environment and provide permanent space for the community? More specifically, is Mauss's model indeed a useful heuristic device in discussing the links between temporality, locality and sociality in present day life in the Inuit community of Qikiqtarjuaq?

The community of Qikiqtarjuaq, Nunavut³

The population of Qikiqtarjuaq, an Inuit settlement situated in the Canadian Eastern Arctic on Southern Baffin Island, is comprised of approximately 500 Inuit and 15, mostly transient, Qallunaat ('Caucasian, non-Inuit') inhabitants. The settlement was constructed by the Canadian Government in the 1960s as part of their acculturation and welfare programs that involved replacing nomadic Inuit camps with permanent residences that offered direct access to public services, education, health care, and church facilities. Similar processes of community construction took place all over the Eastern Canadian Arctic and Inuit are subjected to a Qallunaat system that regulates their lives on a daily basis. Most Inuit perceive that the community provides them with welcomed benefits, such as: comfortable housing (although there are housing shortages), supermarkets, school education, and health care. However, while many of the new elements are welcomed, settlement life is often perceived by Inuit as not to be a complete success.

² Boas (1888: 577) observed that households in Southern Baffin Island did not cook for themselves in summer, but that women provided for the entire settlement in turn. This practice indicates a socially more open setting of the summer camp than suggested by Mauss (1979). See also Stevenson (1997: 245) for variations in communal and individual food storage and retrieval of different camps.

³ The following description is based on data that I collected during my field research in Qikiqtarjuaq (Nunavut) that span 14 months from December 1999 until January 2001. This fieldwork was part of the PhD program at the CERES and CNWS graduate schools at Utrecht University and Leiden University, respectively.

The challenges

Life in the settlement carries ambivalent values. On the one hand, the togetherness of all community members is seen positively, which is expressed especially in the context of festivals, in particular Christmas. On the other hand, living in the settlement is perceived to have detrimental effects on people's well-being and is thought to contribute to a wide range of social problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, child neglect and suicide. Difficulties have already arisen from the enforced patchwork composition of Qikiqtarjuaq which brought various camps together that might have preferred to be kept at a distance. These enforced yet unwanted changes are perceived to have produced tension and social discomfort that are still prevalent in Qikiqtarjuaq. Tensions and disagreements between groups are not a new phenomenon. The dynamic composition of the camp of the past and the relative proximity (often less than a day's journey) of other camps distributed along the coast, however, permitted one to move around more easily⁴.

Remie (1990) identified three major features that contribute to the social difficulties that plague most Inuit communities. First, new settlements were much larger than the seasonal ones that preceded them. Prior to 1850, the population of South Baffin Island winter camps did not average more than 50 persons. Numbers grew in areas where whalers started to overwinter (Stevenson 1997: 58-63). The smaller size allowed for a maintenance of social order, cooperation, and leadership that was based on direct social interactions. The application of these still highly-valued practices is much more difficult to implement in larger, modern Qikiqtarjuaq settlement.

A second consequence of the population concentration identified by Remie (1990) is that compared to earlier camp settlements, it is more difficult currently to move between settlements, for example, if one wants to avoid a conflict. The next community is not a close neighbour anymore. It takes a day or more by snowmobile, or an expensive flight to get there. The requirements of finding housing and employment after having moved to a new location add further obstacles to mobility. However, it seems that changing location may have been a crucial element in creating social well-being. Elders in Igloolik told Oosten (pers. comm. 2004) that they believe a place is "heating up" when occupied too long (*cf.* Bennett and Rowley 2004: 121). While there is evidence to support this perception (ground thaws due to heating houses and tents), the elders seem to refer to a less tangible experience, a kind of unrest and stress emanating from a location that is not left unoccupied long enough for it to recover from the inhabitation of human beings. Nature is not perceived to be the "other" to society, but to be intimately connected to Inuit social, moral and spiritual life.

⁴ For communications between Davies Strait and Cumberland Sound groups, see Boas (1888: 424, 462-464, 467); for conflict management by migration, see Stevenson (1997: 236f., 248ff.).

