Inherit My Heaven:
Kalaallit Gender Relations

Karla Jessen Williamson
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INUSSUK - Arctic Research Journal 1 - 2011
Copyright © Government of Greenland, Department of Education, Church, Culture and Gender Equality
Layout: Nuisi
Typeface: Apex Sans
Publisher: Department of Education, Church, Culture and Gender Equality
Print: AKA Print A/S, Århus
2. edition
Print run: 200 copies

ISBN 978-87-92554-14-7
ISSN 1397-7431

INUSSUK - Arctic Research Journal is published by the Department of Education, Church, Culture and Gender Equality.

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Editors
Research Coordinator Najāraq Paniula
Government of Greenland
Department of Education, Church, Culture and Gender Equality
P.O. Box 1029
3900 Nuuk, Greenland
Telephon: +299 34 50 00
Fax: +299 32 20 73
E-mail: napa@nanoq.gl
www.nanoq.gl

Research Coordinator Martin Oleksiewicz
Government of Greenland
Department of Education, Church, Culture and Gender Equality
P.O. Box 1029
3900 Nuuk, Greenland
Telephon: +299 34 50 00
Fax: +299 32 20 73
E-mail: martin@nanoq.gl
www.nanoq.gl

Publications in the series can be ordered from:
Atuagkat
P.O. Box 1009
3900 Nuuk, Greenland
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Teemiartissaq -- an Ivik shaman trainee -- was told by her paternal aunt:

*Qilaga pissavat!* You will inherit my heaven.

(Vebæk 1996, 34)
Acknowledgements

On an occasion like the publication of a book one feels a sense of awe. I am awed by the intensity of time spent in planning, thought, and contemplation, by the intensity of scrutiny the material requires, and by my indebtedness to people working on this material. I am greatly indebted to my immediate family, friends, and colleagues in Canada, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Greenland. I am especially grateful to my daughter Laakkuluk, now with husband Stephen and their two lovely children, Akutaq and Igimaq, and to my son Thomas, who moved from Saskatoon to Aberdeen, Calgary, and Ottawa – many thanks for nourishing me. Together with my Inuktitut-speaking Qallunaaq husband Robert, we have indeed experienced the bondedness through thick and thin, the true enjoyment of which this book is about. All this makes me feel so rich that I wrote a poem about that feeling in the year 2008 in Saskatoon, Canada.

Pisoorsuaq: The Very Rich

Akkakka, atsakka
aanakka, ilakka
ajakka, ningaakka
ukkuakkaluk
ernutta, meeqqakka
uigalu
qatanngutikka, illukka
ikinngutikkalu
angajoqqakka, aatakka
atikkalu
soorlu tamamik pigigaannga.

My paternal uncles, my paternal aunts
my grandmothers, my relatives
and my aunts-in-law
my maternal aunts, my uncles-in-law
and my husband
my maternal aunts, my uncles-in-law
and my children
my grandchildren, my children
my siblings, my cousins
my husband
my ancestors
my aunts-in-law
my friends
and my names
and my names
it sounds as if they all own me.

I also want to express my appreciation for the financial support of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. The same goes for Brødrene Lyberth in Maniitsoq for their financial and moral support, especially through Piitaq.

I was especially pleased to receive funding from the University of Saskatchewan’s Publication Fund and delighted also to receive financial and administrative support from the Greenland government’s Inussuk Fund. Many thanks are directed toward Janet Drysdale for her help in converting the doctoral dissertation into this wonderfully clear version.

Maniitsormiunut, tamanut qujanarsuaq – ingammik mississueqatinnut.
Iserit, tamassa: Introduction

Starting out: Participatory Action Research in Maniitsoq, Greenland

*Iserit, tamassa,* in the language of the Greenland Inuit (the *kalaallit*), means ‘do enter, it’s all there’ implying ‘help yourself to it all,’ and that is what this introduction is: an invitation to readers of this study to help themselves to its contents. The second term I wish to introduce is *takanna*, used in offering food. My ambition here is to invite readers to a better understanding and appreciation of other ways of knowing.

In May 1998 I met with seven women from the community of Maniitsoq, Greenland, at the old Lutheran church. I had travelled a long distance from Canada to initiate a research study, but I was in fact returning home to Maniitsoq. Maniitsoq is a town with a population of about 3000 located on the southwestern coast of Greenland. It is a municipal centre in the Meqquitsoq area, situated on an island, south of Kangerlussuaq, Søndre Strøm Fjord, and Sisimiut. Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, is just south of Maniitsoq. The inhabitants of Maniitsoq are Greenland Inuit, who call themselves *kalaallit* (sing. *kalaaleq*). Through my training as an anthropologist I aimed to explore Inuit gender relations in the unique post-colonial setting of Greenland. I had chosen Maniitsoq as the location for my research because societal changes in Greenland have been great there. The hunting-based Inuit society has become a Westernized, more industrial society, with changes that arrived since the Second World War having a galvanizing effect on Greenlandic society. When cultures rapidly change, many of the actors do not get a chance to fully evaluate the cultural changes, and valuable lessons are often lost as a result. I see Maniitsoq as a typical Inuit Arctic community with a strong interaction between the inherent mixed cultural lifestyles of Inuit and non-Inuit. In such a setting, I sought to illuminate gender relations among the Inuit people of the area by looking at the roles and status of men and women. As an indigenous female immersed in a vigorously assimilative process, I felt the need to re-evaluate and reinterpret ancient values prevalent in the traditional Inuit society, and what these are in relation to the present situation.

I went to Maniitsoq in the hope of engaging some women as participants in my research. Each woman was kalaaleq (plural, *kalaallit*), as I am; we are a people of Inuit descent whose genes incorporate those of Europeans from various countries. Inuit are the original ancestors of the *kalaallit*, but *kalaallit* have “stepped forward”
away from their Inuit roots to become who they are today: Inuit-originated people who enjoy a modern self-government inherited from colonial times.

We got together that day at the old church, feeling somewhat constrained since we all grew up going to this same church for services. Despite the initial shy moment — since we did not know one another well enough to have an easy relationship — we had a good discussion about my thoughts on Inuit egalitarian principles. I perceive Inuit gender relations as philosophically egalitarian and in many ways genderless. While I will explain these thoughts more fully later, let me first explain how I came to be back in Maniitsoq undertaking this research project with these women. Various “participatory research activities”, research that engages and involves local participants in defining the terms of study and conducting the research, have been carried out in Canada and the United States in indigenous regions for a number of years, and related methods for field research have been established. Such types of participatory action research, which is referred to as PAR, have not taken place in Greenland among the kalaallit population. Coming from within the culture, I had a sense of wanting to share my research endeavour and longed for the active participation of my hometown. I knew that many individuals aspired to further education, but due to location their dreams were not always attainable. The Maniitsoq community did not just become “a people under study,” passively observed by the researcher. The members of the community who became my research collaborators became active, responsible co-operators. Although I am a cultural insider, I am not infallible, and my wish to give back to my community is strong in my mind. I saw this type of research as the best method for me to use to look into gender relations in this setting.

I knew what method I wanted to employ to carry out my research, and I also knew why I was undertaking what could, and would, become a lengthy process. I wanted to affirm my speculations that something could be learned from the old values, and that kalaallit knowledge is something that can be shared with others around the world. At the same time I believed that collectivity mattered and invited the team to participate. Indeed, the research group’s opinions validly counted as knowledge. My aim was not to use the results to go against the power holders, but to use traditional Inuit values to evaluate present relations, and in this case to see how the present gender relations of Maniitsormiut compare to Western thoughts on gender equity. This kind of research undertaking as it was created for this study is unique in that it comes from the point of view of the indigenous group, and the subsequent methods of the field research adhered to the values of behaviour culturally characteristic of the insider’s point of view. I will discuss these characteristics, and
others, extensively later to identify the strengths and weaknesses of such a process. My belief that undertaking PAR was a worthwhile endeavour was confirmed by other anthropologists’ writing. I realized that Morris had had the same experience regarding some principles of PAR. This author (2002, 17) stated, “Collectively we gained more knowledge and wanted to share our new knowledge.” Others, Fals-Borda and Rahman, stated that PAR has the effect of liberating knowledge. They described PAR as an “experiential methodology; that is, a process of personal and collective behaviour occurring within a satisfying and productive cycle of life and labour. This experiential methodology implies acquisition of serious and reliable knowledge upon which to construct power, a countervailing power, for the poor, oppressed and exploited groups and social classes — the grassroots — and their authentic organizations and movements” (1991,3). This statement rang true to me, leading me back to Maniitsoq to this meeting at the church. We talked for about two to three hours. After a lively conversation, the women and I agreed to meet again in the same location for future meetings. The women went home fully informed about my proposed research being different from but inclusive of Qallunaat — as the Inuit call the non-Inuit — Western ideas of inequity between men and women in contrast to the notions of genderlessness. During our conversation we discussed how the discourse on gender and equity from the southern point of view has been strongly influenced by feminist movements. Many feminists with whom I have talked take it for granted that arctic women have experienced the same devaluation as southerners have, and many assume that arctic women have experienced even more devaluation due to colonization. This is compounded by the perception that the Arctic is a male-preferential world, and that, therefore, arctic women must suffer doubly under male dominance and under colonization in comparison with the women in the south. Among the many questions that we developed the underlying question includes: how has the process of social change affected arctic men and women? The process could be analyzed from the point of view of established thought on pan-Inuit values in comparison to the discourse on gender from the southern/Western point of view. This way the present post-colonial social positioning of arctic men and women could be highlighted to give us — the research group — a special understanding of our common heritage.

Inuit gender relations are philosophically egalitarian and in many ways genderless. I use genderless to mean that each person’s humanity is seen as more significant than their characteristics of sex (see my publications of 2000 and 2004). One such expression of genderlessness in Inuit culture is an appreciation of intellect, or sila. Sila is synonymous with the pervasive cosmic power that provides animation to all life forms. Ordination of life is provided through sila and it grants the bearer
autonomy. Siļa, being one of the life forces, is indivisible in traditional pan-Inuit thinking, and discussing gender in the context of intellect is seen as meaningless. Another example of what I call genderless empowerment — empowerment of the individual regardless of sex — is conveyed through pre-Christian Inuit androgynous names and naming practices, where sex does not play any crucial role in the bestowing of names. What matters is the metaphysical and social effect of the name-giving, what Guemple (1995, 27) describes as “the entry of a relatively indestructible spiritual substance, a ‘soul.’” Once a name is given, the individual carrying that “soul name” is accorded reverential respect (Williamson 1988). A third example of Inuit genderless qualities is expressed through the structure of the Inuktitut language. Like many other indigenous languages, the Inuktitut language omits genderization. There are of course many terms that Inuit use to indicate the feminine and masculine, but for the purposes of this exercise I concentrate on one aspect of the Inuit language that can be taken as an expression of Inuit philosophy. The omission of genderization in Inuktitut emphasizes the essential basic humanity of the human being, though expressed in the male and female physiology of both. According to Dorais, this is very much related to the existence of universal truth. He states, “For the Inuit, language cannot be divorced from the cosmic order. Without it, there would be no life and death, no day and night, and even no difference between men and women” (1990, 186). After developing our research questions, we would use this notion of genderlessness as a starting point for the study.

At our next meeting to my delight all seven women said they were interested in participating. Each was asked to “pay” for their interest in the form of a question related to the proposed study. The questions were to stem from their own perspective, be open-ended, with as little manipulation of the prospective interviewees as possible. Together, we helped one another formulate the questions. Essentially, these seven women became my research collaborators, responding to the need of their active participation in designing the research, deciding on the questions, identifying prospective interviewees, and defining their own expectations of their participation. They also conveyed to me their expectations of my producing the answers to their questions. They understood that the process of finding the answers to their questions was an academic one of interviewing individuals whose identity was to be respected and protected. They were also told that the answers to their questions might be found elsewhere, beyond the interviews, and that the entire research would be analyzed as an academic exercise and rigorously scrutinized by others. With these conditions each of the women became my research partner, sponsoring, mentoring, and supporting the endeavour as an investment for the next generations to come. After our initial meetings I trained the research colleagues on
how to construct good, open questions. None of the questions could of course have yes or no answers, as the questions needed to evoke the thoughts of the interviewees without leading them to expected answers. This exercise was well utilized by the group, and we went through the proposed questions one by one to see if they would be reliable for research.

But before we look at the questions we decided on, first let me introduce myself and my research colleagues to you. I was born in a small settlement called Appamiut, north of Maniitsoq, in 1954. In Danish these places are called *udsted* – ‘out-place’ – in Canada such a settlement might be described as an “outpost camp.” During the 1950s and 1960s Greenland underwent enormous economic, cultural, and social changes. As colonial status was officially curtailed, Danes and the local Greenlandic politicians agreed to a concentration policy (*koncentrations-politik*, as mentioned in chapter 2). The plan entailed the closure of essential services (schools, churches, trading, and transportation services) in those “outpost camp villages.” Many of the families were forced to contemplate moving. Enticed by promises of new, modern houses and better economic chances, my parents decided to move to Maniitsoq, and the rest of my paternal family joined us later.

The move may have been convenient for economic and administrative purposes, but socially and culturally such moves had terrible effects; socio-cultural disintegration in various forms created a number of abusive behaviours. Over the years my family directly and indirectly experienced the effect of gross social disintegration and was forced to provide refuge for a number of our female relatives over the years.

The physical and psychological abuse of women within my extended family haunted me for many years, and I felt that I had to do something about it. Daily direct aid proved to be too emotionally and financially taxing, and I realized that my actions did not contribute to preventative measures: I had to find other ways of easing the tension in the atmosphere. Back then my thoughts were focused on how I could contribute to positive and effective social change. Could we learn from or relearn old Inuit values to remedy the social ills of modern life? How could I, while pursuing academic achievement, contribute to empowering the women in my community, and where was the elusive egalitarian principle in the post-colonial setting of Maniitsoq? I was sure that the local need was great, but could this also reach the global community? I also knew, having taught for many years on issues surrounding anti-racism and equity, that the insights of Inuit philosophy on equity issues needed to be explored in solving inequity problems, particularly with regard to the issues of women in Western society.
I feel that I am part of the Maniitsoq scene, able to enter and exit the local scene at will. As noted above I came to Maniitsoq early in my childhood as part of a “refugee” family arriving from what established Maniitsoq inhabitants deemed the “outpost camps” of the Maniitsoq municipality. I was the last child born in Appamiut, and I could not have been more than a year old when we left. My next sister was born in Maniitsoq, but Maniitsoq contemporaries, who regularly shouted at us “annagiarsuit” (‘refugees’, or, ‘people who came to survive’), teased us horribly. We did not really belong there. My parents had been promised new housing, but I clearly remember their disappointment when they made the move. The house given to my parents was an old run-down house that an older, single man had occupied for many years. It had been completely neglected. My mother had to kneel and melt the frozen water on the floor to clean the house for us to live there. The first two years or so were difficult, until we were moved into a new apartment. It was a one-bedroom apartment to house a couple with four children; later, my various uncles, aunts, and my paternal grandmother joined us on and off as they made the transition from the “outpost camp” to town.

The 1950s and early 1960s were times of great change as Greenlandic society was transformed. I was completely immersed in Danish at school. My father learned to speak some, but my mother never mastered even minimal Danish and was content never having had to learn much of it. In grade 5, I was sent to Denmark for three months, and a year later I was sent back for a year. I was one of the successful schoolchildren who learned to “speed up” in Danish. My father passed away at the age of forty-one during the year I was in Denmark. I was thirteen.

After another year in Maniitsoq some of us were sent to Aasiaat (Egedesminde) Preparatory High School for three years. After I finished there, I made the decision to stay in Maniitsoq for a year before I applied for academic high school in Denmark. I stayed in Denmark for two years and, in my friends’ and relatives’ eyes, became somewhat Danified. After high school, I again made a point of spending a year in Maniitsoq before I applied for entrance into the Teacher Training College (Ilimiarfissuaq) in Nuuk. I went there from 1976 to 1978, and decided to go to Canada for a year to become comfortable speaking English since I was to teach it as a third language in the Greenlandic public school system.

Soon after I arrived in Canada I met my husband who is professor of anthropology at the University of Saskatchewan. He is a fluent Inuktitut speaker, and I remained in Canada, going through the University of Saskatchewan Indian Teacher Education Program and graduating from the regular education program in 1982. I have since
then taught cross-cultural education, and since my graduate years I have taught about equity and anti-racism issues at the University of Saskatchewan. My desire to study equity and women’s issues stems, in part, from the years I taught there. While my earlier experiences of attending school in Denmark and Greenland are common for my contemporaries in Greenland, travelling to Canada and staying there was an unusual step, but I still feel that my outlook on and approach to life in general is a very common Greenlandic one, and my friends do take pride in introducing me to other Greenlanders as “one of ours.”

My research colleagues are also women who were either born or living in Maniitsoq or in the area during the late 1940s, sometime in the 1950s, or in the early 1960s. They are all “mature” women. Educational background was not a criterion for selection; their interest and investment of their time and effort was what mattered most. None of them was paid with the funding we received from the Nuna Banken, which was used to cover expenses of participants’ absence from work: their employers or institutions were compensated. But each informed me that insightful answers to their questions were as much anticipated as deeply satisfying for each one of them, and that particular pay was enough for them.

Mariaanna was born in Maniitsoq and is involved in a number of organizations. She takes great pride in being a child of original Maniitsormiut parents. At the time of the research period she worked at the Youth Club where school children can by choice come and go after school. She wanted to explore what the collaborative aspects in life are for a couple today. We all weighed the questions and decided that Mariaanna’s question was a good one since the expected boundaries between men’s and women’s responsibilities have often been somewhat unclear and remain so today. Six couples were interviewed extensively to find answers to the question.

Mariia was born to a single mother and appreciates the fact that her grandparents gave her much time, care, and love during her childhood. She is a business manager of the Maniitsoq municipality where she has worked for many years. Her grandparents moved from Appamiut to Maniitsoq. Mariia wanted to know how children are brought up along gender lines in Greenland. Her motive was to find answers to the fact that many more young men than young women commit suicide. She argued that perhaps aspects of or reasons for this could be found in exploring childrearing practices. She suggested that when dealing with equality issues, the suicide problem in modern Greenland could not be avoided. She also wanted to know why issues surrounding menstruation remain a taboo in modern-day Greenland, where people are supposedly open about sexuality. She felt that since World War II, societal values in Greenland
have increasingly become sympathetic to Danish values, and sexuality is not an exception. She has noticed that Danes appreciate pornography — they are not at all shy about erotica, and this has translated to an acceptance of sexuality in general — yet Mariia felt that there remains a hesitance to discuss menstruation. Is this shyness from the traditional Inuit way of life — why would modern Greenland Inuit women be hesitant to discuss menstruation — particularly young teenage girls? Some of the couples I interviewed for the question posed by Mariaanna provided answers to Mariia’s questions. Four individuals were interviewed directly, but most of the answers to Mariia’s questions were found in literature.

Boletta is my older sibling. Admittedly, I am very close to her and rely on her solid down to earth attitude and solidarity. She was born in Appamiut. She obtained a degree in early childhood education in Nuuk and was the manager of a daycare centre in Maniitsoq for many years. During that time she won a national prize for having created the best workplace in Greenland. She wanted to know the types of jobs there are in Maniitsoq today, and where the division of labour along gender lines is, where employment is concerned. Did women make their occupational choices because of their sex and the expectations thereof? Did men purposefully make a work choice because they are men? In particular, Boletta wanted to know what kinds of jobs Maniitsormiut women hold. Later on, as I attempted to find answers to her question, I augmented her question to figure out what kind of societal status employment held for the Maniitsormiut. What implications did the jobs have in the power structure of the various institutions for individuals who held the particular job? Did Danes or Greenlanders hold the jobs? And what were their positions, and what jobs did they hold? For Boletta’s question I sent out a questionnaire and interviewed administrative support staff members of the Maniitsoq municipality, and I also subsequently contacted Statistics Greenland.

Mimi was born in Maniitsoq to my parents and was later adopted by very loving parents. She is an educated school teacher and specializes in children with learning disabilities. She also became the vice-mayor of Maniitsoq. She asked a question about older, widowed women’s adverse life experiences from childhood. Mimi wanted the women to be allowed to tell their stories without much manipulation. She wanted to know what kind of strength they possessed in overcoming extreme adverse life obstacles. Mimi felt that a number of women who had gone through extraordinary life experiences seemed to have made their efforts without the help of present-day institutions offering services such as psychological help. As a group, we identified possible candidates for this particular question, following up on Mimi’s thought that the individuals to be investigated should be ones who seem not to have
given up hope in life. Each of these women would ideally be well-respected, active, and most of all sober and sensible members of society. They were seemingly “true to themselves.” What strengths did they rely on to avoid weaknesses such as the use of alcohol in their lives? And what lessons would they want to convey to individuals who may have to experience similar lives? Three strong individuals were interviewed; each of these interviews was extensive and emotionally taxing.

Vivi was born in Qaqortoq, was educated as a schoolteacher, and taught for many years in Maniitsoq. Her husband is the principal of the larger school in Maniitsoq, and she has become part of the community through her marriage and her children, who grew up Maniitsormiut. For this research endeavour she wanted to explore three-generational perceptions of entrance to womanhood. Considering what life has to offer in terms of employment, would these women regret their status and gender as women? Again, here we identified a number of three-generational families who resided in Maniitsoq during the field research period. This, we discovered, was not an easy task since the post-secondary education system is organized in few centres and young adults are sent away for their education. We were left with very few young adults to choose from and managed to interview three sets of three-generationally related females.