Elders and traditional knowledge

Elders are highly respected in Nunavut. Those who grew up in camp are often perceived as representatives of what has been termed the *inummarit* ('real Inuit'). In the image of the *inummarit*, the people of the past are depicted as stronger, more knowledgeable and skillful than today's Inuit, but their knowledge and ways of life are perceived to be an integral part of present Inuit society. The relevance of the ancestors in daily life is underscored in Inuit naming practices through passing on their names from one generation to the next.

The Inuit traditional knowledge that is associated with *inummarit* is based on a holistic framework of reference holding knowledge on the environment; animals; skills; ways of proper conduct; values; language; ways of conflict resolution; etc. This knowledge is highly valued and serves as a guide for living properly as Inuit including the use of new devices such as the snowmobile and the rifle. It is also used to help troubled people, who are often either counseled in church or are taken out on the land to live closer to the ways of the ancestors.

The features of safety and togetherness associated with settlement life are also highly valued. While a certain potential for conflict was always associated with large group settings, the considerably larger size; density; permanency; somewhat alien structure; and specific history of today's settlement society appears to add significantly to the difficulties associated with this social setting. However, the changed social conditions are not the only source of concern since the late fall and early winter seasons are still associated with an increase in trouble.

The seasonal cycle of Qikiqtarjuaq

Seasonal variations continue to be an important feature in today's Inuit culture. Qikiqtarjuaq's mayor in 2000, Lootie Toomasie, pointed out that if an outsider wanted to learn about community life, one should participate in all its different forms and observe people's activities throughout the various seasons:

It will be very good for you to stay the whole year round, because we have four seasons, spring, summer, fall, and winter. Each different season we deal with differently. So it is very good for you to learn from each season. Like in spring time, we go out on the land camping and seal hunting and all that. In summer time, we go boating and berry picking and so on. And in fall, people start to stay in the community, because it is starting to get too cold, but the hunters are still hunting a lot on the water. [...] As soon as the ice freezes up, it is winter (Stuckenberg 2005: 103).

The contrasts between the seasons are appreciated as activities, movements to and from the settlement, and locations, size and composition of residence vary with the time of the year interlinking, just like in the past, temporality, locality, and sociality.

Each individual has preferences for specific times of the year according to his/her personality and experiences. Billy Arnaquq, a man in his 40s, explained:

Elders have a passion for spring because the winter is so long and so cold. People always have a passion for when the spring is coming, the birds are coming, the animals are more plentiful. It's a time to go out and be part of, what you may call, the celebration. That is also a time that many people get together. [Hunting in that season] is something that is just so much part of you that you just go try to do it. [...] It is like that season comes for you to enjoy it. It is inside the people. Some men even have a passion for early fall, when the harvest is plentiful and the animals are migrating through. Some have a passion to go out seal hunting in the winter. Some of them cannot wait until it is frozen. [...] Once you are part of that, it just becomes part of you (Stuckenberg 2005: 103).

Most Inuit live in Qikiqtarjuaq during the coldest months of winter and the transition periods of the freeze-up and break-up of the sea-ice. Before the sea starts to freeze in fall, narwhal migrate through Davis Strait and hunters cooperate in tiring out the animals and compete in making the catch. While a highly productive time, it is also the trigger for the revival of old grudges and the rise of new ones. As the sea starts to freeze and people are confined to the settlement, the social atmosphere deteriorates rapidly and people hardly leave their houses to socialise, except within their families. This attitude changes drastically with the 10 days of Christmas festival. Almost everyone who participates is in good spirits, making a point of not having conflicts with others. Afterwards, coping with the severe cold of January and February that keeps most people in their home, Qikiqtarjuarmiut eagerly anticipate the spring camping season.

In spring, summer, and early fall, Inuit, disperse to their camps if employment; school; the family's financial situation; and kinship solidarity allow. The camp locations are spread over about 120 km of coastline to the north and south of Qikiqtarjuaq. Often, these camp areas were used for generations and this connection is emphasised in conversations and in the choices of camp locations. Elder Loasie Kunilusie told me when we travelled by the camp he grew up in: "I know this place very well. This is like my living room to me." Camps are set up by several generations of an extended family and range from between five to 10 people in size. Some families have wooden cabins at their favorite places, while others use canvas tents. These family camps are usually located at some distance to other camps in the area and visits between the camps are sporadic.

Camps form a cooperative domestic unit. Members often express their delight in concentrating on their families, living off the land, and forgetting about settlement life. Cooperation and sharing of food involves all camp members. While a relaxed atmosphere prevails, young people claim to be subjected to a stricter form of discipline and of patriarchal hierarchy than they had in the settlement. However, the majority seems to appreciate this experience—most of the time. Some camp inhabitants also feel that not only do their family relations intensify, but also their relationship to God as well. Inuit explained that camping gives them peace of mind and a sense of being

themselves that contributes to their connection to God without others, such as ministers, interfering.

Most Qikiqtarjuaq households rely to a substantial degree on highly valued country food. In the camps, most activities are related to procurement: mostly hunting, fishing, berry picking, and the preparation of animal hides and down for sewing. These activities position people, as well as the camp, within the circuit of social and cosmological relationships to other camp members, animals, and the land.⁵ For both men and women, even for those who are not involved a lot in these traditional occupations, these practices are crucial aspects of being Inuit. Inuit Arctic College students expressed clearly this sentiment while reflecting on the relevance of the seal in Inuit culture: “Keeping [the family] warm, clothed and fed plays a vital part in one’s identity as an Inuk” (Peter *et al.* 2002: 170). Furthermore, observing proper conduct in respect to the game, such as not to boast about one’s hunting success or not to be stingy with food, is still perceived as highly important for future hunting success and wellbeing.

The legal aspect of camp life did not draw my attention during my fieldwork, thus I can say little about it. The camp leader’s authority was highly respected and even youth who was unruly in the settlement were obedient and showed proper conduct (while often longing to be back in the community). How issues usually brought to the attention of the police were dealt with in camp, I do not know as I did not experience any troublesome situation. Flows of property between camps, and camps and the settlement, is another field of study on which I collected little data. All camps were self-sufficient in their access to transportation, equipment and labor. The formation of the camp group took place in the community where people with limited access to, e.g., a snowmobile or boat would negotiate with family members for inclusion in their camp or use of their equipment. Any equipment not used was felt should be available to family members in need of it.

The ritual cycle

Before the introduction of Christianity, calendars, and clocks, Inuit did not have a fixed or formalised measurement of time. Their notions of temporality were based on the situational reference to moon-months, the seasons, and astral correlations. Significant personal experiences, such as a boy’s first kill, and ritual periods, such as the Sedna festival, marked transitional periods organising the society’s temporality. By examining the weather, the seasons, the animals, and the world of the spirits, the elders of a camp decided when to perform a seasonal ritual and which injunctions to observe to ensure successful hunting and a prosperous camp. Boas (1888), for instance, reported that caribou skins obtained in summer might not be worked on until the sea-ice formed and the first seal was caught. “Later, as soon as the first walrus is caught,

⁵ For a more detailed description of the Qikiqtarjuaq’s seasonal and ritual cycle, see Stuckenberg (2005).

the work must stop again until the next fall. [...] All families are eager to finish the work on deerskins as quickly as possible, as the walrusing season is not commenced until that is done” (Boas 1888: 595).

In the past, seasonal festivals played an important part in the constitution of Inuit society. Times of community concentration were also times of public festivals, such as of the Sedna festival on which Boas reported. Celebrated in late fall, the Sedna festival reconstituted the link between the Inuit community and Sedna, the game animals, and the dead, thereby organising the nomadic society in connection to the cosmos.

As camps converted to Christianity and the latter became more popular in the North, Christmas took over the function of the earlier Sedna festival (Laugrand and Oosten 2002). Christianity, and later the introduction of today’s settlement life, implemented new and formalised forms of temporality. The communities of Nunavut started to follow the civic and Christian holidays familiar to the Western World. While this holiday cycle provides Qikiqtarjuaq with a fixed formal temporality, holiday celebrations meet with a varying success throughout the year.

As in the past, ritual community formation still takes place in connection to the temporality and locality of the group. Even though holiday celebrations are generally appreciated, not all holidays are celebrated by the entire community. It is arguably the seasonal ways of life that are of critical relevance in this respect⁶. The celebrations of early spring (Easter), freeze-up (*e.g.*, Halloween), and winter (*e.g.*, Christmas)—all periods of community concentration—are well attended. Festivities of summer (Canada Day)⁷, and autumn before freeze-up (Terry Fox Run)—periods of community dispersal—are attended only by people who stay in the community. Thus, during times of dispersal, Inuit apparently attach a higher value to being out on the land than to staying in the community and participate in community celebrations. Neither do people return to the settlement for these occasions nor do they celebrate any of these holidays in the camps.