Biillaat is another woman who takes pride in being a child of original Maniitsoq parents. She has taken training in business management and managed an office by herself during the time of our field research. She wished to get to know how women in Maniitsoq contributed to the development of the town through their work at the fish processing plant. I interviewed fish factory officials in Maniitsoq — both males and females — and two women who worked as factory workers in earlier times.

Ilibooraq is a proud individual, having brought her children up as a single mother. Her husband had passed away, and at the time of the research period she worked in a daycare centre. Like mine, her parents moved from Appamiut. She was curious about the physically and psychologically abused women in Maniitsoq, and about the causes of abuse and what forms it took. She thought that individuals who have been physically abused must have a lot to tell. For Ilibooraq’s question I interviewed two municipal social workers and attempted to find some answers from the local Lutheran priest. Having no luck in meeting with the Justice of the Peace and the police officers, I resorted to available statistical information. Chapter 8 is devoted to Ilibooraq’s questions attempting to explore the reasons behind existing physical and psychological abuse in Maniitsoq.
During the summer months of 1998 I went back to Canada, stayed in contact with the group through the Internet, and consolidated the suggested questions. When we met again in Maniitsoq in September 1998, all questions were discussed individually, checked for their “potency” insofar as they were to be open-ended and to contribute to finding an answer to the question of kalaallit equality and kalaallit women’s societal positioning. At the end of each exercise the questions became accepted as tools to explore what “putative gender equality” really looks like in Maniitsoq. The understanding was that I as a researcher worked for the group. It was my responsibility to attempt to find some of the answers to their questions. I had previously also mentioned that we would possibly have to undergo an exercise of analyzing the raw data, and asked that we meet specifically for that. We concurred that the outcome might not necessarily fulfill accorded expectations, since the questions were open-ended, and that the requirements of an academic exercise could be different than their expectations. We agreed that our combined effort was based on contributions that each one of us could make, and the consequent discourse was to be based on good will and responsibility to ensure a sound outcome. I worked with the group as a researcher under their direction, support, and anticipation.

The women came to the research deeply curious about the project. One of the reasons for this might be that research — as most Maniitsormiut and in general most Greenlanders have experienced it — in most forms remains in the hands of people who are not part of the Maniitsoq community. To most individuals in Greenland, research activities seem distant, not relevant to most people’s lives, and decontextualized. The Maniitsormiut feeling about research and academic undertaking is not an exception across the Arctic. Indeed, it is not a given among other indigenous peoples that research holds benefits for them. Smith (1999), who is Maori, carried out research among the Maori of New Zealand. She writes that research is incongruent to the Maori way of thinking, and the results may not have contributed to the improvement of their lives or way of thinking.

The term “research” is translated in Greenlandic as mississuineq, which means ‘looking for something.’ During the post-World War II era, a medical ship named Misissuut went up and down the coast of Greenland checking and X-raying people for tuberculosis. Later on, this word was adopted to refer to the research activities of Western scientists. It relates to anything from the natural sciences to social sciences.

Although such institutions as the Ilinniarfissuaq (Teacher Training College) and Ilisimatusarfik (the University of Greenland) have been established, kalaallit have not until recently been directly involved in much research in Greenland, and the
terms used for professors or researchers, *ilisimatoorsuit*, connote apprehension and detachment, while at the same time the literal meaning of the term is “individuals with great knowledge.” Few Maniitsormiut individuals have participated in research and publication activities, but it is appropriate to mention the Petersen brothers, Robert and H.C. These two scholars were born and raised in Maniitsoq and eventually became the first professors at *Ilisimatusarfik*. Their youngest sister, Marianne, is an accomplished poet and author. Their oldest sister, Gudrun, has also published a book on plants and their use in Greenland. Their work does not necessarily deal directly with Maniitsormiut, but it is well appreciated as it has made a significant cultural contribution to all kalaallit. Robert is tremendously respected as a prolific scholar and has written a number of chapters about Maniitsoq and the area. He and his brother H.C. continue to publish while retired in Denmark, and their publications were useful and inspiring for my endeavour.

Let us now look at the town of Maniitsoq and its surrounding area.
Chapter One

The Maniitsoq Habitat and its People

The small town of Maniitsoq is both the setting for my research study and the home of my research partners. In many ways Maniitsoq is a typical community in Greenland. A small permanent settlement that dates from the early years of Danish colonization, Maniitsoq is peopled by Inuit who share a heritage with other Inuit peoples across the circumpolar area, but has developed in its own direction as a result of its history of colonization by the Danes. The climate of the area, its geography and history all contribute to the unique setting that is Maniitsoq.

Maniitsoq: The Settlement

The settlement of Maniitsoq was established in 1781 as a colonial centre, replacing the already established Sukkertoppen colony in Kangaamiut (Petersen 1982a; Lyberth 1982). The Danish name Sukkertoppen is derived from the Dutch zuickerbrood; the name is based on the sugar loaf-like mountains just north of Kangaamiut (Kreutzmann 1982).

Map 1: Latest map of the town of Maniitsoq. The airstrip is to the left.
The settlement was established to protect and advance the commercial interests of the Danes, who had observed the successful ongoing trade between the local people and foreign whalers from elsewhere in Europe (Gad 1984). According to Lyberth (1982), the Maniitsoq settlement was not the most suitable location. Fresh water needs could not be met and harbourage was not ideal. He speculated that individual politics played a major role in establishing a colony where Maniitsoq is located. During the time when the colonial centres were established, other, smaller “camps” such as Timerliit, Narsarmiut, and Ikerasak existed. By the 1950s these smaller areas had been depopulated, with Appamiut, Ikkamiut, and Kangerluarsuk existing until the early 1960s.

Interestingly, Faeroese fishermen were given permission in 1931 to create a small harbour just south of Maniitsoq, called Toqqusaq. This existed until a fire burned all the necessary equipment and housing in the 1960s.

The centre of Maniitsoq comprises a number of small islands and reefs connected by now rock-filled causeways. Jokingly, local Danes used to call Maniitsoq the “Venice of Greenland” because of these channels. The small fjords have also been filled in, and these areas have either become roads or houses, and buildings have been built there.

The town itself is a busy, productive arctic home for people working in the municipal offices, in three (two large and one small) retail stores, a fish processing plant, two elementary schools, four daycare centres, a home for the elderly, a “state-of-the-art” hospital, a hotel/bar, and a shipyard. There are a number of private enterprises, and one is never really free of the sound of some kind of mechanized equipment and rock blasting twenty-four hours a day. Populated by 3023 individuals (according to Greenland Statistics 1998), Maniitsoq is the main administrative centre for the municipality, Maniitsup Kommunea, and as such is responsible for three smaller settlements in the district, namely, Kangaamiut, located north of Maniitsoq, and Napasoq and Atammik to the south.

Today, Maniitsoq prides itself in being one of the first communities in Greenland to obtain an airstrip for service by regular small planes. Before the opening of the airport in 2000, the town relied on connections provided through helicopters, coastal passenger and cargo vessels, and privately owned smaller boats. The passenger and cargo ships are provided by the Royal Greenland Trade and are still well used. The helicopter services are also much in demand in most places in Greenland. There are no roads leading into Maniitsoq. The roads on which one can
drive are only for in-town purposes, but the number of boats owned by people in Maniitsoq and area speak to the extensive traffic outside the town by sea.

Maniitsoq has a typical arctic climate. The average temperature is 10°C during the warmest summer months. The town's island location off the mainland exposes it to the Davis Strait sea current system, which includes the Gulf Stream from the east coast of Mexico. The Gulf Stream is the reason that Maniitsoq is one of the few towns in Greenland where harbourage is possible all through the year. I have never seen land-fast ice in the Maniitsoq area, and the sea to the west, south, and north is open throughout the year. Right around the town itself the small fjords are covered, but due to the high and low tide, there are always bobbing ice pans. Maniitsoq is the northernmost town along the west-Greenland coast that does not have sled dogs. Farther north in Sisimiut, where the Gulf Stream does not reach, the land-fast ice is strong enough for Sisimiormiut to have dogs and dogsleds.

Precipitation in the Maniitsoq area is relatively high, and soft snow is frequent and plentiful enough for Maniitsormiut to enjoy downhill and cross-country skiing for a good part of the year. These are well-subscribed activities, and each year many Maniitsormiut compete in various ski competitions locally, nationally, and internationally. Recently snowmobiles have been introduced, and they are used for recreational purposes.

There are five names for the seasons of the year in Maniitsoq, namely, ukioq for the winter, upernassaq for pre-spring, upernaaq for spring, aasaq for summer, and ukiassaq for fall.

The landscape of the Maniitsoq area is striking. The terrain around the Maniitsoq municipality consists of high, majestic mountains rising directly from the ocean. The mountains to the east and the north are ice capped. With the reflection from the sea, this creates incredibly luminescent light all year round. The rocky nuna-toat, which stick up above the surface of glaciers descending from the ice cap, are actually the peaks of some lower coastal mountains. All the rock formations of Greenland are early variants of the igneous granitic/gneiss/feldspar pre-Cambrian period, which makes it the oldest rock in the world, though some metamorphics are also present. Concerning the physiography of the region, the very dramatic topography of the relatively recent synclinal/anticlinal patterns of the region is the result of earlier earthquake activity. The enormous extent and depth of the glaciation, which has only in the last century begun recession, explains the lack, so far, of significant geographical change due to isostatic response.
The town, of course, adapted to its geography. Houses and apartments are built on the granite rock, making visiting trips a strenuous exercise. At one time, my English-born husband was sufficiently challenged by Maniitsoq terrain as to comment that “one never simply goes in Maniitsoq, one either goes up or one goes down, mainly by the stairways!” Indeed, the town's Greenlandic name means “uneven,” a classically Inuktitut understatement. For a newcomer or visitor, the quantity of wooden stairs in Maniitsoq will be overwhelming; for example, as many as 150-plus stairs can be counted while climbing to the entrance of an apartment.

The existence of permafrost is to be expected in any arctic area, but because Maniitsoq terrain is consistently mountainous and rocky there are very few areas expansive enough to facilitate permafrost. The thin layer of peat moss is the regular “soil” one would see in most of the Maniitsoq area, hence the name of the region, Meqquitsoq, meaning ‘hairless/featherless region’ (pertaining to its lack of vegetation). Permafrost is ground material which stays at or below 0°C for at least two consecutive seasons; it may consist of soil, other organic matter, or bedrock. Where there is potential moisture in the spaces between the materials, it occurs in the form of ice lenses, veins, or layers. It is conditioned by climatic energy balance, particularly surficial air temperature and also plant coverage. In comparison, the Kangerlussuaq — Søndre Strøm Fjord to the north and the Nuuk Fjord to the south— support more vegetation. The latter was lush enough to sustain some principally agrarian Norse communities until the fifteenth century. However, despite this lack of vegetation, the landscape is well-appreciated by the inhabitants. Unlike those who use many dismissive terms to describe the Arctic — for example, “barren lands,” “Arctic wastelands,” “Arctic desert,” “harsh, unforgiving environment,” “bitter climate,” “terra nullius” (empty land), “terra incognita” (unknown land) — the inhabitants of Maniitsoq, like other Inuit, value their habitat. Characteristically, Inuit in the circumpolar region praise their land for its immense beauty and generosity. The sustaining land is seen as a forgiving, soul-enriching totality, which by virtue of its own integrity has allowed human existence.

This appreciation by the indigenous population of the area is shown in many well-known legends and songs around Greenland. One is about Inngik, ‘the pointed tip.’ Inngik is just north of Maniitsoq and is a prominent mountain. The east side of the mountain is oxidized ferrous granite or possibly even coarse pegmatite rock, and the story is that it is “shrouded red” because it has been stained by Parnuuna’s blood. Parnuuna and her husband Orlíina lived at the bottom of Inngik, and they were very devoted to one another. One day Orlíina was missing, and for some time Parnuuna climbed the mountain every day to locate him on the sea. One day her husband’s
empty, over-turned qajaq came over the horizon, and out of despair she jumped off the mountain tip. Her blood stained the mountainside. The tale is much celebrated through a long song, but Robert Petersen cautions that there were at least two variations to the story of the bloodstain on the mountain (pers. comm. 2005). One is a much romanticized version, in the form of a song composed in 1832 by a Danish missionary by the name of Knud Kjer, and the other story was about wife abuse, which led to Parnuuna’s suicide; this story was excluded from the regularly used song book.

Maniitsoq:
The Surrounding Area

Map 2: Map of Kalaallit Nunaat, the land of kalaallit. The Maniitsoq municipality is in blue.

Existing maps show many Greenlandic names widely scattered throughout the region. The names may indicate habitable or potential hunting locations, and some are literally named after events that have happened in the past. The remotest fjord and its bays, cliffs, rivers, islands, straits, and strands are named. Only the totally
barren, ever-moving upper reaches of the ice cap are unnamed, lacking any game or stable hunting base. Some avenues of access to the ice cap are named, mainly in connection with adventurous crossings from coast to coast in historical times. All the names in Greenlandic indicate a good knowledge of the environment. Some are mythic with associated stories attached to them, and others are named essentially for descriptive purposes. All are part of the extensive Greenlandic inherited mental mapping. It is the kalaallit geographic home, with strong emotional attachment. Maniitsormiut also express their feelings for the land in besottedly romantic country-and-Western-style music, and in other styles. Many Maniitsormiut praise the whole region for its immense beauty and the local diversity of renewable resources.

Map 3: Municipality of Maniitsoq.

Today, another way of discerning the appreciation of the surrounding environment is through the purpose of the numerous illuaqqat, small houses or “cottages” owned by local people. These are scattered buildings to which townspeople retire during the weekends and summer holidays to rejuvenate, literally to strengthen themselves for urban living by recapturing the sights, smells, and feeling underfoot of the homeland. As Nungak, (2005, 14) researching on the other side of the Davis Strait in Arctic Quebec, claims, “It anchors an individual’s sense of belonging to the land where life started…. People visit the Nunatuqaq to replenish and rejuvenate the spirit. To
touch and feel one’s core identity as an Inuk...." These small but restorative recreational houses, neatly kept, are usually located on islands around Maniitsoq and are well used during the summers but are mostly closed for the winters. Families may go to these “cottages” to get out of town to relax or carry out activities such as fishing, hunting, or berry picking. In most cases families procure fish in their summer huts, and many cure their local foods there for the winter. These houses have largely replaced the tent camping of earlier times. Any resident of Maniitsoq can apply to the municipal office to build one of these houses, and each applicant is required to provide the buildings as shelters and keep them open for any emergency purpose.

**Maniitsormiut:**
**The People of Maniitsoq**

In my travels over the years in the circumpolar region, I have observed that Inuit generally express their gratitude regarding their good fortune in being born on nuna, the habitat. As an Inuk, one usually identifies oneself as “of a certain area,” using the suffix “-mioq,” for example, Maniitsormioq, a person of Maniitsoq. This suffix “-mioq” implies a strong sense of affinity with the dialect-group-identified area of nuna; it is an acknowledgement of one’s own relation to the land of birth. Nuna is usually translated as ‘land,’ but it can also mean ‘total habitat,’ including the sea, the ice, the mountains, the air, the animals, fish, and even souls and memories of events and the people who lived in the past (Nuttall 1992). This kind of relationship usually gives individuals a strong sense of identity, a more abiding affinity with nuna than that which is indicated by, for example, the modern system of surnames. One bonds solidly with the nuna of birth. Until just recently, it used to be that the sense of belonging to the land of birth, which remained significant and very compelling, meant that few contested this by moving away from their region.

The Maniitsoq area was periodically occupied by various prehistoric peoples such as the Saqqaq (which is similar to pre-Dorset in Canada), beginning about 3000 BCE. The Thule people moved into the Maniitsoq area after 1000 CE and lived a quasi-nomadic, small-hunting-band, Eskimoic way of life, hunting mainly food from marine mammals and fish but also caribou and muskox. They were fine seagoers, and they brought the design, building, and use of the qajaq to the level of a fine art. Culturally they were the immediate predecessors of the modern Greenlanders, who became known to themselves as kalaallit only over the past 500 years, a relatively short period in the 5000-year history of occupancy of this land.
Inuit Nunaat

Inuit in Greenland are a sub-group in the general Inuit populations, and their habitat is typically an arctic region. Prior to colonization Inuit lived in small groups and had relatively little contact with other Inuit groups unless they lived in close proximity. Each group was self-sufficient, living without any state intervention and receiving no government assistance. Each individual owed his or her life to the family, the camp group, the community, and the good will of animals, spirits, and the land (Jessen Williamson 2000). However, over the last century and a half, Inuit populations have been steadily colonized by non-Inuit on the basis of the latter’s claims of rights to vast areas of what Dorais called “Inuit nunaat,” or “Inuit nunangat” (1990, 188), namely, the Inuit homeland (see Nuttall 1992). This development, for most of the colonial era, was achieved without any formal or even informal consultation with the original people inhabiting the area, and there was no conquest by warfare.

I remember speaking with several elderly men in Pangnirtung on Baffin Island, Canada, in the 1980s during my master’s thesis field research (Jessen Williamson 1992) and their expressions of utter disbelief regarding the Qallunaat — as Inuit call the non-Inuit — and their claim to the Inuit nunangat. They thought of the implication of Qallunaat responsibility for Inuit nunaat. The elderly men conveyed that neither they nor others had ever been approached by anyone directly, and they had been struck by the audacity of the Qallunaat since Inuit have never relinquished their affinity to nuna or any part of it. In the minds of these elderly Inuit men, the Qallunaat have not shown any evidence of knowing how to look after and nurture nuna, or of even understanding all the needed relationships and implied obligations to sustain life in the Arctic, not just for human beings, but equally important, for the animals. Moreover, the concept of “owning” land was earlier seen as implausible and disrespectful and actually absurd, a pretence as ridiculous to them as “owning” the air we breathe. The close relationships with nuna and the animals were precisely what the elderly Inuit men in Pangnirtung felt were sure to be severed by the Qallunaat claim to Inuit nunaat, thereby endangering nuna and the animals. The very least the elderly Inuit men could do was to reciprocate with nuna the right to exist freely and untrammelled, as the Inuit knew best how to achieve. The attainment of indigenous self-government was not the gradual development of people learning to “govern themselves”; such developments are modern instruments negotiated to continue ancient Inuit claims to remain the custodians and stewards of the arctic environments, and certainly to challenge Qallunaat ideological formulations and practices (Nuttall 1998a) that Inuit fear are detrimental to the intellect and spiritual and physical sustaining of nuna.
Variations of the word *nuna* are recognized and officially inscribed on new maps. Nunavut — ‘our collective land’ — is the latest, replacing the colonial Northwest Territories in Canada as the name for the Inuit *nunaat*. Inuit of Arctic Quebec named their original land Nunavik — ‘real homeland,’ while Inuit in Labrador call theirs Nunatsiaq — ‘good land.’ Kalaallit in Greenland call their homeland *Kalaallit Nunaat*, meaning ‘the land of kalaallit’ (see Nuttall 1992).

While nation states were not relevant to the Inuit traditional way of life, today Inuit live their lives designated as citizens of four nation states: Russia, the United States, Canada, and Denmark. The Greenland Inuit differ from Canadian, Alaskan, and Russian Inuit. As a result of the interaction with non-Inuit and new governance structures, the influence of colonial history, imposed and implemented laws, and the new culture that modern Inuit have taken as their way of life, the distinctions between the various groups may appear greater. For example, the kalaallit of west Greenland have become somewhat Danified in lifestyle and appear puzzling to other Inuit. The organization of their political structure and bureaucracy is Danified in comparison to the Inugpiaat of Alaska, who are quite vocally American in their approach to life today and their political organizations. Similarly, the Canadian Inuit have adopted southern Canadian ways, while Siberian Chukchi and Yupiit have had to adjust to many Russian traditions. As a result of colonization, each group has internalized nationalistic sentiments and to varying degrees is proud to be a member of the nation state. These feelings have particular significance in relation to the attainment of self-government within each nation state. After a century and more of colonization Inuit self-government is being gradually realized. Nuttall (1998c, 3) writes, “In the Arctic political movements to achieve self-determination and land claims settlements have been fuelled and propelled by the construction and assertion of ethnic and cultural identity and notions of aboriginality and ‘indigeneity’... they argue that... they have a unique and special relationship to the Arctic environment which is essential for social identity and cultural survival...”

In each nation state various dialectal and cultural groups reside. Below is a map of the circumpolar Arctic with the names of the indigenous populations illustrated without modern national borders.
Inuit: The Distinct People

The circumpolar area is a vast culturally and geographically diverse landmass and seascape. The area is not only populated by various groups of Inuit but also by many other groups of indigenous populations.

In the farthest western part of Inuit nunaaq, on the easternmost peninsula of Siberia, live the Chukchi and Yupiit (sing. Yupiaq). The latter also live in western and southern parts of Alaska (Kaplan 1990). Aleut or Alutiiq/Alutiiq (sing. Aleuteq) belong to Yupiaq people and according to Bergsland (1990, 177) the Alutiiq call themselves “Unangan... The name Aleut, which is of disputed origin, was introduced by Russian
fur traders who... conquered the Aleutian Islands...." They adopted the name Aluitit for themselves, and the name of the new state Alaska originates from the Alutiiq word for their communal houses (Bergsland 1990). Inupiat (sing. Inupiaq) live on the inland and coastal areas of their nunaqarfiat, their land of origin.