Within the confines of the settlement, however, these holidays are inevitably held. The municipality organises feasts and games that are financed by government institutions. The efforts to provide festivities irrespective of the local Inuit seasonal cycle of concentration and dispersion reflect the value governmental institutions attach to sedentary community life. At the same time, these efforts acknowledge the high status of being a provider for community needs and the leadership position that is associated with it within Inuit traditions. The implementation of the formal holiday cycle in Qikiqtarjuaq thus points to an integrated process in which a modern institution

⁶ The more recently introduced holidays often mark social or political occasions that are perceived by Inuit to be of relatively little relevance to community life. Furthermore, several of the holidays take place during times of community dispersion in spring and summer.

⁷ There are no further community festivities in late spring after the well attended fishing derby in May on Victoria Day.

(the Canadian Government) asserts its existence and role and, importantly, integrates itself into Inuit sociality.

The successful celebrations of communal holidays thus take place in the largest groups possible. This emphasises the public character of the festivals to which also Mauss referred. In particular, the enormous efforts and expenses (funded largely through the Nunavut government) invested in providing food for the entire community for each feast is telling in this context. It would be comparatively easy to organise a holiday celebration in the confines of one camp, but this would mean confining the public feast to a small fraction of the community. One camp alone could not provide food for the entire community, and, therefore, this option has apparently little attraction for Inuit. There is, thus, strong evidence that festivals, today just like in the past, are intimately connected to the largest possible concentration of people.

Christmas

As people move back to the settlement in late October, social and religious life intensify. For example, church services are well-attended, as are community dances. This time is also marked by increasing social tensions and encounters with the apparitions of recently deceased people—specifically those who died by suicide. People then look forward to the 10 days of Christmas. This festival is anticipated as a period of social and cosmological renewal.

At Christmas, all relevant social and spiritual relationships are addressed and improved⁸. During the religious services, people relate directly to God. For instance, elders give testimonials of their positive experiences with God. They emphasise elements of confession and conversion that highlight the importance of forgiveness and the reconstitution of social and spiritual relationships. By exchanging gifts, people invest in their social relations, and these relations are objectified in the gifts themselves. People privilege specific relationships in, and outside of, their immediate family circle. The feast consists mostly of country food, and connects the community to the game. Sharing and consuming it with Western foods creates a sense of togetherness. As Ina Sanguya, a woman in her 30s, said, “Country food brings people together the best.” No one should be excluded or leave hungry.

The competitions are probably the most striking feature of a festival. When missionaries introduced Christmas it was a celebration of one or two days. Presently, Qikiqtarjuaq celebrates it for 10 days mostly due to the ever increasing number of competitions organised. By participating in the games people express themselves as skillful partners in cooperative, yet competitive, performances. The winner can only become victorious through the contributions of others. This structure expresses a fundamental Inuit value that every success ultimately depends on functioning cooperative relationships. In the context of the games, the Inuit sociality does not refer

⁸ For a detailed description, see Stuckenberg (2005).

to a corporate unit (here a team) encompassing and transcending the participants; it represents much more the ultimate potential for cooperation.

All these elements are perceived as contributing to conflict resolutions between individuals and to the improvement of people's relationship to God. Functional relationships in both respects are believed to be crucial for the community's wellbeing and hunting success. The translation of Christmas as *Quviasuvvik* ('a time of happiness') expresses the joy experienced by human beings in shaping and constituting the social and cosmological relations of their society. In the festival, the community re-establishes itself as a religious community in relation to God. Whereas in the past ancestors observed the Sedna festival, today it is most important that the elders especially enjoy the games and dances, as they represent a link to the *inumhariit* and to the past⁹. Also, in the names that people were given, the ancestors may actually be represented in the players.

Christmas activities and interactions do not lead to further obligations, but they create the condition for cooperation in the coming camping and hunting season. They clear the path for cooperation between people who bring their own ways and their personal relationships to others, the land, the animals, and God. In this way, all the relevant connections covering the region through the migrations of animals and people are improved and cleansed from conflict before people spread out over the land again. When, in the following spring, people disperse to their campsites, some of these potential relations will be established—though all relationships had that potential. Christmas thus establishes the contemporary community of Qikiqtarjuaq according to the old nomadic model of society. We could speak here of a process which indigenises modernity since Inuit adaptive skills embrace change with substantial continuity to their traditional ways of life.