Inuivialuit occupy the now-named Mackenzie Delta and Beaufort Sea areas of the remaining Northwest Territories of Canada. In literature, they are known as the “Mackenzie Eskimos,” carrying with them the name of the eighteenth-century fur-trade developer who is actually not a significant character in the contemporary lives of Inuivialuit and the Dene of Canada. Each of these culturally disparate groups has its own term and name for the great river, which they travelled and explored extensively.

Farther east, named “Copper Eskimos” by recent non-Inuit explorers, Inuinnaat still cherish their distinctive identity and quality of life. All around Hudson Bay, Baffin Island, Quebec, and the Labrador coastal areas, the people call themselves simply Inuit — ‘the people.’ The northernmost people of the world are the Inughuit (“the great people”) of northwestern Greenland, known to outsiders as “Polar Eskimos.” Along the west Greenland coast people call themselves kalaallit, (sing. kalaaleq). The term kalaallit or kalaaleq is most likely a misnomer for “Karelen,” which was thought to be an extension of the north cape of Scandinavia. When in 1721 Hans Egede and his family arrived in the Nuuk area (presently the capital of Greenland), just south of Maniitsoq, his son Poul Egede wrote in his diary that the indigenous population called themselves “karálek, an indigenous Greenlander” (Petersen 1991, 12). Egede was told that the old Christians — possibly the Norse — who previously lived in the area, had given them that name. West Greenlanders may have adjusted “Kareler” to kalaaleq and kalaallit.

Iviin are the most eastern group of the Inuit, residing in eastern Greenland (Kleivan and Sonne 1985; Jessen Williamson 2000). Iik in the singular, the kalaallit call them tunumtiut, relating their location as being on the “back” of the island. Their language is distinctly different from other kalaallit on the island.

Contact:
Genetic Divergence, Surnames, and Changes to Culture
From about 1000 BC and onwards occasional Viking vessels passed by Maniitsoq, but there is so far no evidence of Viking settlement in the area. A mountain north of the town is said to hold the grave of one prominent Viking.
In the later years of the fifteenth century, Dutch, Portuguese, and British whalers ranged the coast, and in the nineteenth century the Greenland waters were a major hunting ground for the right whale, Greenland whale, and sperm whale hunters. Danish recolonization (following the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century demise of southern Greenland settlements) began in 1721 with the arrival of Norwegian Lutheran Hans Egede and his family. European men arrived in the Arctic as whalers, traders, fishermen, government employees, doctors, and scientists. The kalaallit are a people of Inuit descent whose genes integrate those of these European visitors. According to Gad (1984), the combination goes back to the seventeenth century.

On meeting Maniitsormiut the genetic divergence developed since the arrival of the Europeans is apparent. There are indeed generations of kalaallit in Maniitsoq and area who are blue/grey-eyed, light-skinned, light-haired, and even some red-haired, and the variable physical makeup does not in any way divide the community. Kalaaliussuseq — the state of being a Greenlander — does not include a physical description such as one would have seen in the anthropological literature of the last century. Furthermore, kalaaliussuseq includes the capacity to manipulate a lifestyle incorporating both ancient Inuit and modern European values. The future of kalaaliussuseq will ultimately involve more and more European values being adopted and adapted to life in Greenland.

Since the introduction of Christianity, families have received or obtained surnames. Petersen (1982) traced the frequently used surnames in Maniitsoq to the late 1800s and early 1900s. He found that the following are prominently used surnames: Bech, Berthelsen, Biilmann, Donadusen, Christiansen, Fountajn, Heilmann, Kaspersen, Karlsen, Kreutzmann, Larsen, Lyberth, Olsen, Petersen, Poulsen, Møller, Rosing, Skifte, Sommer, Villumsen. While these surnames were historically prominent, many others have been introduced as people have changed their locations over time. Many Olsen families, for example, reside in Sisimiut or elsewhere today.

As mentioned earlier, historically kalaallit identified strongly with their place of birth, like other groups, and stayed in their region because of this. However, today in Kalaallit Nunaat, mobility, mostly afforded through the education system and necessitated by the changing socio-economic system, has made it possible for individuals or families to go beyond this nuna-bound affinity and become members of a new area while maintaining their connection to the original group. There are indeed many new individuals and families who have become Maniitsormiut: some come from East Greenland, others from various communities in the north, or from southern Greenland. As in many other communities in Greenland the original
inhabitants of Maniitsoq are a minority within the present community. Other inhabitants come from the closed “outpost” camps around Maniitsoq, while still others have simply moved from the existing settlements and become part of the Maniitsormiut mosaic.

The majority of the population of Maniitsoq are of Inuit descent. Compared with places such as Nuuk, Ilulissat, and Sisimiut, there are relatively few Danes residing in Maniitsoq; there are even fewer individuals from elsewhere. At the time when this field research was undertaken there was one person from the Far East who had settled and married one of the local women. Compared with many other indigenous peoples around the world, most kalaallit live at a distance from non-Inuit centres where most of the non-Inuit are found. In all towns, Greenlanders live as a majority in their own communities, but as in most colonial locations — even in post-colonial times — the government administration is usually run by previous colonizers.

Maniitsoq is an exception in that regard, stated the director of the Maniitsup Kommunea, the municipal office. He relayed to me that a deliberate decision had been made during a financial crisis to administer needs locally and let Danish civil servants go. He felt that Maniitsoq had managed the local office well; indeed, it has become a national example of how to achieve beyond expectations.

Most of the Maniitsormiut live in apartment buildings, where living facilities compare to what is available in Europe. Maniitsoq was a prosperous town with a promising future during the expansion of the fisheries in the 1950s and 1960s. It was and remains one of the biggest centres in Greenland. People in Maniitsoq are very engaged with and unapologetic about their metropolitan living, locally enjoying the fruit of Danish standards of living since the early 1950s. Attempts to find a stereotypically traditional “Eskimo” lifestyle in Maniitsoq would result in disappointment.

**Kalaallisut:**

**Language and the Writing System**

The common language that most Maniitsormiut use is the Greenlandic language *kalaallisut*, which literally means ‘doing things in the way of the kalaallit.’ The language is what would be described as Eskimoic and is a dialect within the circumpolar Inuktitut language. The language is holophrastic or agglutinative, and for many who are not used to such a system the “one-word sentences” can be long. In my experience of travels to the Canadian and Alaskan Arctic, my Maniitsormiut
dialect is mostly transportable enough for me to get by conversationally. I have also learned to use terms from the Keewatin Inuktitut dialect in order to convert the Maniitsormioq dialect into understandable Canadian Inuktitut. This ability to communicate has opened many doors for me, specifically regarding fieldwork.

The Kalaallisut language is well utilized in all contexts in Maniitsoq, particularly as the majority of the civil servants in Maniitsoq’s municipal office are Greenlanders. In addition to the civil servants, the local Lutheran minister was born in Maniitsoq and grew up there. Many of the educated teachers in the elementary schools are locally raised individuals, as are the senior citizen home staff and many of the daycare centre workers. Non-kalaallisut speakers are now exceptions. In earlier times monolingual individuals had to have translators to address any administrative matters, and, for that matter, Danish civil servants could only operate with a translator at hand. The Danish and the Greenlandic languages are not mutually understandable; the two are as different from each other as Chinese and English.

In earlier times, the Maniitsormiut dialect was distinct in tone and with the strong “ss” sounds. It certainly remains distinct, even today where a pan-west-Greenlandic language is being developed to encourage nationhood building. This development may be similar to the BBC English or the Danish “Rigs-dansk” where local dialects are not well appreciated.

Since Greenland was a colony of Denmark until 1953, the official language of Greenland was Danish until the late 1970s. Kalaallisut succeeded the Danish language after the colonial era as the primary official language. At the same time, the use of Danish remains quite prevalent and among the younger generation fluency in Danish is not uncommon; in fact newly introduced ideas and items, such as køleskab for “fridge,” have remained Danish, and most numbers beyond twelve are in Danish. Many educated individuals speak mixing Greenlandic with single Danish terms. Such instances highlight new ideas and items, which have yet, if ever, to receive a kalaallisut term.

Since the arrival of the missionaries in the Arctic, a number of orthographies have been introduced to the Inuit around the circumpolar world. In the case of Greenland, written kalaallisut was introduced by German Moravian missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century. The Roman alphabet is used. Greenlandic orthography has undergone a number of improvements since the classical work of the scholarly Moravian missionary Samuel Kleinsmidt in the mid-nineteenth century, and is linguistically modern and phonemically sophisticated. The existing writing system
was developed by Professor Robert Petersen. I was one of the guinea pigs while the system was developed; various tests were given to us in our preparatory classes at the Aasiaat boarding school in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Written Greenlandic is well appreciated by the population, and kalaallit have easy access to many books in the form of poetry, commentary, and novels. There is a rich and ever-growing original literature in modern Greenlandic. Much European classical literature has been translated into kalaallisut: Hugo’s Les Miserables, for example, and books by George Orwell, Henrik Ibsen, Hans Christian Andersen, Astrid Lindgren, John Steinbeck, Alfred Hitchcock, and lately J.K. Rowling. Unlike many Inuktitut languages across North America, the kalaallisut language is a vibrant living language, orally as well as in written form, and it is seen as a socio-culturally viable language.

The Greenlandic language is used extensively in all new forms of electronic media, and Danish remains in use as the most common second language. One can watch television and listen to the radio in the kalaallisut language; Maniitsoq prides itself on having produced a number of talented music groups, popular both locally and nationally, since the early days of modern music. Today, good-quality CDs are produced in quantity every year, available in kalaallisut rap, reggae, hip hop, rock and roll, country and western, blues, and classical genres. These talented artists make local community hall dances possible.

Many of the younger people speak English comfortably. It is introduced through the schooling system as a third or fourth language. English is the lingua franca for international conference purposes and the most effective language for communicating with other Inuit groups to the west. It is in that context that kalaallisut sounds strange, as other Inuit across the Davis Strait have adopted English terms and the English numbering system while the kalaallit use the Danish. While English is a popular language to learn, French, German, and Russian are also well known. It is not uncommon to encounter kalaallit who are more than trilingual, and joy in being multilingual is often expressed among “ambitious” Greenlanders.

The Greenlandic newspaper Atuagagdliutit was one of the earliest regularly published newspapers in the world, and pride is taken in its having been the first publication in the world to publish coloured pictures. The second newspaper is Sermitsiaq, which was originally a Nuuk local newspaper. The two are widely read and available for Maniitsoq residents. Some Danish newspapers and magazines are freely available in the shops, and many new recipes, particularly for coffee cakes and buns, are sought after in these magazines.
Kalaalimerngit:  
The Local Sustenance

As I mentioned earlier, Maniitsoq is an “open-sea” area; that is, the sea does not freeze during the winter months and thus allows for continuous hunting and fishing. The area is a seasonal home to a number of large sea mammals. The minke whale, which frequents the waters around the Maniitsoq area, was the preferred whale to hunt during my childhood and adulthood. As a child I ate very little narwhal or beluga, as these were hunted more in the northern waters. I gathered from my paternal grandmother that much beluga hunting was done in Appamiut, and this was confirmed by Peter Egede (1982). During historical times, other great whales frequented Maniitsoq and the surrounding waters, and the area was well known by the European and American whalers. The small harbour porpoise was regularly hunted and welcomed as a change of diet. The customary food is seal, which is hunted year round in Maniitsoq and the area. The area is rarely visited by polar bears, due to the absence of land-fast ice and icebergs.

Fish are abundant around Maniitsoq, in terms of both quantity and variety of species. Cod once provided much economic sustenance to the town as well as to the smaller communities around Maniitsoq. Other fish such as halibut, small Arctic char, rock fish, Atlantic salmon, and small capelin frequent the waters around the settlement and have provided food for the community whether dried, smoked, frozen, or fresh. These are much celebrated foods even today. Fishing on a commercial scale is a relatively “new” activity in terms of the hunting-based Inuit way of life. Since colonization the Maniitsoq and area population has been introduced to commercial whaling, and it is only since the demise of the great whales that commercial fishing has been more recently introduced to the local people. Maniitsoq was in that sense a very promising location, its waters well populated with whales and later found to be rich in cod. Today, the decline of the whale populations in Atlantic waters makes it virtually impossible to hunt great whales, and any whaling of any species is strictly supervised by the International Whaling Commission and rigorously regulated by the Home Rule Government (Caulfield 1997). Shrimp trawling has in the last three decades replaced commercial cod fishing, and lately snow crab fishing has become a lucrative activity of local fishers.

Sea fowl are also plentiful in the area, and a number of cliffs are home for large numbers and varieties of sea birds. Eider ducks, murre, Arctic terns, seagulls, geese, and ducks make up the diversity of bird-meat food to be had in the area. Some of these birds’ eggs provide excitement and pleasure in the spring, and rather than collecting eggs on the cliff sites as previously done, the non-protected birds’ eggs
on islands are sought after. I have taken part in collecting seagull eggs, which are large and rich. Ptarmigans are also available, but since Maniitsoq is on an island they are pursued only rarely. They are much treasured and usually eaten as a delicacy – raw or braised in butter. Ravens and eagles are common sights in the Maniitsoq area. The latter are not eaten.

Maniitsoq is located between two extensive fjords, Kangerlussuaq (Søndre Strøm Fjord) to the north and Isortoq (Søndre Isortoq) to the south. These two fjord systems are homes for the local wild caribou and have provided these caribou for all the communities of the Maniitsoq area. During my childhood nearly all the Kangaamiut people went into the Søndre Strøm Fjord to hunt caribou. Some families stayed at length, drying the meat for the winter. Both fjords are also popular areas for fishing the relatively small Arctic char. Between 1962 and 1964 (Petersen 1991), muskox were transplanted from East Greenland to Søndre Strøm Fjord. This move has been very successful insofar as local people are able to hunt the muskox, and the population of muskox seems to be able to sustain such a hunt. During the month of August berry picking takes place. In the Maniitsoq area there are crowberries and to a lesser extent blueberries; cranberries are very rare treats and can only be found deep in the fjords in isolated areas. Arctic hare can also be found in the surrounding area.

As in most towns in Greenland, there is a “fresh produce” market — kalaalimineerniarfik — much frequented by the local population. Depending on the season one might find fresh seal meat, salt-water fowl, caribou or muskox meat, common harbour porpoise, minke whale, berries, and different kinds of fish. During my childhood there was rarely dried fish or meat in regular grocery shops, but these are now available in the kalaalimineerniarfik as well as in the regular grocery shops.

In reference to the original meaning of “Eskimo” (‘raw meat eaters’), kalaallit are no exception to Inuit across the Arctic who continue to take great pleasure in eating raw meat in various manifestations. This extends mostly to animals, fish, or birds of the Far North, and preferably to those that have not been physically or chemically manipulated by human beings (Jessen Williamson 1992). As far as the Inuit of the Arctic are concerned, the animals residing in the Arctic are self-determining free beings that fully enjoy a good life and provide the Inuit with the means of living and enrichment of their souls. Their presence materializes a mutual relationship with the natural world, and this relationship has been well connected to the Inuit identity. This relationship to the animals and their habitat is one that has captured the imagination of various scientists studying Inuit around the circumpolar
region. In his dissertation about Greenland Inuit–kalaallit hunting practices in Sisimiut, Sejersen (1998, 8) asserts that the local food — the *kalaalimerngit* — “is a powerful vehicle for the social relations and identification through production, preparation, sharing and consumption. Food is used to mark a sense of community and it is used to accentuate sociocultural and political borders.” Sejersen’s statement is well supported by Pars, Osler, and Bjerregaard (2000) in their article on traditional and imported food in Greenland.

Among the Canadian Inuit, the same food is called *Inuksiiutit*. Local arctic food is interlinked with the identity of people and so is called *Inuksiuit*: ‘the staple food of the Inuit.’ Kalaallit call their food *kalaalimerngit*, meaning ‘small pieces of kalaaleq.’ In many ways the two descriptions refer to becoming *Inuk* or *kalaaleq*, and naming the food that way just refers to the total human reliance on it. The food is the staple sustenance and sustains the Inuit with symbolic, physical (Sejersen 1998), emotional, and spiritual identity (Jessen Williamson 2000).

Not all meat is eaten raw. *Kalaalimerngit* is usually a processed food. Most of it is nowadays boiled as a broth with short rice and onions, and called *suaasat*. Other food is frozen, as *quaq*, and sometimes eaten like that. Other processing of food is undertaken by salting (*tarajortigaq*), by smoking (*puujuugaq*), or by drying (*panertoq* or *nikku* or *pissit*, depending on the dialect). Yet other food is eaten as matured *tipittuliaq* or *mikiarsigaq*. Today, a lot of the local food is plainly fried in a pan (*siataq*) or roasted in the oven or just boiled in salted water. Among women and men in Greenland, the interest in local food and local food preparations has taken the form of “updating” (*nutarsarlugu*). Instead of relying on traditional food preparation, European or Asian ways of cooking have become very popular, including that of barbecuing.

Since the Second World War, Inuit in the circumpolar region have learned about other peoples around the world, and kalaallit are no exception. Maniitsormiut, like any other Inuit in the Arctic, deeply appreciate the fact that they enjoy life away from warfare, political unrest, and the great human suffering that other peoples on the globe are experiencing. They cherish a quality of life that includes their being able to drink water directly from free-flowing waters that are not chemically treated for human consumption and to eat non-manipulated food derived from non-domesticated fish, birds, and animals. They realize these benefits are difficult if not impossible to attain in many other areas of the world, and many are greatly concerned about the recently developing issue of contaminated food in the Arctic. Many Maniitsormiut speak freely about their concern and are aware of the choices they
have to make. Regardless of the pollution issue, it is possible for individuals and individual households to make food choices, since total reliance on the local food is not financially viable for some, and the choice to eat European-originated food is at times made deliberately.

Kalaallit: Danification of Greenland Inuit

Next to the culture of the kalaallit, whose genes have been extensively and continue to be mixed with non-Inuit genes, the most powerfully pervasive culture in Greenland is Danish, essentially those aspects of the Danish way of life that have been introduced since Hans Egede’s arrival in 1721. As mentioned earlier, Qallunaat is the term kalaallit and the Canadian Inuit use in reference to “white people.” Interestingly, both Canadian Inuit and kalaallit use exactly the same word to describe their respective colonizers: in Greenland the word usually refers to Danes while in Canada it refers to southern Canadians or any non-Inuit. While Qallunaat denotes “white people” it does not in any way refer to colour. In many interpretations the word qallunaaq refers to eyebrows; at least, the root of the word qallu means ‘eyebrow.’ I am not certain if indeed the eyebrows were the reason for this term; nevertheless, the Arctic has been “explored” by Qallunaat — Western Europeans and North Americans — for the last 500 years or so, and it is possible that their strange expressions and strained appearance prompted their name.

In the first place, travel to the Arctic seas and lands by Qallunaat was in the form of attempts to reach “through the mystical Straits of Anián” (Robert G. Williamson, pers. comm. 2000; Caulfield 1997), the lands of spices and silks: China, Japan, India, and surrounding areas. But often they got lost in the Arctic and spent much time looking for each other. It is no wonder their brows furrowed as they realized the slim possibility of attaining their goal of finding the Northwest Passage. Many of the Arctic “explorers’” accounts of their voyages through the Arctic seas tell of constant enormous hardships, causing, no doubt, a lot of unrestrained frowns, and the bushing and brushing of eyebrows in all directions. Some were undoubtedly frowns of determination or expressions calculated to keep discipline among their suffering crewmen. Hence, the name Qallunaat: people with discernible eyebrows. According to Robert G. Williamson (pers. comm. 2000), one language expert believes that the term Qallunniat comes from a trade fabric the early Europeans brought, called calico, which eventually evolved into Qallunaaq.
When trading was introduced, kalaallit acquired *qallunaamerngit* (little pieces of *Qallunaat*): goods ranging from beads, buttons, needles, cloth, materials, guns and ammunition to sugar, flour, tea, and coffee. The term may in fact refer to ‘colonial goods.’ Caulfield (1997, 29) claims, “Greenlanders preferred goods like shirts, gloves, knives, fishhooks, and specially developed replicas of the Inuit women’s knife, the ulu.” *Qallunniat* was used during my early childhood in reference to people going from outpost camps to the colonial settlement to shop. *Qallunniat* is reminiscent of terms for action-oriented activities such as fishing for char (*eqalliat*) or hunting for caribou (*tuttunniat*). Among the kalaallit Danish food is called *qallunaamineq* and is appreciated in contrast to the food obtained locally, *kalaalimineq*.

The Norsemen, who occupied two fjord areas on southern Greenland’s west coast for two centuries, left evidence of interaction between them and the indigenous people who migrated from farther north toward the end of the Norwegians’ first century of settlement. In the Icelandic Sagas of the Vikings, the Greenland Norse mention their interactions with the Skrællinger (peelings). At the same time the Inuit developed vivid stories about their interactions with the *Qallunaatsiaat* (the incipient *Qallunaat*). These and a few archaeological examples from that time tell of social interactions, but it seems that neither of the two very different cultural groups borrowed from one another to make cultural changes. The Norse strongly held to their own cultural stance, as did the Inuit.