Discussion and conclusion

Mauss connected a homologous pattern in the rhythm of Inuit religious, moral and legal life to seasonal variations in the mass, density and composition of nomadic Inuit groups of the past. With the introduction of permanent settlements around the 1960s, the size of Inuit communities increased dramatically. At the same time, a more formal temporality was implemented as the municipalities started to organise festivities not only of selected Christian but also of civic holidays. Moreover, families adapted to the schedules of schooling and employment. The new living conditions discouraged moving between the settlements making the group composition dynamics less flexible than before.

While these developments brought drastic changes in social conditions, they affected the constitution of Inuit society less than I had expected before starting my field study in Qikiqtarjuaq. Applying Mauss's model heuristically to analyse today's

⁹ For a more detailed description and analysis, see Stuckenberg (2005).

community life of Qikiqtarjuaq produces a positive analogy of Inuit community constitution in past and present. Namely, the prolonged period of community concentration in late fall and winter is highly valued and practiced as a collective time emphasising togetherness but also the dangers of larger groups. These dangers evolve from the concentration of strained relationships as well as dangers emanating from the world of spirits, especially those of recently deceased by suicide. Community concentration goes along with intensified collective religious practices, specifically Christmas as a festival of social and spiritual renewal.

During the prolonged camping period in spring and summer, the dispersion of the “cleansed” community into loosely connected family camps over the land is valued. The camp period is perceived as a relaxed and peaceful time of low social life intensity, a focus on family and individual spiritual experiences, and intensified contact to land and animals. Thus, Qikiqtarjuaq constitutes itself in a twofold morphology that connects the seasonal variation between small, less dense and family-oriented camp periods, and the concentrated and community oriented settlement periods to a homologous pattern in the rhythm of Inuit hunting and gathering, religious and social life.

While there is analogy between Mauss’s and Qikiqtarjuaq’s models of Inuit society, it is actually partial as certain values associated with today’s seasonal configurations are not accounted for. While the past and present community concentrations are associated with intensified collective social and religious life, this value today is also linked to the summer camp, and not exclusively with the winter camp as in Mauss (1979). Perceived as relaxed and a “time off,” these camps are seen also as a major context for articulating Inuit cultural identity through hunting, gathering and camp practices. The reconnection to *inummarit* (‘real Inuit’) ways of life is clearly articulated in the specific form of “healing camps” usually organised for troubled youth and for women. These camps are organised to remove the detrimental effects associated with settlement life not so much by providing them with a relaxed atmosphere (which, however, is no doubt is part of the experience) but more importantly by reconnecting them to the land, the animals, gender-associated work, other camp members, and to God—to being “true Inuit.”

Although the seasonal camps have acquired the value of being “ideal” Inuit communities, the concentrated community tends to lose this value that Mauss attributed to it. While times of community concentration always have been ambivalent and required social-religious rituals to establish and maintain community life, the drastically changed social conditions are perceived to add considerable detrimental pressure on the latter. The extension of the Christmas festival from one to 10 days, and in particular of the number of games played, highlights the perceived increased deterioration of social and spiritual relationships as well as the continuing importance of removing conflict for the well-being of the community.

These new values attached to the seasonal social formations are arguably associated with the change in social conditions as Inuit nomadic hunting society moved

into socially concentrated permanent settlements that were developed based on a Western model of community life. Evolving from this new context is the image of the *inummarit* through which Inuit formulate their cultural identity emphasising the proper ways of relating to people, land, animals, God and ancestors—ways and connections that Qallunaat are lacking. While this image supports the new values attached to the camp configuration, it also serves as a touchstone of successful integration of new elements into Inuit society, such as modern institutions.

Western institutions are ubiquitous in Qikiqtarjuaq. In this respect, celebrating Christmas and other holidays has an additional function since it is organised by the municipality and largely financed through the Nunavut government. Thus, these institutions representing Western community administration and political structures take on the culturally significant position of the provider for the festival. Being a reliable and generous provider is associated with a high status and support a leadership position in Inuit society. By integrating the formal modern leadership into traditional Inuit leadership patterns the municipality justifies its existence, position and work in the community. Hence, the Western institution is indigenised, and therewith can be integrated into Inuit community constitution.