Thus it is that when the Norwegian-Danish missionary Hans Egede arrived in Nuuk fjord bent on firmly restoring the embrace of Christendom to the long-neglected and presumably backsliding Viking survivors of the Greenland settlement, there was little Norse cultural presence to be found. There were no Scandinavian settlers left to be rescued from a pagan cultural twilight, and so Egede and his sons Niels and Poul redirected their zeal toward the resident Inuit. The Egedes applied themselves assiduously to learning the indigenous language, and in particular Niels and Poul excelled and learned to speak the Greenlandic language fluently. Their arrival in Greenland initiated the establishment of the settlements up and down the western coast of Greenland. It is in the context of establishing trade and the Lutheran mission that Maniitsoq was created in 1781.

Maniitsoq history is not much different than that of other “colonies,” as the settlements are called in Danish literature. It is, in that sense, a typical Greenlandic community consisting of Inuit descendants strongly linked to the Danish systems of social and political organization. Greenland did become a colony of Denmark, whose intentions were much more concerned with the expansion of land and resource
ownership than with purposefully colonizing the people. I have often heard Danes comparing their pattern of colonization to other European colonization of indigenous peoples around the world. Many such Danes are convinced that their relationship with the Greenlandic population consists of protecting the interests of the kalaallit from the invidious greed of the “white man.” Greenland was a “closed colony” where the import and export trade was under total monopolistic control until 1953. Despite the fact that Greenland is a post-colonial entity within the greater kingdom of Denmark, monopolistic and controlling systems remain very strong.

During the Second World War, the German Nazis occupied Denmark, and the Danes allowed the Greenlandic authorities to negotiate with the United States for protection from invasion. The Second World War years brought many new influences, and consequently new developments were requested from the Greenlandic Councils. Greenland became an open country in 1953, whereby people were allowed into Greenland without having to obtain special permission. At that time, Greenland ceased to have colony status.

As part of decolonization, new policies were put forth, and the depopulation of the smaller settlements became part of the history of the post-colonial Danish government. The koncentrationspolitik (concentration policy) was carried out during the latter part of the 1950s and early 1960s. The policy was announced as an attempt to improve living conditions by streamlining government services to deliver economic and educational opportunities and health services. It was a convenient way to centralize regional administration. The policy also encouraged even stronger collaboration between the major powers in the land other than the Copenhagen-based Danish and the Greenland Council.

Large concrete multi-storey apartment blocks were built. As Erngaard (1972, 184) wrote, “100 million dollars worth of Danicization is being sent across the Atlantic Ocean every year, equivalent to well over 10,000 dollars annually per household.” He felt that the “developments were quick… Some thought too quick. The Greenlanders could not keep the pace. They became the spectators. Passive.”

Along with the intensive construction came social and economic changes, some well-liked by the local population and others much criticized. An assimilationist school system was put in place through which kalaallit school children were given the opportunity to become competent in the Danish language and thinking. Political parties were formed and evolved rapidly over the years and, today, kalaallit have enjoyed political self-government for more than twenty years. They take great pride
in having been one of the first indigenous people around the world to gain control of state administration from colonial powers. Societal changes in Greenland have been great in that a hunting-based Inuit society has essentially changed to a Westernized society.

As I furthered my preparations to return to Maniitsoq, I was conscious of these influences of geography, history, climate, and culture that have shaped and changed Maniitsormiut. The uniquely mixed culture of Inuit and non-Inuit that has developed there made it an ideal setting for my research, to which I now turn.
Chapter Two

The Inuit Egalitarian Principal:
The Notion of Genderlessness

As children in southwestern Greenland, when it was stormy, we used to go to the seashore and “invoke” mallip inua, ‘the essence of the sea wave.’ Just as the wave stopped rising and began to ebb, gathering all its strength with a pause not unlike the pause of breathing in, we challenged:

- mallinngooq inua — The essence of the sea wave
- qarasartoriartorli! — To come and eat brain!
- Suup qarasaanik? — Brain? Of what kind?
- inuup qarasaanik — Human kind of brain.
- Qarasartoriartorli — Come and eat brain.

We would then run up the rocky shore just before the wave exploded its force on the rocks behind us. The inua is tantalizing and wondrous, and in this case the mallip inua, the essence of the sea wave, could, we believed, indeed eat our brains. The complete interaction between nature’s essence and our own also demonstrates the all-encompassing life forces within us. These life forces or “the creative force” are fundamental to all life. They are just one of many manifestations of pinngortitaq — the creation — the foundation of everything, as I will show in more depth later. The Yupiaq scholar Kawagley (1993, 18) explains, “The creative force as manifested is more profound and powerful than anything the human being can do, because in it is the very essence of all things... all creatures, including humans are born equal. This does not imply that all functions or jobs of the creatures are equal, but holds that each does its job equally well.” In thinking about the Inuit worldview and struggling to find a framework for understanding Inuit gender relations, I recalled this image from my childhood. It led me to the notion of genderlessness.

As I searched for a framework, I kept in mind the assumptions that underlie much of the work that has been carried out by Western scholars. Western gender relation studies assume the inequality of men and women. This thought, however, does not necessarily transcend cultural boundaries. As an Inuk I wanted to explain how the Inuit value the individual before making gender distinctions; as well I wanted to assert that this view of inequality between men and women is inaccurate in Inuit society.
It is certainly true that the Inuit are known to have exercised strong division of roles and responsibilities by gender by creating spheres for individuals according to sex. Inuit men and Inuit women have explored these separate spheres, and in their social organization they have strongly adhered to them. Much of Inuit life involves actions that are dictated by sex – some of it dealing with incest taboos (Robert Petersen, pers. comm. 2005). There have been extensive descriptions of these gender-related spheres and the responsibilities and tasks accorded them, but very few commentators have understood the basic philosophical foundation. Bodenhorn (1990), however, understood the deep-seated division of these spheres to be a reciprocal relationship between men and women. She discovered that Inugpial men in Alaska took on responsibilities on behalf of their women, while the same was true for women. In other words, role reversal was not uncommon. This role reversal was not just in relation to physical tasks but included metaphysical aspects. I will explore this further after I develop the idea of genderlessness.

**The Notion of Genderlessness: Inuit Egalitarian Formulations**

The notion of genderlessness, while new, is based on traditional Inuit perspectives of egalitarian social norms that I have observed and participated in. Inuit see themselves as first and foremost human beings: the term *Inuk* refers to a human being with no gender; *Inuit* is the plural form. In other words, gender is secondary to being a human being while yet remaining a vitally important part of being human. In introducing the concept of genderlessness, I want my work to stimulate debate. Scholars such as Saladin d’Anglure and other Westerners have introduced terms such as “third gender” or tried to impose Western gender conventions in relation to Inuit sexual categorizations. To me, however, the notion of genderlessness is a more appropriate account of egalitarian thinking and ideas in Inuit society.

In what follows I aim to bring to light the philosophical qualities of genderlessness, informed by academic research. I hope to achieve an appreciation of gender relations that is enlightened by a philosophy encompassing egalitarian principles not exclusive to human beings but across all creation. First, however, we need to establish the foundation upon which the development of genderlessness occurs. The Inuit have expressed this in many aspects of their lives. I have chosen just three examples of how this is made manifest: first, through the Inuit understanding of intellect and the fact that the Inuit understand it to be a life force; it cannot be divided by sex, nor is it solely a human quality. The second example is through Inuit names, which, before the introduction of Christianity, were not gender specific. The third example
addresses the language structure of the Inuit, where gender is omitted in sentences and there is no distinction between “he” or “she.” Later we will come to understand that genderlessness is a good notion. Building upon it, I will develop another important epistemological model to explain more fully the dynamics of Inuit, including kalaallit, gender relations.

Pinngortitaq: The Foundation for a Genderless Life
Since the beginnings of the women’s liberation movement, a growing body of literature has dealt particularly with issues of special concern to women. While at the outset admitting that I do see the work of feminism to be a valid endeavour, I believe that much more effort is needed before women in Western societies can actually enjoy equal treatment in the division of societal power and prestige. However, I believe that the Western discourse on equality between male and female is too human-focused; it thereby perpetuates human ecology to the great disadvantage of other parts of creation.

With the feminist movement gender has received paramount attention. It is taken for granted as a primary criterion in the way parents bring up their children, from the typical colours chosen to represent males and females (blue and pink, respectively) to gendered expectations. Mackie (1987, i) says, “Gender continues to be an axis of both individual identity and social organization”; it is regarded as a socially salient factor.

Much like Janice Acoose (1995), a Cree scholar in Saskatchewan, I grew up in an indigenous community taking no particular note of an alleged male superiority. This observation was also expressed by one of my informants during my master’s thesis fieldwork in Pangnirtung, Nunavut, in the late 1980s. One of my interviewees, an Inuk woman, expressed her great displeasure at the way mainstream Canadians are, according to her perception, forcing gender issues “down the throats of Inuit women.” She strongly defied Western European women’s calls for egalitarian formulations to be applied to the position of Inuit women, as she felt that implied that Inuit women suffer lesser status than their male counterparts (Jessen Williamson 1992). I was much intrigued by Mackie’s (1987, ii) idea of a “gender-blind society,” and I wondered if the Inuit notion of genderlessness might qualify as part of an answer to her observation.
Using aspects of linguistics that indicate that languages are social constructs of knowledge, I understood that by analyzing the structure of any language, I might gain insight into the ways in which worldviews are expressed. I was reassured by the statement of Dorais, the Canadian Inuktitut-speaking linguist, that “[m]ost anthropologists, sociologists and linguists agree that language reflects the culture of the speaker. Vocabulary, in particular, may be considered a translation of the technical, social and philosophical knowledge shared by all members of a specific community” (1990, 204).

I began to examine how the Inuit understand the way in which the world came into being using existing terminology. I realized the significance of the word that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter with my story of the waves, pinngortitaq — ‘the creation’. Its significance grew when I applied MacDonald’s (1998, 202) statement, in combination with Dorais’ above, that “language played a primordial part in expressing traditional philosophy and preserving social order.”

In current usage, pinngortitaq is used in reference to the biblical creation story among the kalaallit. It resonates with the observation that “Christian ideology has almost completely replaced [the] Aboriginal worldview” (Dorais 1990, 208). I think it is important to note the “almost” in this quotation, because it grants the possibility of further elaboration. As the term pinngortitaq exists today, it means the environment, the habitat, or the totality of the world or creation perceived in the context of the universe. Christian missionaries adopted indigenous terms already in use to convey particular Christian religious teachings. The missionary use of the kalaallisut language, the Greenland Inuit language, was also not an exception to missionary methods elsewhere in the world. In a significant article, Christian Berthelsen (1990), a kalaaleq, discusses aspects of social change in Greenland. In particular, he writes about the effect of foreigners on the kalaallisut language and confirmed my thoughts on exterior influences: “Foreign missionaries had to learn the language and entirely new concepts were introduced into the language in connection with the transition to the new religion” (334). Berthelsen discusses the kalaallisut language and foreign impact in terms of “far-reaching consequences for its further development.”

Rather than impose Western or foreign influence on the native language, however, I am able to explore in kalaallisut, my native tongue, the existing usages of various words to appreciate how these terms might illuminate the “traditional philosophy and preserving social order” that Dorais (1990, 202) discussed in his article about the Canadian Inuktitut language. How might individual terms animate the philosophical
foundations of social order? It should be noted that the Inuktitut language, and therefore no less the kalaallisut range of dialects, is a compound-word-building, holophrastic language. A holophrastic language expresses complex ideas in a single word. As I will explain further when we come to the section on the Inuit language, in Inuktitut words are built of base parts with the addition of infixes and suffixes. While the language is very different from Indo-European languages, it has strength, beauty, and adaptability. “Post-base agglutination creates the potential for almost all infinite abstraction, and both descriptive and ideational refinement of expression. The creative versatility of this language, because of its combination of flexibility and capacity for exacting specificity, makes it very satisfying to use philosophically,” claims an Inuktitut-speaking anthropologist (Robert G. Williamson, pers. comm. 2000).

I will illustrate this by looking at pinngortitaq. Breaking down the word, the root pi- means ‘to realize / to objectify’ in English; nngor- (infix) means ‘making of,’ and -titaq (suffix) means ‘the process of becoming’ or ‘happenstance.’ The term refers to an objectification of happenstance, and conveys the kalaallit perception that the world has spontaneously come into existence. Rather than believing in human-like gods, Inuit and kalaallit believe in non-anthropomorphic, genderless, pure-spirit forces — anersaat — that create life and life forms (Fitzhugh and Kaplan 1982; Burch and Foreman 1988; Briggs 1970; Dorais 1990). The word pinngortitaq may not have been commonly used in pre-Christian times but became a familiar term as Christianity was adopted by the kalaallit.

Individuals who have written about Inuit religion or spirituality have rarely pursued the question, in referring to life forces, “forces of what?” The word pinngortitaq suggests to me, a native speaker, that during this spontaneous creation of the world the life forces (anersaat) came together. The Inuit notion of life forces has enjoyed a great deal of attention in the academic literature but has never truly been “grounded.” I argue that the grounding, therefore, of these life forces is that “they” came together and therefore work in conjunction. While a number of intriguing life forces exist, for the purpose of asserting the notion of genderlessness I will introduce and discuss only three here. For this framework, Inuit intellect (sila), Inuit names (aqqi), and the Inuktitut language (oqaatsit) will illustrate the notion of genderlessness among the Inuit, and they apply to the kalaallit as well.

While their integration may have been coincidental, each of these forces is life ordaining, and in combination the creative possibilities are enormous and limitless. The Inuit believe that all things in this world are manifestations of these integrated,
life-ordaining forces. Each being, regardless of gender and whether animate or inanimate, is to be respected for its own engagement of these forces.

The pinngortitaq concept conveys the idea of order, which has largely eluded many previous researchers. In this concept any attempt to create some other form of order — hierarchical, linear, causal, evolutionary, and human versus animal, rock versus sea, animate versus inanimate, male versus female — is virtually meaningless. All beings, whatever they are and irrespective of gender — humans, animals, insects, rocks — and however they appear, are to be respected for their own qualities, as each is the epitome of the life-ordaining forces the Inuit call inua, meaning ‘the essence of all objects.’

I suggest that this essence refers to the manifestation of an object or subject from the time of the happenstance of creation, when the qualities of pinngortitaq became innate. Seeing that this essence and these life forces are fundamental to all life and being on earth and are distributed equally, as human beings we cannot presume to be more or less than any object or being around us. Just as a piece of rock or a wave is a manifestation of the actualization of this pinngortitaq, as human beings we are mere human manifestations of that objectification, just one manifestation among many.

Thus, rather than seeing the human being as the apex of achievement, Inuit across the Arctic see themselves as part of creation, participating in the system of all things in the universe. As part of that enlightenment Inuit also realized how human beings depend on the well-being of their surroundings. As mentioned earlier, in the minds of the Inuit, nurturing a relationship with nuna, not just physically but in an inherently spiritual way, is of the utmost importance. The Inuit believe that nuna and animals not only possess immortal souls and awareness, as Alaskan scholar Fienup-Riordan (1983) claims, but that their souls and awareness are equal to those of a human being. Her statement is reminiscent of the notion of the non-human person, but Inuit farther east believe that nuna and the animals also possess a deeper and more qualified wisdom, sīla, than human beings have. Kawagley affirms this, saying that the “creative force as manifested is more profound and powerful than anything the human being can do” (1993, 18). So, rather than animals being non-human persons, their quality goes beyond human and therefore evokes respect from human beings. Indeed, if animals are mere equals to human beings, why would the traditional Inuit seek knowledge and spirit helpers through animal qualities?
This deeper and more qualified wisdom of the land and animals is at times beyond human comprehension. The life of human beings on nuna is possible because of the courtesy extended by nuna and the animals. This is much appreciated by the Inuit and animates and validates the practice of gift-giving and reciprocal relationships to which Nuttall (1998c) refers. Indeed, the celebrations of life among the Inuit display “an elaborate system of beliefs and moral codes [which] act to regulate the complexity of relationships between people, animals, the environment and the spirits (Nuttall 1998c, 84). It is because of this understanding that the Inuit feel their environment is rich and continues to nurture the existence of humans through their relationship with the rest of the world, which transcends and is irrespective of gender.

It is interesting to note that Croll and Parkin (1992, 15) suggest “coping” as having become “a key word in describing indigenous science.” My earlier description of the Inuit relationship to the land and animals supports such speculation. Here, it is important to clarify that the “coping” of the Inuit is not in reference to living in a “harsh, unforgiving” environment, a phrase with which the Arctic has been commonly stereotyped. Here, coping refers to the fact that Inuit must deal with the indifference of nuna and animals toward human existence.

While researching Inuit original creation stories, I came upon Edna Ahgeak MacLean’s writing. MacLean is an Inupiaq, an Alaskan Eskimo, culturally affiliated with the kalaallisit. As a linguistics scholar she analyzed the term for sun, siqiniq (note that there is a difference in spelling because of a difference in dialects; in the kalaallisut language it would be spelled seqineq), much in the same way as I have explored the term pinngortitaq. She explains siqineq:

The stem of word is “siqi-” which in English means “to splatter, to splash outwards” and the ending of the word “-niq”… indicates the result or end product of an activity…. According to the Inupiaq legend there was darkness before there was light. This was the time when humans did not age. The Raven-Spirit… secured the land and the source of light from an old man and his wife and daughter. Light appeared only after the Raven-Spirit stole the source of light from them. As he was fleeing, the Raven-Spirit dropped the source of light which then exploded and dispersed units of light throughout existence […] The Inupiaq word for sun, siqiniq, and the legend of the Raven-Spirit accidentally dropping the source of light which then exploded supports the concept of the big-bang theory of the origin of the universe in which the sun is only one of many. (MacLean 1990, 168–69)
MacLean does not expound on the way in which the Inupiaq notion of the explosion supports the big bang theory, but the explosion, or spontaneous creation, evokes the similarities. The big bang theory is a relatively recent Western theory about the origin of the universe. The Inuit concept of pinngortitaq has been developed over the last 4000 years (Wenzel 1991), in a manner quite different from the Western practices of taking measurements and making calculations.

It is out of reverence for pinngortitaq that the Inuit have arranged their social lives, and I believe that pinngortitaq is the very foundation for life forces, whose qualities are genderless. Now we will see how the notion of genderlessness is also omnipresent through Inuit silaat, the intellect of the Inuit.

Genderless Intellect:
Inuit Silaat
Through understanding the concept of pinngortitaq, one can appreciate Inuit cosmological perceptions. The story of the sun (siqiniq) as analyzed by MacLean is just one of many examples that relate to silarsuaq, the universe, or the source of all intellect. It exemplifies Dorais’ statement that “[s]pecialized words and semantic categories constitute very powerful intellectual tools, [and] add another dimension to the material culture and social rules” (1990, 204). His statement allows for exploring other terms related to silarsuaq. Sila is the root of the word, which Inuit use to refer to air, weather, intellect, knowledge, integratedness, wisdom, and the external. In writing about Inuit astronomy and connecting silarsuaq as “an all-encompassing sense,” MacDonald (1998, 35) describes sila as “an indicator of environment, an indicator of locality, and indicator of intelligence or spirit.” He quotes Spalding, who correlates sila and silarsuaq: “In a word like [silarsuaq]... we have a synthesis, one might say, of all these: that which supports life and physical being, that which defines horizons and limits, that which regulates and clarifies mind and spirit. In this concept, one feels a unity of microcosm and macrocosm, near and far, inner and outer, that is one living physical and spiritual unity of being. These are the outlooks and values of all peoples who are wise from their contact with the air, earth and water” (1972, 102, quoted in MacDonald 1998, 35).

I describe sila as a “force that gives all the living beings air to breathe, and intelligence. With every breath people and animals take, air becomes transformed into energy to be used for intelligence, because as much as there is no life without air, without it there is no intelligence either” (Jessen Williamson 1992, 24).
This quotation illustrates that life-giving energy gained from *sila* is pervasive, all-encompassing, and distributed widely to all organisms and non-organisms on earth; thus the Inuit worldview is truly animated. As noted earlier, there is no division into animate and inanimate objects in Inuit thinking. Any object can be imbued with *sila*. *Sila* is distributed according to the distinct needs of each being. Fish need it, rocks need it, animals need it, human beings need it, the land needs it: these needs are relative to the character of the object. However, all of these fish, rocks, animals, and so on have their own special power of *sila*, which is different from that of human beings, and obviously distinguished from others (Kawagley 1993). The challenge here is to understand that the air, the weather, and the intellect are equally worthy, and each manifestation of *pinngortitaq* possesses unique qualities distinct from other forms of creation. Such is the privilege of participating in creation through *sila*. As mentioned earlier, each being is respected for its individual qualities and none imposes its own.

Human beings in *pinngortitaq* learn that animals and other beings already possess their own self-conscious knowledge: *nammineq isumalik*, or *silalik*. There are as many forms of intellect as there are entities in the world and in the universe. For example, to the Inuit, walruses do not live a life based on primitive instincts. By their participation in *pinngortitaq*, walruses have their own intellect and knowledge, which is distinctly recognizable and honourably and validly theirs. The quality and depth of walrus *sila* is at times enigmatic to human beings, as it has its own mysterious and direct relationship with the life forces separate and maybe beyond that of human beings. This fact does not in any way imply that the quality of the walrus intellect is less than that of a human. It is a self-conscious and perfectly aware being: qualities inherent through the ordination of the incipient *sila*. The unique qualifications and qualities ordained through the participation of *sila* in each of the beings in this world create a challenge for human beings. The walrus employs air and intellect (*silalik*) differently than human beings do and remains a well-integrated animal, perfectly capable of handling itself within its own environment. This kind of understanding is applied to all manifestations of *pinngortitaq*.