The connection between sociality, temporality, and locality continues to be crucial for Inuit perceptions and practices of community life as Inuit manage to maintain nomadic ways of life in Qikiqtarjuaq. As expressed in the contemporary image of the *inummarit*, Inuit perceive hunting out on the land as the true vocation of Inuit life, and, even within the Christian framework, the relationship to land and animals is still a necessary precondition for people's well-being and spiritual health. It is therefore beneficial to maintain a nomadic life style that connects complementarily the land and the community. The new structures, alien to the non-institutional and non-corporate Inuit social organisation, require integration into nomadic ways and the development of adapted values associated with them. Looking back into the time of myth from which co-evolved a moral cosmos and Inuit ways of life by transformation, we can see a similar logic still operating on the latest diversifications of the Inuit cosmos; the contemporary settlements.

References

- BALIKCI, Asen
1970 *The Netsilik Eskimo*, Garden City N.J., The Natural History Press.
- BENNETT, John and Susan ROWLEY (compilers and editors)
2004 *Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press.
- BOAS, Franz
1888 *The Central Eskimo, 6th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology for the years 1884-1885*, Washington: 399-669.

- 1900 Religious beliefs of the Central Eskimo, *Popular Science Monthly*, 57: 624-632.
- COLLIGNON, Béatrice
2006 Inuit place names and sense of place, in Pamela Stern and Lisa Stevenson (eds), *Critical Inuit Studies: An anthology of contemporary Arctic ethnography*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press: 187-205.
- DORAIS, Louis-Jacques
1997 *Quaqtaq: Modernity and identity in an Inuit community*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
- GUEMPLE, Lee
1972 Kinship and alliance in Belcher Island Eskimo society, in Lee Guemple (ed.), *Alliance in Eskimo Society*, Seattle and London, American Ethnological Society, Supplement, Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society for 1971: 56-79.
- HAWKES, Ernest W.
1916 *The Labrador Eskimo*, Ottawa, Canada Department of Mines, Geological Survey, Memoir 91, Anthropological Series 14.
- KRUPNIK, Igor and Dyanna JOLLY (eds)
2002 *The earth is faster now: Indigenous observations of Arctic environmental change*, Fairbanks, Arctic Research Consortium of the United States.
- LAUGRAND, Frédéric and Jarich G. OOSTEN
2002 Quviasukvik. The celebration of an Inuit winter feast in the Central Arctic, *Journal de la société des Américanistes*, 88: 203-225.
- LAUGRAND, Frédéric, Jarich G. OOSTEN and François TRUDEL
2000 *Representing tuurngait*, Iqaluit, Nunavut Arctic College, Memory and History in Nunavut, 1.
- MAUSS, Marcel (in collaboration with Henri Beuchat)
1979 *Seasonal variations of the Eskimo: A study in social morphology*, translation and introduction by James J. Fox, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul (originally published in French in 1906).
- PETER, Aaju *et al.*
2002 The seal: An integral part of our culture, *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 26(1): 167-174.

RASMUSSEN, Knud

1929 *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Copenhagen, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition, 1921-24, 7(1).

REMIE, Cornelius H. W.

1990 Landclaims en politieke emancipatie bij de Inuit in Noord-Canada, *Antropologische Verkenningen*, 9(4): 50-64.

SALADIN d'ANGLURE, Bernard

1993 The shaman's share, or Inuit sexual communism in the Canadian Central Arctic, *Anthropologica*, 39: 59-103.

STEVENSON, Marc G.

1997 *Inuit, whalers, and cultural persistence: structure in Cumberland Sound and Central Inuit social organization*, Toronto, Oxford University Press.

STUCKENBERGER, A. Nicole

2005 *Community at play: Social and religious dynamics in the modern Inuit community of Qikiqtarjuaq*, Amsterdam, Rozenberg Publishers.

WENZEL, George W.

1994 Recent change in Inuit summer residence patterning at Clyde River, East Baffin Island, in Ernest S. Burch, Linda J. Ellanna (eds), *Key issues in hunter-gatherer research*, Providence and Oxford, Berg Publishers: 289-308.