Inuit see that the *sila* of the *tuttu* (caribou) is distinct from the *sila* of the *puisit* (seals), no more or less, but obviously dissimilar. But within each soul/being, there is no reference to *sila* in terms of gender. Such a notion is truly foreign to Inuit thinking, equal to claiming that female seals possess less intellect or air than male seals, or that female caribou are more aware and therefore use more air than their male counterparts. The qualities of *sila* are indivisible by gender. Men are not seen to possess more intelligence than women or vice versa. Kleivan and Sonne (1985, 31)
claim that \textit{sila} is “[a]nother force to reckon with,” and, interestingly, they assert that in their studies, “there was no agreement about Sila’s sex.”

Certainly, Kleivan and Sonne’s speculation that \textit{sila} is genderless, as is the weather and the air, rings true to Inuit thinking. Gender does not matter in the powers of possessing intellect, integratedness, air or weather, knowledge, wisdom, or, for that matter, in asserting existence. Discussing capacity for intellect as being less for women than for men, for example, belittles the potency of this particular life force. It is here, too, then, that we see how Western constructs or assumptions are of little use among the Inuit.

Consequently, the division of \textit{sila} is such that it explicitly discounts, in terms of any hierarchical order, the human being as more important than all creation. The phrase \textit{Inuit silaat} does not support the notion of an “evolution-like” progression, which would cause the \textit{inua}, the very essence of \textit{pinngortitaq}, to assume a subordinate significance. Such hierarchical thinking here is inappropriate to the Inuit mind. The belief of humans that they are supreme beings is seen as absurd and would appear as a challenge to the initial energy of life. Many well-meaning scientists studying the \textit{Inuit silaat} have been screened from perceiving this by their own and their surrounding societal pervasive acceptance of hierarchical and evolutionary assumptions (see Nuttall 1992).

\textbf{Genderless Names: Inuit aqqi/atingi}

As shown earlier, gender equality among the Inuit is expressed through an understanding of \textit{pinngortitaq} and its relationship to \textit{silarsuaq}, the universe and Inuit intellect. \textit{Sila} allows the bearer autonomy, since it possesses self-conscious knowledge and valuable qualities in its own right and is indivisible by gender lines. These characteristics of each being take precedence over gender. Discussing or imposing gender divisions in the context of \textit{Inuit silaat} is futile because there is no such thing. The Inuit naming system, the second aspect of Inuit tradition that provides us with an example of the insignificance of gender in Inuit life, is a way to explore Inuit genderlessness further.

The Inuit \textit{aqqi} (or \textit{atingi}) (name) in Canadian Inuktitut (Dorais 1990) is closely linked to \textit{silarsuaq} and \textit{sila} and is seen as synonymous with the soul. Nuttall writes, “The name is independent and idiosyncratic, a person’s life stream through which flows strength and character… an indivisible entity” (Nuttall 1992, 66). I propose that the name/soul
entity remains “independent and idiosyncratic” on the basis of its creation through pinngortitaq and silarsuaq. Indeed, the name/soul entity possesses “strength and energy” that derives from the initial energy instituted by pinngortitaq.

Williamson (1988) aptly explains the connection of the individual to that of pinngortitaq. Sila is the natural order, a universal consciousness, and at the same time it is a breath soul — air, weather — anirniq, that individuals breathe in and out. Furthermore, Williamson felt that Inuit understood that each and every individual has great importance in relation to the fundamental principle underlying the natural world. Sila is manifest in every individual as breath and also through Inuit aqqi: names.

Nuttall studied the kalaallit naming system extensively in the 1980s and argued that, in naming, the Christian kalaallit practised “a blend of pre-contact Inuit religion and Lutheran theology” (1992, 60). He also argues that the latter was very much a “veneer,” allowing the continuation of the traditional Inuit naming system. Nuttall explains that the kalaallit name/soul entities comprise three components: tarneq, anersaaq, and ateq. He writes, “A person’s body (timi) is ephemeral and houses the spiritual components of ateq, tarneq and anersaaq…. All three can be seen as being a kind of soul in the sense that they are non-material parts of the body, belonging instead to the spiritual person” (65). Nuttall speculates that tarneq was “reshaped by the missionaries and has now become synonymous with the Christian ‘soul.’ Originally, there was probably a semantic link with tarraq, meaning ‘shadow/reflection,’ and tarneq, meaning ‘darkness.’” About anersaaq, the breath soul, he writes, “Numerous informants identified tarneq with anersaaq… [both] are at once the same, but separate. Tarneq is passive and its exact location unknown, while anersaaq contains aspects of mind… and is slightly more autonomous during a person’s life… anersaaq is shadowy and independent, able to leave a person’s body during life” (66). Of the third component, ateq, he says, “Ateq is both the name and name soul…. The name is independent and idiosyncratic, a person’s life stream through which flows strength and character. Identity is closely associated with the name…. As an indivisible entity, a person’s ateq is a link in a wide network of social and spiritual relationships. While tarneq, as the personal soul, goes to God, ateq remains on earth, as does anersaaq” (66–67).

Each of the components of the name represents an element of sila, an eternal unitary principle. “Sila connects a person with the rhythm of the universe, enlarging and integrating the self with the natural world” (69), and some of these aspects are internalized by the individual bearers of Inuit aqqi.
When bestowing names in the tradition of the Inuit what matters is “the entry of a relatively indestructible spiritual substance, a ‘soul’” (Guemple 1995, 27); once a name is given, the individual is accorded reverential respect. For the Inuit, a name is a soul and a soul is a name. This life-giving entity comes directly from the universe (silarsuaq), the home of all souls, the setting of eternal life. According to Nuttall (1992), Inuit bodies are temporary vehicles of the real matter that exists beyond this material world, and he argues that temporary embodiment really is a form of recharging of souls. Inuit names, he continues, are bridges, the connections with the past, the animals, the land, and the ever-existing universe, validating human presence in this world.

Williamson’s (1988) implication that Inuit invest in their names challenges Nuttall’s statement of names being connections with their pasts. Investment implies the future, yet the notion of genderlessness proposes that time is irrelevant insofar as it follows neither linear nor progressional thought but, rather, draws upon the pervasive energy of sila and silarsuaq. This may help to explain why there was no preoccupation with time in traditional Inuit society, and events of some great importance are narrated with a freshness and immediacy as if they are in fact happening contemporaneously, experiencing the deep past and the deep future only momentarily. That Inuit genderlessness discounts time as relevant is supported by MacDonald (1998, 192–93), who writes, “Inuktitut... has no word for time, not at least, in the abstract, regimented sense commonly understood in Western society. This does not mean of course that Inuit somehow lacked any comprehension of the links between time and so-called economic activity, a view too often perpetuated on cultures whose perceptions of time do not coincide with those of the Western world.”

This irrelevance of time applies to Inuit names, and despite the inheritance of names from previous bearers in the recent past, ultimately what matters is the quality or the energy of the “relatively indestructible spiritual substance,” which Guemple (1995, 27) asserted; this is why the name is “ever-existing.” The continuation of the traditional Inuit naming system in spite of the historical Christian missionary context is suggestive of the potency of the name/soul concept. The naming of many children with the same name/soul in Inuit communities indicates an appreciation of the energy invested by the previous bearers. The empowerment of that particular name/soul energy is shown by the multitude of atsiat (namesakes) that Nuttall (1992) was told of when he lived in Northwest Greenland.
Some of the argument for the initial creation energy from which the name/soul is obtained might be best understood by looking at Saladin d’Anglure’s (1994, 83) writing. He states, “The Inuit foetus is considered as a miniature human endowed with consciousness and will, but psychologically fragile, unstable, susceptible, and versatile, characteristics shared with the spirits of the dead and with animals, as well as with supernatural beings…. Endowed with hypersensitivity, it hears, understands, smells, and sees… that which humans cannot see, smell, hear, or understand, the exception of course, being the shaman.”

As Saladin d’Anglure knows, there are always exceptions to generalizations, and not all shamans will understand this energy. This does not take away from the fact that the Inuit perception of the newborn baby’s endowment extends to all newborn animals and miniature creations; even insects are seen to carry with them unknown powers and qualities from elsewhere than in this world. “This world” can mean the physical world, nunarsuaq, but equally possible is silarsuaq, a world consisting of metaphysically different realities – Inuit world. Some of the powers and qualities inherent in newborns are to be cherished, others to be feared. As mentioned earlier, the powers and innate physical and spiritual qualities of all things, animate and inanimate, are to be respected as unique and granting autonomy. No one, including parents of children, may impose their own characteristics or qualities on another.

Knud Rasmussen (1929, 58–59), one of the earliest Arctic ethnographers, explains the energy or quality of the name/soul entity in this way:

Everyone on receiving a name receives with it the strength and skill of the deceased namesake, but since all persons bearing the same name have the same source of life, spiritual and physical qualities are also inherited from those who in the distant past once bore the same name. The shamans say that sometimes, on their flights, they can see, behind each human being, as it were a mighty procession of spirits aiding and guiding, as the rules of life are duly observed; but when this is not done… then all the invisible guardians turn against him as enemies, and he is lost beyond hope.

Such is the power of the name/soul in its “autonomous entity,” as described by Nuttall. The name/soul possesses a life of its own and can nourish the bearer. But it can also take life away from an individual who does not fit the cosmological order of the name/soul network. This is the reason why in traditional times Inuit changed
names, completely, when attempting to recover from a grave and deadly illness. Illnesses were seen as some cosmological imbalance between the name/soul entity and the bearer. Such an imbalance needs attention by letting go of the free spirit of the name/soul so that it can do what it has to do in its hemispheric reality. At the same time the body can be strengthened by the life force associated with the new name/soul.

So it is that each name represents a soul and the bearer is a namesake of someone who has passed away. Because the name represents a soul, one’s soul identity and, therefore, names/souls can be traced through a soul-kinship system. Names, then, are not mere appellations in the Inuit world. Nuttall and others have confirmed that Inuit “names (atit) are reference points in a complex network of interpersonal relationships. People ‘think with’ personal names in a similar way to when they use place names to think themselves around the physical environment…” (Nuttall 1992, 67; see also Williamson 1988).

On the issue of genderlessness in names, pre-Christian Inuit names were comfortably unisex, shared across gender until the recent incursions of Europeans. But true to the nature of the name/soul, an Inuk woman can spiritually be a male through her name, just as a man could spiritually be, as associated with an earlier female bearer of the name, a woman through his name. Saladin d’Anglure associates this kind of transitional process with shamanism and posits his “third gender” theory. He writes, “The practice of cross-gendered names and guardian spirits contributes to their being intermediaries between the land of the living and the dead, between humans and animals, between the genders, and between the sky, the earth, and the sea. A structuralist approach reveals the “third gender” to be the artefact of culturally required transvestism, which predisposes such a child to become a shaman” (1994, 83).

Saladin d’Anglure’s attempt to make sense of Inuit sexuality, physical and spiritual, is an interesting one. But I believe that the term “transvestism” denotes a Western way of thinking, and certainly his acknowledgement of a “structuralist” approach indicates that direction. Inuit do not usually divide human beings according to their sexual preferences. In Maniitsoq there do exist terms for homosexuals and lesbians: arnaasiaq: ‘was made to be a woman’ and angutaasiaq: ‘was made to be a man.’ These terms do not refer to sexual preferences but refer more to tasks and responsibilities. The practice of androgynous names affirms the genderless personal empowerment, a power that goes well beyond human sexuality. Like Saladin d’Anglure, I am interested in understanding aspects of gender construction, including
that of sexuality, but for this purpose sexuality needs to be conceptualized using different terms than those denoting Western ways of being. Terms such as “transvestism” and “homosexuality” are not appropriate to use in understanding Inuit sexuality. A different approach than the structuralist one is necessary to fully appreciate sexuality in relation to pinngortitaq and Inuit silaat, and different values and mores will thus be brought to light with this approach. Although I do not have space to discuss this topic here, it is surely a subject for further research.

For the purposes of this study, the fluidity of names across genders strongly implies genderless qualities. I have asserted that the notion of genderlessness argues that the name/soul entity is one of the life forces stemming from pinngortitaq. I believe it is in the context of genderlessness, rather than a third gender, that the ambiguity of gender can best be understood. Saladin d’Anglure’s statement that such gender adjustability is easily accomplished is true and is supportive of my explanation of spiritual and intellectual genderlessness.

Nuttall (1992, 60) writes, “The person is an expression of the continuity of social life... it is the person who, sharing something of others through the name, creates a relationship of equality.” Just as sila appears to be indivisible by gender and ordains human qualities important beyond gender, so does the name/soul entity. As Nuttall says, “[a] child does not become a full or proper person until it has received a name” (65).

Thus, Inuit do not secularize their cosmological understandings but integrate them into their daily lives. One continuously breathes sila, and one is given a name/soul (ateq). Both of these are elements of the silarsuaq, the universe, and pinngortitaq, creation, and maintain a genderlessness, transcending even gender equality, in that the qualities equally distributed are irrespective of sex, and they are not gender-oriented. We have also noted the cross-gender use of names, thus actualizing the Inuit practice of genderlessness, proving the existence and practice of the notion of genderlessness a second time.

Next we will explore genderlessness as expressed through the remarkably flexible, holophrastic Inuktitut language. This is my third example establishing the notion of genderlessness as practised and illustrated through life among the Inuit.
Genderless Language: Inuktitut kalaallisullu

Dorais (1990, 202) claims “language played a primordial part in expressing traditional philosophy and preserving social order.” As suggested earlier, language is seen as a social construction of knowledge. If one accepts that a rational description of a worldview can be derived from analyzing the structure of any language, one can then understand how the Inuktitut language reinforces the importance of a deep appreciation of humanity. Like many other indigenous languages, Inuktitut omits pronominal genderization, that is, it does not use words like “she” “he” or “it”. This denotes emphasis on the existence of a universalized social truth. Certainly the omission of pronouns de-emphasizes the dichotomy of gender relations.

To the Inuit, words have metaphysical and magical powers (Williamson 1974), and the power of the word is considered tremendous (Berthelsen 1990). Inuit enjoy the flexibility, expediency, accuracy, and delivery of both concrete and abstract thought through their language. The oral tradition is made up of legends and myths working in conjunction with reality, often even explaining reality, such as Inuit legends. The stories display an integrated wisdom, or sila, and these have great importance in transmitting the Inuit culture and psyche. According to Dorais’ suggestion, they imply social order. These stories also reflect values and the cosmic significance of human existence in the shared universal context, in other words, not just in relation to other human beings but in relation to all surroundings, physical and metaphysical.

The Inuktitut and also kalaallisut words are comprised of root words, infixes, and suffixes. Some of the words can be long and might appear to have no specific order, grammatically, in speech. Yet this flexible arrangement is a perfect illustration of the Inuit theory of the origin of the universe. MacLean states, “The concept of interdependence stands out in the structure of the Inupiaq and Yupik languages. Each word has a marker which identifies its relation to the other words in the sentence. There is no set order of words in a sentence, just as there is no way of determining what will happen next in nature. Man cannot control nature” (1990, 164).

A listener cannot determine in Inuit sentence structure whether the suffix of the word refers to a man, a woman, or other than a human being, as pronominal-verbal endings such as -voq, -poq, -soq, -toq or -paa, and -ngaa indicate no gender. For that matter these terminal morphemes do not indicate what kind of object or subject of pinngortitaq the speaker indicates. What matters here, again, is the recognition of pinngortitaq, the cause of all manifestations. The listener has to determine this in relation to the context of the conversation. Context is always vital, and this clearly
illustrates not just genderless qualities but equality among all the manifestations of pinngortitaq. Certainly, the notion of genderlessness offers a deep-seated equanimity and equality with the ecological factors whose relationships place value on all beings. Each has comparable rights to exist on individual terms (Nuttall 1992; Briggs 1970).

Language is the heart of a people and contains their values and cosmic and social knowledge. As mentioned earlier, Dorais speculated that Inuksitut carries with it the social order, and certainly in our case we understand through Inuksitut that there is no devaluation of anyone’s importance. Such is the power of the words, which Berthelsen (1990) expressed. Inuk and Inuit are the terms used for human being, exclusive of sex and gender. The terms kalaaleq and kalaallit carry with them the same quality of genderlessness.

When I was doing my field research in Pangnirtung, Nunavut, back in the 1980s, one of the locally esteemed Inutoqaq (an elder) once confided to me:

Inuit have thought... that the universe which was made very long time ago will never come to an end unless it has reached the satisfaction of achieving its final fate... Everything has its end. Animals and human beings have been made simultaneously; they would not become extinct until their purpose of existence has reached its fulfillment. They will not reach the point of extinction, unless that point has reached itself. That is how they are together; they are made together.

(Jessen Williamson 1992, 66–67)

I must admit that I had had no idea what to do with this information, as it “came out of the blue” and had little application to my research back then. At least I thought so. It was not until more recently, when I started to explore the notion of genderlessness among the Inuit, that I found the statement to be a revealing insight for the understanding of the continuum of the life forces and their endless creative manifestations in the silarsuaq (the universe). This elder was telling me that these forces may in the future or in a different time make totally different compositions, creating very different qualities of life. His insight added much to my proposal of the timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu framework that I write about in detail in the next chapter.
Chapter Three

Kalaallit Gender Relations through Maniitsoq Eyes:
Timikkut, Tarnikkut Anersaakkullu

Having established the basis on which Inuit perceive themselves as human beings before taking on their identities as men and women, I felt prepared to undertake the interviews that would constitute the fieldwork for the research project. This chapter describes this stage of the research by outlining how we conducted the interviews and how data was analyzed. It also relates how, soon after the start of the interview stage, my research plans were very nearly derailed. Although at first I thought of this unexpected development as a difficult challenge, ultimately it helped me to articulate an important part of the framework for making meaning of this study.

When I decided to undertake research for my doctoral studies, I deliberately chose to do the fieldwork in Maniitsoq. I had no interest in studying gender relations in a non-Inuit community, and my experience doing field research in Pangnirtung, Nunavut, frustrated me when I realized that I needed translators and interpreters to fully reflect what I had been given by the Pangnirtungmiut. I wanted to experience field research where language and culture were not obstacles, and I wanted to be fully immersed in the fieldwork setting. I felt that doing research in a town where I speak the dialect and where I could be intimately involved, both linguistically and culturally, would fulfill these desires.

The field research for this study was conducted from September 1998 to December 1998 in Maniitsoq. This followed the initial meeting held in May 1998 to explain the basic framework to the research partners. It served to establish common ground and identify potential research collaborators. This preliminary fieldwork took place over a short period of just one month followed later by half-a-year field research resulting in consultative meetings with the research collaborators to hand in research results. The results of my research first became a dissertation written in English and have now been expanded into this book.

Although this may seem a short time in which to undertake extensive doctoral research, my experience as a member of Maniitsormiut society afforded me unparalleled access to the community and knowledge of the subject matter. My research was undoubtedly prompted by what I perceive as traditional pan-Inuit
values and how these are used by the kalaallit. This knowledge of the community and of Inuit values could only derive from lifelong experience and as a result produce significantly profound analysis. And, as the method of the study communicates, the active participation of my collaborators was based on shared values.

My life experience facilitated the research in another respect, through use of the three languages necessary for this study. While the field research was based on kalaallisut, and the transcriptions of the interviews are in that language, a substantial part of what has been written about the kalaallit in general exists in Danish only, and some additional information gathering was done in Danish. Danish civil servants head most of the bureaucracy in Greenland, and exceptionally few of them have learned to speak the local language.

Apersukkat ilisimasallit: Interviewing People with Knowledge
All the people we interviewed lived in Maniitsoq at the time of study. Most of them are kalaallit. We included both men and women as interviewees. Very few were young; the youngest one, whose mother accompanied her for the interview, was twelve. The oldest participants were in their seventies or early eighties. Sadly, several of them passed away between the time of the interview and the finalization of my dissertation.

No educational qualifications were demanded of the interviewees; after being chosen in accordance with the questions, each was selected on the basis of their willingness to be interviewed. There was much exchanging of stories, information, and ideas during the interviews. These anecdotes often had nothing to do with the interview topic, but were essential to create goodwill between the interviewers and the interviewee, and often provided unplanned background insights.

A number of Danes who had administrative positions in Maniitsoq were also interviewed so that we could take advantage of their observations. As this research concentrated on kalaallit women’s and men’s social positions, including their labour market participation, we excluded the Maniitsoq Danish population from the formal interview process of the study. When appropriate, Danes participated by completing a written questionnaire that was mailed out to them.

During my initial stay, in September 1998, I was interviewed by the local radio station Akisuasoq (the Echo). I explained the project and its purpose in Greenlandic. This
broadcast led several individuals and couples to contact me to volunteer themselves for interviews. This is also how the student at Ilisimatusarfik came to volunteer with us.

In reaching out to prospective interviewees, two pages of information were prepared as handouts. The information was written in Greenlandic. These pages outlined the nature of the study, including who was involved as research collaborators. All questions posed by the research group and their names were listed. As a group, we wanted this exercise to be as transparent as possible. It was through this process that prospective interviewees were given an opportunity to decline the offer or to agree to participate, and as the actual interviews did not take place until the following week, or later by request, the interviewees were given time to think the questions through.

As part of my research licensing agreement I needed to train a student from Ilisimatusarfik. This student participated in some of the interviews and together we arranged times to meet with the interviewees. Initially the interviews were recorded on a handheld mini tape recorder and re-recorded into a transcription machine. All interviews were conducted in Greenlandic. This initial field research continued until the middle of December 1998. Rather than taking the form of a formal interview, the process was much more of a long visit during which we sat and drank coffee or tea, usually served by the interviewees. During most of the meetings with the research colleagues, I managed to get kalaalimerngit (local food) as well as poorlut (homebaked sweet raisin buns), coffee, tea, fruit, some candy, and soft drinks. The kalaalimerngit varied according to the season of the year and consisted of dried fish, beluga, or minke whale. The dried food is always accompanied by fresh frozen seal blubber, orsumineq. I was also lucky enough to buy some mattak (rind or skin of a beluga, narwhal, harbour porpoise, or minke whale). Sharing the food dispelled any possible awkward moments. We shared food, thoughts, and laughter and felt at home doing this together. We reminisced about our various childhood experiences and commented that because of rapid cultural changes times are very different today.

Early in the field research, I contacted various municipal department offices in Maniitsoq to find out where I might obtain access to information pertinent to Boletta's questions: specifically, what jobs are there in Maniitsoq, and how are they divided along gender lines? What kinds of jobs do the men and women of Maniitsoq hold?
I met with Poul Therkelsen, who provided me with a list of workplaces in Maniitsoq, but he acknowledged that it was an incomplete list. I soon found out that the kind of information we wanted did not exist. A questionnaire in the form of a letter written in Greenlandic and Danish was devised.

With the help of this list, and after consulting the telephone book, we sent off more than five hundred letters to administrators asking five questions concerning jobs in Maniitsoq. We asked who held what jobs along gender lines, excluding names; what kind of a structure was discernable, if any, and where men and women were within that structure; we also asked if the jobs were held by kalaallit or Danes.

Having received very little response from this questionnaire, further effort was put into contacting businesses and workplaces in person, and an assistant was hired to complete the work. She was to report back to the research collaborators and send the information to me.

Other attempts to find answers to Boletta’s questions about employment included contacting Grønlands Statistics in Nuuk where the lack of records was confirmed. Indeed, a separate list of income of married couples was not available, which will be discussed further in the findings of the study.

During my stay in Maniitsoq, I also had a chance to talk to a number of people not directly involved as informants as such. These individuals were, for example, a local police officer, an alcohol and drug abuse prevention administrator, the local Lutheran minister, the director of social services, and the hospital administrator. The discussions I had with these individuals gave me an opportunity to understand and contextualize the setting in which people in Maniitsoq experience social problems.

I planned to present the findings of this research in categories of stages of life, beginning with Maniitsoq children and child-rearing practices and continuing with school children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. I was prepared to provide the insights gained earlier through a review of the questions posed by the research partners. I set out to relate those directly to the notion of genderlessness presented in the previous chapter. Everything was well planned and organized in order to present this theory of genderlessness in Inuit society. Then came the stumbling block. I was stalled for a long time by the communication difficulty I experienced with one elderly interviewee and by the ensuing struggle as this difficulty became another, unexpected epistemological layer in my research, one that I needed to present as an important, integral framework.
As part of the process of developing the research questions mentioned in the first chapter, Mimi, a collaborator, wanted me to interview several elderly widows of Maniitsoq. She thought their life stories might shed light on their strengths and where these individual strengths came from. I contacted a number of women and proceeded with the interviews. Each of the elderly women knew me as a person from the community of Maniitsoq and, in support of the study, was surprisingly candid.

As I interviewed one particular elderly woman, however, the direction of our conversation baffled me. For a number of days I listened attentively to her rendition of her life story, and at times I really did not know which stories were true and which were in fact imagination, déjà vu, premonitions, or dreams. Fortunately, the interview was recorded, and I transcribed and translated it into English (see Appendix A: Interview with a Widow: Exploration of Where Kalaallit Women Get Their Strengths). This process gave me an opportunity and time to absorb the interview and allowed me to analyze my reaction to what I felt was not making much sense.

The surprise came when I realized that I was valuing aspects of the widow’s conversations differently. I did not view details of dreams, nightmares, déjà vu, premonitions, and seeming imagination as necessarily valid information, and remembered longing for the times during these particular interviews when the widow would “come to her senses” and talk about the realities in her life. Yet she had deemed these details matters of great importance and consideration, giving them equal if not more weight in relation to what I perceived as real events. Mimi had asked that the widows be allowed to use their own conversational constructions and that the rendition of their life stories be told without much manipulation on our, the researchers’, parts.

My concern was how I could possibly present the widow’s dreams, nightmares, déjà vu, premonitions, and imagination in an academically oriented context. The widow also had continued to make frequent statements that she was grateful for having been “stupid” and that it had been through her state of being stupid that she had managed the incredible events in her life. By this she meant that her stupidity kept her from knowing certain things and therefore from having expectations that might only have led to great disappointment. But how could I use this self-proclamation of stupidity to support my academic endeavour?

Fortunately, I have been trained to evaluate myself and admit to being part of the Western scholarly tradition. As a result of having attended school systems that are undeniably assimilative of individuals like me, my manner of thinking was obviously
the product of such a process. Thus, the problem of me not fully understanding the relevance or importance of details I felt were invalid had to do with my approach and my Western way of analyzing information. I was not willing to discount what the widow had given me; I needed to understand her on her own terms.

I postulated that since the way the widow had told her stories is common in Maniitsoq and generally in kalaallit conversation, a well-established framework must have been behind the way that the conversations were structured, one that I had not been made aware of in my educational training in the Western way of knowing, since dreams, and particularly stupidity, are not valued qualities in that context. On the one hand I knew I needed to make sense of the data for academic reasons, but I also needed to respect the way the data were presented to me.

Basso’s work (1984) describes a similar experience. During his field research he endured incredible teasing and shunning from his prime informants when he attempted to understand the local relationship with the land. He persevered and evaluated himself and understood better after having juxtaposed himself in relation to his prime informant. In the same way, I appreciate the struggles of Goulet (1998), who in the 1980s and 1990s worked with Dene of the Northwest Territories. Like Basso, he tried to make sense of his situation by analyzing himself and his vulnerabilities in relating to the people. Each of these researchers — there are indeed many other examples — ended up writing about their derailed research plans and added to their writing their sense of weakness and vulnerability. In doing so, each made a significant contribution to the field of anthropology.

The Maniitsormiut Paradigm

So, at this early stage in the interview process, I took stock. I knew that I could have analyzed kalaallit gender relations simply in light of the notion of genderlessness. I could also have shown that data can be presented in ways that depend on the positioning of the researcher. As mentioned earlier, gender relations in a southern context take shape from the assumption that there is an unequal relationship between Qallunaat men and women. Inuit gender relations originate from an egalitarian society; chapter 2 gives a good example of what such a social construction looks like. We have come to appreciate in earlier chapters the generalized implications of studying Inuit society. One can assume that these will also involve various other aspects of Inuit culture. However, as noted above, I am trying to go beyond the cultural boundaries, parameters, and indeed limitations of some commonly-used scholarly approaches. I have examined the existing literature
extensively to discover Inuit thoughts on creation, in the hope that such an exercise would lead to an understanding of an Inuit worldview and its association with social relations. How are individuals valued, and where does gender enter in such a setting?

When this misunderstood communication complicated and challenged my neat organization of the presentation of my Maniitsqoq field research findings, old sayings in my childhood came to the surface. As children we were always told to measure and evaluate our experiences grounding these to timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu.

**Timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu**
The first term, *timikkut*, denotes the physical: *timi* means ‘the body’; -*kkut* denotes ‘that of going through,’ or ‘by way of,’ or ‘by means of.’ The second term, *tarnikkut*, means ‘through individual, personal soul.’ The third term, *nersaakkullu*, is in recognition of the life force whose energy remains autonomous from *pinngortitaq*: -*ullu* just means ‘and.’ These physical and spiritual qualities (also previously alluded to in chapter 2) are closely associated with the Inuit notion of genderlessness: any Inuk is philosophically empowered regardless of their gender. This goes beyond equality between men and women: the triadic structure is to be applied to all of life; it is the framework of Inuit knowledge.

As we grew up, *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu* were mentioned to us at times when life-altering events occurred. We would be told ‘*silattorsarit*’ – “expand your purview” – and we were to use these three elements to expand our intellect. Each component was a consideration in acquiring valuable knowledge; whether physical or spiritual, real or intangible, and given the interconnectedness and valuable qualities of all of creation, all aspects of life are important. Even though we never quite understood these abstractions, our parents and grandparents encouraged us to always be mindful of them. After considering how engrained they had been in us, I surmised that perhaps these three concepts made up the structure of the narrative of this particular widow. My assumption proved correct; her rendition of her life story finally made sense for me as I explored these terms. I finally understood that individuals like her are afforded choices of which element of the triad to use. In the case of her life story she relied on her *tornaq* and *anersaaq* elements, while I as a listener with Western influence yearned for *timi* aspects of her life. As *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu* are equally important, so were all aspects of her life, whether physical or spiritual, including dreams, imagination, and premonitions, in the accumulation of her knowledge of life.
In Inuit society, stories integrate both reality and mythology equally, no one more important than the other, each blending to contribute to a person’s knowledge of an aspect of creation. In societies based on oral tradition, storytelling is an evocative means of connecting the listener to the universe, delving deep into the past, moving deep into the future, while experiencing the story in the present. Inuit introduce stories with ilaannigooq, which in English translates into ‘it is said to be part of (the) reality.’ Stories are powerful in connecting the listener to the souls and minds of human beings, animals, and the land. Storytellers do not impose their own values upon the ever-developing minds of the listeners, but the stories do reflect the values of the society as a whole (see Jessen Williamson 2000). MacDonald (1998, 17) writes, “Among many indigenous peoples vestiges of the so-called mythic view of the world still persist, but their expressions, particularly in a cross-cultural context, are all too easily characterized and dismissed as mere superstition.”

While timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu provides a framework for Inuit knowledge, it also explains how men and women are equal. The Inuit are well recognized for practising a gender-related division of labour, and timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu can be explained in relation to the Inuit understanding of work, wherein individuals have their own spheres in which to explore tasks and responsibilities, physical, spiritual, or otherwise. The Inuit know that there are certain expectations of men as there are for women. Men hold certain responsibilities very apparently different from those of women, and many of the earlier studies on Inuit labour focused extensively on descriptions of “gendered” work, showing very little appreciation of the correlation between physical work (timikkut) and the ontological/spiritual (tarnikkut/anersaakkullu) aspects of labour. While responsibilities are different for men and women, their roles in and contributions to society are of equal importance. Based on timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu, men and women are equal; it is this structure comprised of all three elements that allows the Inuit to embrace the notion of genderlessness.

I asserted earlier that the Inuit world emphasizes the relationships among human beings, animals, the land, and their cosmic soul relationships. Consider again my treatment of Inuit aqqi (names) in chapter 2, which includes three aspects stemming from pinngortitaq (creation): tarneq, which Nuttall (1992, 66) conveys as “synonymous with the soul; it is passive and its exact location unknown”; anersaaq, which “contains aspects of the mind, and is slightly more autonomous during a person’s life. It is shadowy and independent, and capable of leaving a person’s body during life”; and ateq. Nuttall was informed that ateq is a combination of “both the name and name soul. It is independent and idiosyncratic, and a person’s life stream
through flowing strength and character. It is an indivisible entity; a person’s oteq is a link in a wide network of social and spiritual relationships” (66–67).

Consider also Kawagley’s (1993, 19) tetrahedral model:

The tetrahedral structure, a device recognized for its strength by engineers, is often utilized in the Yupiaq fishing or hunting camp by erecting a tripod of wooden poles to hold up game and drying meat or fish. The structure of the tetrahedron allows for several important dynamic forces to be examined in relation to one another. If we use the three corners of the base to represent the human being, nature, and spirituality respectively as elements in a common circle of life, we can see the apex as representing the world view that overarches and unites the base elements of our existence. The lines connecting these “poles” can be seen as the life forces which flow all ways between and among the human, spiritual, and natural worlds and are united through the world view. The three base poles all provide essential support to the Yupiaq world view.

The triad described in this quotation as well as in Nuttall’s treatment of names is what is important: the physical, here represented as the human being; the individual soul, represented as nature and spirituality, which co-ordinates with pinngortitaq. The understanding of the interaction among the threesome is what would give an individual sila (consciousness or wisdom) or what Kawagley claims as a “world view that overarches and unites” (20). Kawagley explains, “This tetrahedral framework allows for triangulation whereby human beings can locate themselves in relation to the other domains of their existence and check to make sure that the values and traditions are in balance” (20).

To my mind, these are exactly the qualities that timikkut, tornikkut, anersaakkullu imbue. We therefore have a triangular framework made up of these three elements. This illustrates the Inuit concept of work, which implies “an alliance and alignment of all elements and... constant communication between the three constituent realms to maintain [the] delicate balance” (19–20). Accordingly, the division of labour can be appreciated more fully, going considerably beyond a binary understanding of the body and mind context.
The model became obvious to me as I interviewed an elderly Maniitsormiq widow. She used this triangular model to convey the meaning of her life.

The **timikkut**, **tarnikkut**, **anersaakkullu** structure is indeed the very construct that the widow used in our conversation. With the integration of these three concepts, her dreams, déjà vu, premonitions, and imagination became valid elements in seeing the world. Moreover, individuals like her are not at all afraid of viewing “stupidity” as a good quality in coming to the solution of the importance of an extreme life-altering event. The widow is aware that all beings have been given the qualities in life they need in order to continue to exist autonomously.

So, just as the experiences of other anthropology researchers, such as Briggs, Basso, and Goulet, led them to write about their own vulnerability during their fieldwork, adding to knowledge and sensitivity, so my own vulnerability was revealed to me during my field research. It brought me to this insight of **timikkut**, **tarnikkut**, **anersaakkullu** I am now writing about, and that I sincerely hope will contribute to new knowledge and new sensibility.

Thus, in order to analyze Inuit gender relations in Maniitsoq, one needs to appreciate the philosophical, genderless qualities first because genderlessness is primary in Inuit culture, as we have repeatedly seen. The second layer to fully understanding this genderlessness is to appreciate that some kalaallit use the triangular structure that represents **timikkut**, **tarnikkut**, **anersaakkullu** as a framework of knowledge and through which they view life, including social constructs. Presenting the data from
the fieldwork without the two considerations above would have greatly detracted from the meaning given by the informants of this study.

**Analysis of Data**

Once the transcriptions were completed, I returned to Maniitsoq and gave the research collaborators the responses to their questions. I felt that the collaborators owned the raw data, and I did not want to use the responses for analytical purposes until I had consulted with them.

Each of the collaborators was handed a complete set of answers to the research questions, except for Vivi, who had moved out of town in the meantime. The answers had been organized into a fairly hefty binder. Prior to delivery of the material, as a group we had agreed that the identifiers would be deleted to avoid revealing the identity of the interviewees.

The interviewees were told who the research collaborators were, but since we had agreed to preserve the interviewees’ anonymity, the research collaborators were not told the names of the interviewees even though they had taken part in suggesting potential interviewees at the beginning of the study. This discretion was appreciated by all of the collaborators, who wished to respect the privacy of the interviewees fully.

The coming chapters deal with the answers to the questions posed. These answers are at times left as raw data to give the reader an appreciation of the information given by the informants. While not a common practice in studies, I felt this was warranted because the methodology used was PAR. Moreover, I deliberately avoided framing my field research with an established theory but provided a framework. Exercising a rigid theory and methodology in fieldwork is disdained in many indigenous communities. Such an approach tends to leave the actual statements of the informants tainted by the perspectives of the inquirer. I wanted the field research data to present an alternative to my statement, and I must admit that I have been exceptionally lucky in seeing an alternative perspective materialize in this research endeavour. I have experienced some of the interviews as a gift, one which I received with the implicit assumption that the message would be relayed without me giving the information a different meaning than was intended.

Throughout the month of May 2000, the research collaborators and I held a number of meetings to finalize the pertinent questions and receive feedback from each research co-operator. Their reactions are disclosed in what follows whenever
appropriate. Knowing that the process of analysis becomes the actual study tool that hands over ownership of this new knowledge to those in the academic community, I asked for permission to use the raw data for my academic undertaking and to analyze the data the way I saw fit. Fortunately, the group granted this permission.

As I just mentioned, the raw data were handed over to each of the research participants. Together we attempted to initiate a process of analysis. However, this exercise was not a complete success, and I asked the group if they wanted to leave this part to me. They were each fully aware of the fact that my own interest in the welfare of the study was to be able to defend the findings for academic purposes, and they wanted me to continue with this exercise.

As it transpired, I was able to find answers to some of the questions through interviewing other community members. Still other answers were found through reviews of the existing literature and through the process of “deconstruction,” by bringing in new values to gain new insights (Ghosh 1996). Readers will find the discussion of worldviews is broadened by the framework developed in subsequent chapters. It is my hope that this framework will capacitate an expanded and deeper understanding of worldviews.

A radio interview was arranged for our very last meeting. My research collaborators discussed on air how they felt about their participation in the research. They expressed a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in having participated in the process and gotten to know some aspects of the answers to their questions.

Not all the questions posed are analyzed individually, but those that deal directly with the revelation of gender relations in Maniitsoq were utilized. Out of this we hope to gain more insight into what the position of kalaallit women and men is in its social context. I hope to contribute to the discussion of other ways of knowing and supply both a novel paradigm to Western scholars and a useful tool for kalaallit. More importantly, I wanted to produce well grounded knowledge for peoples like kalaallit to employ in policy-making endeavours in order to ease life for their constituents.

The results of this study, the comparing and contrasting of the findings in view of ways of knowing that are significantly different from the Western knowledge system and Inuit philosophy, can be further contextualized through current work by indigenous scholars around the world. Indeed, theoretical approaches that have already been used by others in doing research in Inuit communities can be explored and illuminated from a different analytical viewpoint. Since I have now related my experiences in carrying out the interviews, it is time to present the results.
Chapter Four

Gender, Childhood, and Sexuality

Mariia’s Questions
Mariia asked if children are currently brought up according to traditional Inuit practices. Also, are boys and girls brought up differently? She wanted to know the limitations and motivations of child rearing and how responsibilities are instilled in children. She knew from her own experience as a child that the process of rearing kalaallit children involves inculcating responsibilities and values in the developing child, and she wanted to know if the process is as harsh as she remembered it. For example, she said, “When I was being brought up, questions surrounding sexuality were practically a taboo. If these aspects were explained, it certainly was done in a limited way.” Mariia commented on the fact that we live a much modernized life as kalaallit, yet in her opinion issues surrounding menstruation have not necessarily become more open. Why is it that discussion surrounding menstruation remains so rare? Are children encouraged to get to know about sexuality through the education system more than in the family?

During our sessions establishing the questions in preparation for fieldwork, Mariia also disclosed her concern about the fact that many more young men commit suicide than young women. She felt that we needed to examine equality issues in Greenland and address the issue of genderized suicide. Mariia felt that a number of couples who had successfully raised children would be good candidates for her questions, and she also wanted daycare and school officials to be interviewed.

The notion of genderlessness and the concepts of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu may not necessarily be expressed explicitly. Individuals do not make a point of behaving in a “genderless” manner — far from it; Inuit do practise a deep-seated gendered division in their activities. We now understand that this division is based on a triangular philosophical model. And, while individuals may not evaluate their daily life experiences according to the triangular construct, many do rely on the model to convey their experiences, especially in situations that require serious decision making within family settings. Balancing timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu is difficult, and very few individuals obtain a state of balance, even in their elder years. As touched on earlier, wisdom is fluid; some children are born with such qualities in place and exert these throughout their lives. Children who have this capacity are greatly valued as silatuut, meaning ‘endowed with wisdom.’ Kalaallit
believe that these qualities are innate and are connected with naming; they grant autonomy and self-determination. Children born with these innate qualities already have in them a purpose in their lives. It is for this reason that kalaallit parents rarely see children as empty slates who need “parenting.”

When Greenland became colonized and foreign ideals were introduced to the kalaallit in the form of new religious values and, later, governance, these qualities were integrated with people’s already existing principles of life, namely, genderlessness and timikkut, tornikkut anersaakkullu. It would be wrong to assume that the kalaallit rid themselves of the notion of genderlessness and the triangular construct because a new governance structure was introduced. I have already argued that despite rapid transformation over time and acculturation, even strong assimilation, the endurance of Inuit values can be demonstrated.

Kalaallit have been enticed by curiosity about the new dimension, namely, the European way of life, enough that they have agreed to embrace its potential partly through the development of their children through education. Thus Mariia’s questions would allow us to see how individuals in Maniitsoq negotiate the various dimensions in their lives through the genderization of kalaallit children.

The research collaborators and I hoped that the answers to Mariia’s questions would give us a chance to demonstrate how the kalaallit enjoy a life that includes the capacity to shape a lifestyle that incorporates ancient Inuit and modern European values. It is in that context that Mariia’s question concerning child-rearing practices becomes interesting.

Reflection on Becoming Responsible
The first person I interviewed initially adamantly denied that any differentiation between siblings in terms of gender existed. She expressed the discrepancy between herself and her older sister. According to her, her older sister was so much more beloved by their grandparents, whose house they were staying at. Her grandparents constantly praised the older sister, saying, “angajormiuna qujanaq” (‘the older sister is really so beloved’). To her, the grandparents sang, “nukak, nukakik, ikikik.” These are nonsense words, playing on nuka, meaning ‘a younger sibling of the same sex.’ But having expressed this, she assured herself and me that in reality there was no real differentiation. In fact, as a young child she had been somewhat spoiled and had been breastfed until she was about five. This was because a younger sibling born after her passed away, so she had been allowed a much longer babyhood than usual.
Before we got into the differences between boys and girls, she wanted to make sure that it was understood that she had been wrapped in deep care and love in her own childhood. She felt that there were no differences at all in terms of expectations of work. As far as she was concerned, the kinds of tasks the children performed showed no differentiation or preference in her family. They all worked hard, willingly, and diligently. It was not until after I asked if she had observed any gender-related tasks outside the home that the question was addressed. Yes, the girls did the sweeping, washed the floor, did the dishes and the laundry, fetched the household water daily, and fetched sod for the winter. The boys were expected to help with the fishing and went out with the fathers or grandfathers to work alongside them. When the fish were brought in, the rest of the work was usually given to the girls. On such occasions the girls were expected to clean the fish and empty the boats of any travel gear.

The interviewee felt that the differences in tasks started to occur only as the children grew into adolescents. The tasks were given with good humour, love, and advice. Generally speaking, she said, she grew up in an atmosphere that was peaceful and respectful. She wanted to communicate these qualities to her own children, and wanted her children to learn to be mindful and accepting of other people around them. “I want my children to appreciate work,” she said, “for them to understand that work can make people happy. I want them to exemplify respect to other people.” She listed her requirements of her children. She brought them up without ever paying much attention to their gender. She gave her orders — “clean-up, vacuum, do the dishes” — not paying attention to whether the requests were directed toward her sons or daughter. Of five children the couple had a single girl, but as she said, they each finished the tasks expected of them, which were assigned according to their skills rather than their sex.

The interviewee also lamented that everything is so easy today. Everything is pre-made and ready to use and this leaves children and young people without much to do. She often hears the statement “suffissaaleqinaq” (‘one wonders what to do’), which to her is a lamentable situation, since there used to be so much one could do.

She regretted the fact that the religiosity previously taught in school as a desirable respected trait, and which she continues to relish, has lost respect, to the point that some mock it. Many children do not know the Lord’s Prayer, but she teaches her grandchildren the faith. “One never knows what life has to offer,” was her reason to defend her Lutheran beliefs. According to her observations, many children lack respect in general and basically do not care. Some affect a stance of lacking interest
Children are left to drift without anyone instilling the responsibilities of an adult in them.

We then got to the issue of suicide. I explained carefully how this was related to our ultimate research goal of determining what issues surround equality and kalaallit women’s position in society. I made sure to use Mariia’s words insofar as addressing the number of young men committing suicide compared with the relatively few young women who do so. The question was greeted with even stronger feelings than were present during the initial stages of the interview. One of her brothers had committed suicide. I had had no prior warning about this and apologized sincerely, offering to discontinue the interview if she wished to. However, she wanted to continue and viewed our conversation as a welcome outlet. She had been very close to her brother and had been trying to help him prior to his suicide. Since then, she had had no one to talk to, except her own husband and children. Suicide makes families speechless, she said, and many of her own siblings did not wish to address any of the related issues surrounding the suicide, not even their feelings about it.

She insisted adamantly that the suicide question was not related to gender issues but, rather, to personal issues. The question really concerned what the individuals had gone through as human beings. She felt that her brother had committed suicide because he felt devalued as a human being. He had been very successful in his life while he held a prestigious job on a trawler, but lost his sense of self-worth when he could not continue that job as he was forced by mental illness to remain on shore. He had not been able cope with the drastic change. Even though she had helped him through official channels, he had not been able to accept his circumstances.

The interviewee expressed her feeling that sometimes our fate is unavoidable. In the case of her brother’s suicide, the experience had put inordinate pressure on the family, but destiny in life could not be denied however extraordinary it may be.

We talked about the fact that many individuals do commit suicide. It is true that there are indeed very few people in Maniitsoq whose families have not been hit by such a tragedy. We also discussed the fact that suicide and related issues surrounding suicide are taboo subjects in Greenland. The interviewee felt that families experiencing pressure do not have any official forms of support to turn to prior to and after the suicide, and many are left to deal with the psychological pressure of being blamed. Pisuutitsineq (blame) is one of the many aftermaths of suicide, and many people cannot go beyond their feelings of blameworthiness, even within families. She had been able to work through her grief, however, and told me
that she had also helped herself to deal with it by taking a workshop offered through her work, in which she wrote her brother a letter.

I thanked her for her contribution as it would add tremendously to our research. “Thank goodness, I really hoped it would,” she said.

**Gender and Child-Rearing Practices from the Male Point of View**

The following is an interview with an Akulliit husband. Asked if he discerned any change in child-rearing practices since he was a child, he adamantly stated they are very different. He stated that he had grown up during a time when most activities were based on physical strength and when children were expected to obey their parents’ requests. His duties had been to get coal for the household, fetch water, and do anything else his parents asked to be done. This, in his mind, is drastically different from today’s situation. Like my first interviewee, he stated that everything is already done, and he felt that children today are undeniably lazy and spoiled. He was also the oldest child in the family and as such had been expected to manage the tasks that the younger children could not handle. As he was growing up, his father assigned typically male tasks to him, which included rowing the boat, minding the fishing lines, hunting sea fowl, and hunting seals. He also had to fill empty cartridges for their ammunition manually. Nowadays these tasks are either non-existent or not encouraged. Growing up he spent much time on the water, and he is now trying to pass on this tradition to his grandchildren.

I asked him if he thought that a child’s sense of identity has in fact been jeopardized today by modernized living. He affirmed that he thought this was true and said that he challenged his children about this, trying to inspire them to live out the opportunities granted them.

Comparing his own upbringing, this interviewee observed that today children are being brought up in an “indifferent” way, meaning indifferent to gender. He suggested that this trend would ultimately lead to politics becoming “manned” by women. In his opinion men and women are becoming increasingly equal, and he told me about his own unique child rearing. He had always been actively involved and learned to knit, finishing mittens and socks. His mother had passed away when he was young, and because of his inexhaustible energy he washed the floors, did the dishes, and at a time when there were no washing machines for laundry, he washed the laundry by hand.
The interviewee also observed that children are brought up differently now through educational institutions. In that context the difference he has discerned is the degree of education, but he maintains that the content learned is not gender specific. Educational requirements are becoming increasingly demanding, he commented, and he hoped that this would become even more evident if Greenlandicization were to be the outcome of such a development. He recognizes that better-educated kalaallit are badly needed in Greenland and laments the situation that politics within the Greenland government prevent young educated kalaallit from returning to Greenland. Many young Greenlanders go to universities in Denmark, for example, and because of their inexperience, some have to spend extra years in Denmark as they are not able to compete for jobs in Greenland.

With regard to Mariia's suicide question, the Akulliit husband mentioned the latest media news. Contemporaneously with our interview there had been seven consecutive adult suicides in Ilulissat (Jakobshavn), northern Greenland. He thought that a good part of the reason for suicide was a lack of love. Perhaps the youngsters experience love but then lose it and react typically for their age — that is, immaturity — not having anyone to talk to. He noticed that the child-rearing practices of the parents are often blamed. He speculated that social workers dealing with potential suicides are not necessarily well trained or well enough equipped to deal with the problems and offer good service. It is in that kind of setting that people end their lives, he concluded. He stated that he was consoled by the fact that there is much more openness in discussing problems all along the coast of Greenland, which he says is helpful.

The wife of the Akulliit man could not resist participating in our discussion and talked about the lack of understanding of the spiritual aspect of human suffering: tarnikkut anniaateqarluni. She felt that many issues have been buried in states of avoidance, shame, and denial. Her husband ended the conversation on suicide by making a reference to the old traditional ways based on what he called kalaaliussusermi kisissuseq, or shyness, which he thought comes from being a kalaaleq. Not being assertive was seen as good, which therefore led to the suppression of some underlying personal issues.

More Male Reflections on Child-Rearing Practices
When I met with my next interviewee he told me that his wife had declined the opportunity to be interviewed and he respected her decision. He also told me that since he had had a stroke, he was not totally comfortable speaking with me but at the
same time he was interested in proceeding. I assured him that I would be pleased
with whatever he could convey, and if he was uncomfortable we could stop the
interview for a while or for good. Accepting these conditions, he became a willing
participant.

On the question of child rearing, he felt that the differences between approaches
in the past and today were enormous. Previously, children were taught their role
according to their gender through practical work; such teachings, he felt, went
beyond oral instructions. Boys and girls learned their roles through experience. Boys
were given physical teaching tools such as the sling or taught how to make a fishnet,
and these skills were handed down first-hand, accompanied by definite instructions.
He had heard on the radio about Icelanders encouraging educational programs that
included experiential aspects. In Greenland, he lamented, there is now so much
emphasis on reading and theoretical aspects, and training opportunities like the
ones in Iceland have not been offered in Greenland. In the olden days children were
taught through their own experiences and trials; they were taught through the
observation of others around them, and by helping out. If he were to analyze the
child-rearing practices of children today, he would deem modern practices to be so
limiting that they jeopardize the experience of boys becoming men. They are not
shown anymore how to become men, nor are girls shown how to become women.

Reflecting on the educational system, the interviewee found that expectations
were not divided by gender, and children are encouraged to take wage-work-related
training regardless of their gender. This of course was very different from his
upbringing when men were expected to be the breadwinners. This is evidence of the
respect and status men had in the past. The male provided while the women waited
for his provision and handled what he brought home. Today, men and women are both
providers, equally so, and this is based on their wage-earning capacity. Because of
the current job-oriented society, the greatly differentiated tasks among men and
women have been eradicated, and one can observe men doing dishes and cooking,
things that they were never expected to do in the past. Whereas previously men
would never have been seen cutting an animal, they do so today. The interviewee saw
nothing wrong with such co-operative arrangements, and his respect for such
arrangements stems from his speculation that negotiating couples base their
agreements regarding duties on great trust among themselves. After all, everything
in life is based on money now, and bills do need to be paid.
I asked him if he and his wife had made any recommendations to their children about educational training and, if so, if these had been based on gender. The older children made their own choices of training and were pursuing their own interests. They had not been directed by the parents. Because of hearing difficulties that resulted from constant ear infections during childhood, the youngest child had fallen behind in school, and as parents they had chosen to help that child more.

When our conversation turned to gender-related suicide, my subject related his regret at having met two very young teenagers about to commit suicide. Both were male. I am not sure if the young men committed suicide after he encountered them, but I understood from his story that he followed the two young men for a while.

He admitted openly that he himself had considered suicide as a young man, and this had only been prevented as he had unexpectedly run into a good friend early one morning. On meeting his friend, his thoughts of suicide were averted. He stated that many men want to end their lives due to the feeling of “being stuck,” not knowing what steps to take to overcome obstacles in life. Such situations may be caused by love, though he thought this would be more prevalent in women. Yet he imagined that the desire to live often resides more strongly in women, and they seem to develop more potent hopes than men, especially if the woman is loved more than the man. He said that love is usually initiated by men toward women. Generally speaking, women tend to take less initiative to begin a relationship and wait for the males to make the first move. Men tend to change their partners more during their formative years. During such times opportunities may pass them by. Limitations may begin, and such limitations may become restrictive enough to create obstacles in life, leading some to commit suicide. He felt that being left by a partner was a major reason for suicide.

**An Angajullikkut Couple's Discussion on Child-Rearing Practices**

The next couple I interviewed had been married for more than fifty years. Their children were grown up, and they had a good number of grandchildren. I was not able to interview them separately as they insisted on being together, and as a result, some of the interview responses were difficult to transcribe when both talked at once.

The Angajulleq husband tended to dominate the responses but certainly paid great respect to his wife’s responses and gave her opportunity to contribute. The *Ilisimatusarfik* undergraduate student went with me, and I interviewed them at their
home. We took a break from the interview when we discerned that both were tired. We made several arrangements for other interview times.

Both were very anxious to make us understand that they never differentiated between their children with respect to gender. My attempts to communicate about the eventual differential treatment of children irritated the husband, and he would often challenge me, saying, “Did you get it?” throughout the interview. He obviously did not want to risk being misunderstood and for his or their reputation to be blemished, and I was asked on a number of occasions to switch off the recorder. After a long rebuilding of trust through extensive conversation about many other aspects of life, we reached a point of discussing child-rearing practices. He spoke at length about his daily observations of bad behaviour among children, and he was certainly disinclined to become involved in such issues. I eased my way into the conversation by talking about how some of the conditions of his time were based on *inuk nammineq*, meaning ‘each person to itself,’ and that such philosophy was based on living off the habitat, as mentioned earlier in this study. *Inuk nammineq* conditions are not necessarily realistic anymore as changes in society have been drastic. Like other interviewees, he was enticed by this to address progress in Greenland. “We have to move forward, of course, we do,” he stated, “but progress has come about far too drastically. If only the officials had treated us with more care. We cannot do without Denmark, but when the Home Rule came about, the officials wanted to take over everything, disregarding the finances and pre-empting the economy. Many, many kalaallit would have been able live out their identities honestly and would have honoured their own lives.”

The husband was satisfied with the education system, though he stated that altogether progress had been undertaken far too quickly and brought in a lot of material goods, irresistible goods. Correcting the children is even discouraged, such that children who are smoking are allowed to do so; in fact, smoking pupils are given ashtrays. So much has changed, even the discouragement of Christian education.

The Angajulleq wife took over the conversation and talked about her contributions to the community lately in the form of educating children in Christian teaching. Basically, however, she wanted to reiterate that she and her husband had never demonstrated preferential treatment according to gender toward their children and had always insisted that everyone else do the same. They wanted all their children to be loved and treated equally and did not want their boys to be more cared for than their daughters. They had never appreciated that kind of approach. I asked if she had noticed any differential practices elsewhere.
“Of course this is evident every now and then, but I never ever mingle in such issues, and never comment on the observations,” she said. “Let me just clarify this,” said her husband. “I was one of the much celebrated children: qujagisaarujuussuit ilagaannga.” Such extra care and preference was based on the naming system. The husband was named, for example, after somebody’s husband or son. His names were all requested names, and because of these names he received preferential treatment.

All the names that were given to him were names of males, but his wife conveyed that it was also possible to name children across gender. Young parents do not necessarily follow the practice nearly as much as they did in their time, but there are still families who do this. I wanted to know if any special treatment still took place. They confided that this was not necessarily the case. They talked about certain circumstances in which the naming of children was denied by the priests. He and his wife attend Sunday services regularly and are surprised every now and then when expected names are not given in a baptism, considering, for example, that the baptising parents are known to have recently lost a family member. The couple brought up the number of names given to a child and thought that regularly four names were given, and sometimes, though rarely, five.

The couple observed that their grandparents did practise gender-related work, and that children were indeed brought up to learn different responsibilities. The husband stated:

Boys were taught by their fathers and girls by the mothers. Today things have turned around to be totally the opposite as far as our hunters are concerned. The husband cuts the caught animals, whereas beforehand my mother was the only one to cut the animal. When the father arrived with an animal the wife takes over, and he has no say after that, and it seems to me that no one was missing anything.

Today, the practice of pajuttarneq — ‘sharing of the meat’ — is not even practised. The men scrape the skins and sell the hide, and women’s work in that regard is non-existent. Of course it would be pretty difficult for working women to attend the cutting of the hunt, but I suspect that couples are not even sharing the stories of the hunt anymore. I am certain that the wives do not even get to see the results of the hunt. With the economic circumstances they way they are, the husbands cherish the wage-earning capacity of their women.
The husband had an interesting reflection on the question surrounding suicide. He felt that the use of alcohol and drugs was very much a cause of suicide. During their time these were used very rarely and in limited amounts. The couple continued to lecture us about the drug and alcohol programs in Nuuk, Ilulissat, Aasiaat, Iceland, and Denmark. They felt that substance abuse has a definite effect on the children. The husband also felt that as a result of this substance abuse the men are more aggressive when, back in his time, men were not expected to exert aggression. Sadly, he said, with such drastic changes in society men have become aggressive even within their relationships with their wives. His statement indicated a respect for women, and he suggested that the kind of aggressiveness that one sees today is “new” and was not at all tolerated in his time. This is actually the first time that anyone had mentioned aggression this way, and it was indeed novel to discover that men were discouraged from exerting aggression.

**Exploring Gender through the Education System**

I also took Mariia’s advice that I interview school officials to discuss some of the questions that she posed. The exercise was to find out what role the education system plays in instilling gender roles, if any.

I set out to interview the principal at the time and was instead referred to his vice-principal. At the time of the interview the Atuarfik Kilaaseeraq (Kilaaseeraq School) was administered by fully educated kalaallit who had all grown up in Maniitsoq. I asked the vice-principal if he was aware of any differential treatment of school children in the education system with regard to gender.

He felt that the question could be best discussed in terms of the forventninger, which is Danish for ‘expectations.’ He said that the instilling of gender-related values likely depended on the individual teacher’s outlook on gender, and in many cases school teachers envisioned goals for their pupils based on their expectations of them and perhaps directed the students down the educational paths they foresaw for each student. Stereotypically, the goals could be office and clerical work for the girls, and the more musculosynthetic activities, whatever these may be, were for the boys. School teachers are not expected to have any specific viewpoint in relation to gender as far as the education system is concerned, but the vice-principal imagined that their expectations were not devoid of gender-related views. He also observed, “I am not sure what expectations parents inculcate, but I believe that the lower-achieving school children are exposed to more gender-related options than the more successfully achieving school children. My estimate is that the higher-
achieving school children do not necessarily pursue their higher job-related aspirations in relation to their gender.”

In the past, teaching activities were divided according to gender, such that girls were taught sewing and cooking while the boys were taught carpentry; the vice-principal stated that today the school children are not divided that way any more. Courses are offered and taught to children, beginning in grade five, regardless of gender. All children in grade five learn to sew or do carpentry. They gain much that way, he deemed. He also felt that in the near future there could possibly be a reversal in the traditional division, but currently the interest or curiosity of the child was the decisive reason for a division of classrooms. “I have discerned that school children make a choice based on their interests..., and at this point the girls are taking carpentry and the boys cooking, and it seems to me that many more make a choice like that. I believe that boys enjoy taking courses in cooking since they eat the food they’ve cooked.”

I inquired about physical education classes and asked if the boys and girls were still separated. Indeed, the boys and girls are taught physical education separately, starting after grade three. “I am not even sure what the reason is behind this, and our practice is strictly based on the traditions in that regard. I remember back in 1981 when I practise-taught in East Greenland that school children in grade six were taught co-ed physical education. They also showered in the same room, and these were pubescent children with girls beginning to grow breasts, but all the children were used to this, and no discernible discomfort was ever expressed.”

In reference to sexual education, the vice-principal talked about the school’s sincere effort to deliver well-rounded information ensuring the human aspect of sexuality. The boys and girls are taught about sexuality together so that they may understand the physical differences of male and female physiology. “This approach is much more accepted by the younger generation of teachers, and it seems to me that there is much more openness about what used to be seen as an embarrassing subject.”

As part of the effort to provide information about sexuality, the health officials of the town have now become part of the delivery system. The vice-principal stated:

We have now come to understand that issues cannot be taken separately, and that we are all part of the system delivering information. We are even dealing directly with the police office, even though they are very different from our system. We are also working with the social services, and all these
collaborations are geared toward an improvement. Recognizing that we have the same goals and bringing down the barriers of institutional boundaries in a society can only be good, particularly now that most of the officials are kalaallit themselves.

The vice-principal and I also discussed suicide and the great discrepancy in the ratio of male-to-female suicides. His feeling was that great expectations instilled in the school children added a tremendous amount of pressure. These expectations are related to life skills, to educational goals, but also first and foremost to expectations of personal growth. After all, children are expected to go to school for a minimum of eleven years, during which they must learn about their individual responsibilities. They undergo great pressure, constantly being reminded of being the future for society. “I believe it is in that regard that the instilling of the responsibilities of the individual child is often a heavy one, as far as the school expectations are concerned. This is the cost of being a kalaaleq. Some do not measure up to it and, maybe, therein lies the danger.”

Interestingly, the vice-principal turned the discussion around to his own experience as a young student residing in Nuuk in an apartment building.

I found it disillusioning. I was brought up to be able to handle the “man-work,” but in an apartment, I found myself not being able to shovel, not being able to fetch water or anything, and I did not even have a boat. It was very difficult to put into effect the role toward which I was brought up. I may even say that all the enabling that apartment living was supposed to do was in effect disabling. It must be difficult for women as well; you cannot spend all your time doing dishes or washing the floors. For many men apartment living is equal to that of just giving up — being caught in intangible tangles. The quest for doing things is severely limited in my thinking. You are not allowed to paint the outside, and you cannot go on doing the washing of the floors.’

It is perhaps this ennui and inability to carry out that which you have been taught is your responsibility that contributes to male suicide. The vice-principal stated that in his view the municipality should have programs enabling people who do not have a boat to go outside the town. In this way, children of lesser-income homes would get a chance to fulfil themselves elsewhere. Recreation centres and other organizations should promote such activities, which would act to encourage children who have given up on satisfying expectations of them. Generally, the vice-principal thought
that both men and women in the present-day situation have much less of a chance to put their roles in effect due to modernization. The first interviewee also made this observation.

Our discussions turned to the vice-principal’s general understanding of opportunities in Greenland. The new generation of parents is the generation born after the Home Rule Government was instituted in Greenland. In his estimation these people have clear expectations of their children and, for that matter, of their schools. He finds that the new-generation parents groom their children for the future and instil in them a sense of purpose in relation to their home life as well as educational conditions. Today, people in Greenland are very aware that they have great opportunities. They travel beyond Denmark and experience the world globally. The vice-principal saw Greenlanders as active players in global society and named as an example of this Henriette Rasmussen, who at the time of the research period was the first kalaaleq to hold an important position within the United Nations Office in Geneva. He mentioned others who have made a mark in the international context, and these examples he felt were role models, and were indeed indicators for the trust that people can now place in the kalaallit identity. “It is very visible that the possibilities are reachable,” he stated. He felt that both men and women could achieve for their people and also realized at this point that women have constituted the majority in being successful role models.

Conclusions Regarding Child-rearing Practices and Gender
I mentioned earlier that Inuit and kalaallit individuals are given spheres in which to explore their potentials as individual men or women, and these spheres are not just two-dimensional (body and mind), but they involve timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu (physical, spiritual, soul/name). Mariia wanted to know if the earlier generations’ processes for instilling responsibilities in each gender are still used. Her question is typical of the research group insofar as each one of us had some idea of what the past held, but what was known back then has become blurred since the assimilationist era.

Obviously the older generation of Maniitsormiut experienced physically challenging work. They lived during times when water was available only if it was carried directly from rivers and lakes. They experienced times when washing machines did not exist and clothes had to be washed by hand. Motor boats were not necessarily available as they are today. Most food came from either fishing or hunting and was prepared from scratch. Very little food would have been available in the shops back then.
Furthermore, the older generation was exposed to strong Lutheran religious teachings.

The interviewees felt that since everything is readily available now children today in Maniitsoq are brought up very differently. They do not have to wash clothes by hand, they do not have to carry water, and they can buy anything that they need without much effort. Each of the interviewees felt strongly about the necessity of ensuring that children got to know their tasks in the form of responsibilities within each household. Each of these interviewees discerned a great void when children were not taught these skills during their childhood. They adamantly denied any differentiation of household tasks according to gender between siblings during both their own childhood and during parenthood. The concern among the interviewees was that the children miss out on the necessary process of learning skills. Such a process is what formed the men and women of previous kalaallit generations. Apartment living, an example mentioned by the vice-principal, seems to particularly affect young kalaallit men, as they have no say at all in the running of the building. Men cannot exercise any typically male duties, such as looking after the outside of the building. This was the privilege of men, today and in previous generations.

Furthermore, it seems that the institutions left to instil responsibilities, namely, the schools, undertake this in a manner best described as gender neutral. During my conversation with the vice-principal he felt that such a process is just following the Danish school system, and that maybe this is something that needs to be revisited in the future. The vice-principal felt that the “genderization” process should be left to the parents rather than the schools. He felt that high expectations from teachers regarding the students’ studies create enough pressure in the schools without them having to learn skills that come close to gender responsibilities.

Does the older generation envy the new generation not having much physical labour? Through my interviews it became apparent that the older generation is appalled by what they see as the lack of responsibilities being instilled in children today. They feel that individuals are robbed of their personhood by not having learned responsibilities.

A number of the interviewees lamented the loss of religiosity and felt this as a void.
Menstruation as Taboo among the Kalaallit
Mariia also related her child-rearing question to the topic of menstruation. She felt that despite the fact that we are modern-day Greenlanders the issues surrounding menstruation remain largely taboo. Are children now more encouraged than she was to get to know more about women’s sexuality? I must admit that I was struck by her question; I would not have taken a question like that to the field if I were to have done the study on my own.

In spite of the assumption of a closed attitude toward sexuality and particularly menstruation, many of the elderly women I interviewed voluntarily talked about their menstruation experiences and also of childbirth. The adult female interviewees of Maniitsoq admit to having received virtually no information about their adult sexuality.

This is unusual in many ways in light of the child-rearing practices of the Inuit. Across the Inuit Arctic, adults with whom I conversed regarding children and sexuality expressed a positive attitude toward sex and made a point of instilling in their growing children a healthy familiarity with their own genitalia. Male and female genitalia are recognized as important aspects of personal identity and self-value, which are the foundations for learning responsibilities later on. During my master’s fieldwork in Pangnirtung, Nunavut, interviewee parents talked openly about the issue. In general, Inuit parents make a point of playfully touching, squeezing, kissing, and smelling, at the same time making a statement about, the genitalia of their growing children. Parents, older siblings, and grandparents participate in this practice. Small children respond with shrieks of delight, and this continues until isuma, as Briggs (1970) identified it (positive sexual identity), develops in the growing child. Once this has been formed, Inuit feel that pre-adolescent children have the impetus to carry on with this positive and healthy, open attitude toward their sexuality. It is in this context that the apparent secrecy about adult sexuality is unusual. According to Maniitsoq females it was all a mystery and not to be talked about, not even with other women.

One elderly woman told me that when she was giving birth to her first child in the 1950s, she had had no idea of the process, and she had sincerely thought that she was losing both her legs, and that this incredible pain was due to this loss rather than the birth of her baby. She lamented with others the secrecy surrounding their sexuality.

Secrecy and silencing among Inuit would not have been well tolerated during pre-Christian times, as Inuit depended on their transparent actions and thoughts to
enticing animals to give themselves to Inuit. This could only be achieved by living truthfully and openly, and by being recognized by the souls of the animals as being a person with good intentions (Fienup-Riordan 1990). Anyone who withheld feelings and thoughts surely would cause agony for the community. So, why the secrecy surrounding menstruation?

During one interview, as we came to the issues surrounding sexuality, the woman being interviewed expressed that she could hardly believe the closed attitude toward sexuality that she experienced as a child. She was appalled, recalling how discussing menstruation had been taboo. According to her, not one word was mentioned about her sexuality, let alone menstruation. She had not been prepared and did not know with whom she might consult about “the thing that was happening to her.” In her own house, she remained adamant about her children learning openly about sexuality, and specifically wanted her daughter to learn about menstruation. One way she had of handling this was by asking her children to hand her the pads during her own period.

I was not able to obtain useful information directly through the Maniitsoq field-research stage as my interviewees simply reiterated my question rather than giving me constructive answers. I was forced to revert to existing literature to compare and analyze other cultural practices. I felt that I could gain by understanding the meaning of menstrual behaviour of other peoples who are in a like culture as kalaallit women. In this way I was able to use the notion of genderlessness and apply the timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu framework through which to view kalaallit women’s practices during menstruation.

**Menstruating Inuit Women**

Kleivan and Sonne (1985, 13) wrote about Inuit women’s menstruation practices in Canada:

> Among the Eastern Eskimos in Canada, who exploited resources of both the sea and the land in a bipartite cycle, birth was regarded as so serious, and “infectious” that the mother had to be isolated. On the first sign of an approaching delivery the woman moved to a small igloo, in the summer, to a small tent. As a rule the seclusion continued for a few days after her delivery. And upon the mother’s return to her family’s dwelling with the new-born baby, she was to crawl in under the back end of the tent cover or through a fresh hole in the rear of the igloo. For she was too “infectious” to be
permitted to pass through the customary entrance used by everyone else...

Upon her return the mother was immediately reintegrated into her community, since she was considered non-infectious, as soon as her period of seclusion was terminated. That, however, lasted for two entire months. Reintegration into the community was ritualized by the mother appearing in every single hut or tent in the settlement, to announce the end of her seclusion and receiving pieces of meat as a token of her renewed community membership.

Reading this, I was struck by the term “infectious,” as I had not come across a word resembling it in modern kalaallisut terminology with regard to menstruation. When women menstruate we simply say aaqartoq, literally meaning ‘has blood.’ The term for infection is tunillaaneq or tunillanneq but this has never been used in the context of menstruation.

In further analyzing the term as a present-day reader, one does discern that this term “infectious” suggests the endangerment of others around menstruating Inuit women. Could birthing and menstruating Inuit women pose a threat to others? How? Further analysis reveals that these preventive activities took place prior to Christian times and pre-Christian values would have determined such activities: if one were to understand the “infectious” times as reminiscent of the mysterious powers of pinngortitaq, as suggested in chapter 2, one would realize how the birthing process reminds the participants of the process of creation. Add the dimension of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu and one gets a mental map of activities of the pre-Christian Inuit that would include the females willingly removing themselves from others during these particular times and the reason why. The physical aspect of an activity is always obvious, but that is just one aspect, namely, the physical (timikkut). The other two, tarnikkut anersaakkullu, are equally important in balancing one’s actions and thoughts.

The time of birthing and the menstruation period — the “infectious” times — illustrate the spiritual, cosmological alignment with the physical aspects of the Inuit women and thus bring together the three aspects of the triangular structure of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu. It is probable that these periods of separation were periods of “sanctity.” Inuit women likely meditated during these times of seclusion and contextualized their roles in terms of family and society, aligning them to form spiritual and cosmological relations. This process meant balancing the three dimensions: physical, spiritual, and cosmological.
I argue that Inuit women related their “infectious” times to supernatural powers, much like the practices that Cruikshank et al. (1990) described about Athapaskan and Tlingit women in the Yukon. Cruikshank et al. explained the practices of menstruation and the periods spoken of as “pollution.” During these periods women were admired, since they “acquired ritual and practical knowledge unavailable to men” (11). Thus the authors reinforce my earlier discussion about the Kleivan and Sonne notion of “pollution” not necessarily being an implied belittling or diminution of Inuit women’s status and prestige. The practice of seclusion during the “infectious” times demonstrates Inuit women having a time on their own to internalize the alignment of the spheres of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu and, likely, to find their own individual empowerment in relation to their surroundings. I would also argue that the times that Inuit women “removed” themselves from their regular homes, presumably leaving their children, husbands, and their daily responsibilities, were the beginnings of shamanic exercises. As we know, menstruation occurs monthly, and women departed the camp to be left alone. Much of the time would have been spent thinking, evaluating, and imagining: actualizing tarnikkut anersaakkullu. Much female knowledge would have been solidified during such times. This could only have equalled the knowledge of men who were out hunting on their own much of the time.

In answer to Mariia’s question why modern kalaallit women continue to see issues surrounding menstruation as taboo, I would argue that the kalaallit women’s experience of losing their power through Christianity by giving up the practices of seclusion during menstruation and birthing, among others, left a vacuum so great in negation that no word has been found for it. Thus it finds its equivalent in menstruation remaining a taboo subject among kalaallit women. Once people have been shamed they avoid talking about it. The Inuit women’s power must have been great, as great as is their silence today about menstruation. Today, menstruation is a physical phenomenon (timikkut) devoid of tarnikkut anersaakkullu components.
Chapter Five

Spheres of Men and Women in Maniitsoq Homes

Mariaanna asked what aspects of life a couple collaborate in today. Her question came about as a direct result of our discussions about the pre-historical and historical eras during which we thought that Inuit work was directly linked to gender-specific tasks. We knew that there were certain expectations of men as there were for women as Inuit practised a clearly obvious division of labour, thereby accentuating their gender. Men held certain responsibilities apparently very different from those of women, and many of the earlier studies on Inuit labour focused extensively on descriptions of “gendered” work.

This study argues for understanding the kalaallit gender relations in relation to the philosophical underpinnings of the Inuit whereby one has to appreciate that each individual is first and foremost a human being; their individual qualities, including those related to gender, depend on the dimensions of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu. This chapter extends this exploration. It is about how the seven Maniitsoq couples who were extensively interviewed for this study negotiate their individual spheres in their homes.

As we understood from chapter 3, individual Inuit play a unique role in ensuring the continuation of good relationships, both physical and spiritual. Any undertaking, any work, implies the application of some philosophy, and Inuit work is not different in that sense.

The Inuit concept of work in previous generations implied “an alliance and alignment of all elements and... constant communication between the three constituent realms to maintain [the] delicate balance” (Kawagley 1993, 19–20). In light of the notion of genderlessness, Inuit work is to be understood by applying and combining the three concepts of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu. Work is carried out with the purpose of ensuring a relatively safe continuation of the human relationship with the various animal and nuna souls. Accordingly, work is applied to the nurturing of human relationships with pinngortitaq, and the reverence and nurturance results in nuna’s approval, thereby gifting human beings with physical and spiritual sustenance. This insight coincides with the Yupiat’s sense of a living environment, in which the land and the animals give and receive according to their own will (Kawagley 1993). As Fienup-Riordan (1990, 168) writes, “Just as human hunters were capable of conscious decisions
as to what and where to hunt, animals likewise were believed capable of conscious decisions…”

Inuit have long suspected that the animals and nuna are not only capable of thinking but they also make their own decisions based on their isuma (‘reasoning’), as Briggs (1970) found during her Utkuhikhalimmiut fieldwork. Isumaminik, ‘of its own reason,’ or ‘with its own momentum,’ or ‘whatever he/she/it thinks,’ emerges from the pinngortitaq energy and should not be underestimated. I refer to my earlier statement that all manifestations help to integrate life-ordaining forces, and each one of them is to be respected for its own engagement of these forces. Kawagley’s (1993) analysis that the manifestations deserve to be recognized for their distinct, mystic quality ordained by the life forces is based on the understanding of the autonomous momentum of isumaminik.

While Inuit work is an undertaking sensitive to the indifference of nuna and the animals toward human existence, our understanding of Inuit work now also illuminates the taboos, rituals, and celebrations of the Inuit. These are part of the work of the Inuit in their daily lives in nuna. The fact that men and women work differently does not in any way undermine each other’s responsibility. Each individual is expected to ensure a working relationship with the animated world of the Inuit. They see the division of labour as the best means of relating with their surroundings, physical and otherwise. Gender-based division of labour is seen to be a valued social practice necessary for the enjoyment of the products of the life forces available in nuna. In essence, gender-based work is simply each doing their best with the qualities with which they have been endowed, rather than anything to do with superiority of gender or tasks as we have observed in the Western world. Arnaassuseq (femaleness) and angutaassuseq (maleness) carry with them real manifestations of humanity, and their distinctive qualities are highly cherished. The physical differences between the male and the female are of course not unique to human beings and are to be found in other manifestations of pinngortitaq. Inuit therefore linked these gender differences with the responsibilities of life on nuna.

Inuit have clearly defined expectations of how men ought to behave and present themselves in the contexts of family, community, and soul networks. Inuit men are expected to invest their energies in the sensible and sensitive use of their surroundings — the habitat and the animals — and only to the extent that this use meets the needs of family and community. Inuit maleness is much celebrated with this background of understanding.
Likewise, strongly defined expectations are held as to how Inuit women ought to behave. Women are expected to be strongly sensitive to the needs of family and community and in relation to the forces that make life possible (Jessen Williamson 2000).

Applying the three components of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu, we realize that Inuit work does not only consist of physical work: two-thirds of Inuit work consists of spiritual and cosmological preoccupations. Taking this fresh understanding of the work of the Inuit in general and applying it to the division of labour, one has a considerably different appreciation of the Inuit concept of work.

Today, premises for life in the Arctic are very different, and members of the research group had not had an opportunity to reflect on the incredible surge of cultural change. The questions for which each of us wanted to find answers speak to the change from a hunting-based Inuit life to that of the Westernized kalaallit lifestyle. Mariaanna’s question was not different in that regard. The absorption of Western values is much encouraged in Greenland, and the degree to which this happens depends on the individual. This is reflected in the way kalaallit negotiate and organize their spheres of life and specifically, for this study, household duties as a couple. The homes we visited for the purpose of interviewing were modern-day Western-style dwellings. Some couples live in their own houses, either self-built or purchased, while others live in government-owned apartments. Work, in this modern-day context, is undertaken for the purpose of being able to afford a lifestyle that is based on money, and the question is how the notion of genderlessness and timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu are combined with the European-originated values with regard to work.

Household Work and Societal Positioning of Men and Women in Maniitsoq

Mariaanna wanted to explore what aspects of life a couple collaborate in today. What do men do in a household and what do women do in their homes?

As a research group, we felt that the division of labour in historical times was fairly predictable insofar as all of us had grown up in times when our own parents and grandparents practised a very visible gender division of labour. We perceived this to be traditional. However, we found that the partition of labour and the delineation of the roles today are unpredictable since socio-cultural patterns have changed so drastically from the time of our births (1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s).
When we interviewed the first couple, Aningaakkut (each couple was given fictitious names), this is how they presented their individual responsibilities as they perceived them:

## Division of Labour

### Wife: Nuliaq (Aningaaq)

**Inside the House**
- Generally cooks
- Looks after the regular bills
- Due to the father’s long absences, takes on full responsibility for the children
- Cleanliness of the household
- Looks after all the needs for clothing (shopping, estimating the need for clothes, making sure that not too much money is spent on that)
- All other duties that need to be done not listed by the husband as his responsibility

**Outside the House**
- Her own job
- Looks after the family’s vehicles: cars, snowmobiles
- Buys gifts for the children: birthdays and Christmas
- Shopping for food

### Husband: Uiusoq (Aningaaq)

**Inside the House**
- House renovations, both inside and outside
- Sharpening of household knives

**Outside the House**
- Owns a family enterprise (Interestingly, the point was made that the family business requires so much of his time that his family requirements/responsibilities have been regretfully shifted to his wife)
- Built their house
- Looks after heavier goods from stores
- Helps shop for the gifts for their offspring
- House heating/oil/gas/electric needs
- Takes necessary trips by boat; fishes in boat
- Shovels snow in wintertime
- His financial contribution is a larger computer
Sociability
- Ensures the respectability of appearance (physically as well as socially)
- Looks after houseguests
- Looks after the family celebrations servings of meals, coffee, serving of the kalaalimerngit (prepared kalaallit food), and family formal suppers
- Meets the obligations of extended family (social) gatherings: goes to coffee receptions on behalf of the family
- Feels the responsibility to be the connecting person in all family relations, and that responsibility has to be instilled in the children

Hunting
- Skin preparation

Recreation
- Finding recreationally valuable learning opportunities
- Sewing: both as responsibility and recreational

Health
Social Control
- Ensures that their offspring learn social responsibilities

Church-related Issues

Hunting
- Hunting caribou
- Ensures kalaalimerngit for the household, and cooks it. He is also responsible for storing the household kalaalimerngit
- Cuts up caught animals, or pilanneq, specific to the butchering of sea-mammals
- Looks after hunting equipment for him and his sons

Recreation
- Hunting recreationally at sea (fishing, hunting small sea-mammals, sea fowl, etc.) pinialunneq

Health
Social Control
- Feels responsible for and instils hunting skills in his sons

Church-related Issues
The Aningaaq Couple’s Collaborations

According to the Aningaaq couple, they began to collaborate when the wife could not keep up with preparations for family celebrations. In present-day Greenland, family celebrations involve a great physical, financial, and social outlay. The women usually do most of the planning and carry out the preparations, and when this particular husband made a reference to this, he did it with great respect for the effort that his wife puts into the extensive family celebrations. The more important celebrations are baptisms of children, weddings, funerals, and the Lutheran church confirmation ceremony, which has now become a much-ritualized formal occasion. For these events, families make preparations for years. For girls, the traditional confirmation dress easily costs more than DKK10,000 and a number of relatives, close and distant, may all be involved in making the outfit. The anticipation of the apersortittoq (confirmation) creates tremendous pressure for all involved, and I have heard some of my close male relatives declaring their absence more desirable and safe than being around their overwhelmed wives!

The Aningaaq couple we interviewed divided the bills between themselves. Both earn their own money and have separate bank accounts.

The children’s homework had become more the responsibility of the wife, although the husband had been encouraged to take greater responsibility in that regard.

Recreation was another area in which this couple liked to plan together. This included recreational outings by boat, visiting their small hut outside town, and hunting and preparing traditional food during the summer. For some, this is fish netting for arctic char, which can be frozen fresh or smoked, salted, or dried for the winter. Fishing for cod and curing it is another activity that falls under the notion of pilineq in the Maniitsoq area (in many ways it is recreational, but for some it is financially necessary; culturally speaking it is also essential). The cod does not get smoked or salted, and is usually dried for the winter. It is the same for ammassak, a smelt-like little fish.

Closeness to the environment and the utilization of the resources it provides were important to this couple and they preferred to practise this together. Both also agreed that schools do not provide all the learning a child needs and that pinngortitaq, in this context ‘nature,’ has much to offer to fulfil and facilitate learning. It is therefore important that children grow up learning from both the father and mother, alongside nature itself, what pinngortitaq has to offer.
The Aningaaq couple had agreed to ensure together that they brought up their offspring with the socio-psychological requirements (*misigissutsikkut*). *Misigissuseq* refers to how one feels socio-psychologically in reference to the three foundations of life, namely, *timikkut*, *tarnikkut*, *anersaakkullu*, in making balanced decisions that often having lifelong effects and consequences. While the development of *misi-gissutsit* may be geared toward social organization and adjustment, the individual’s feelings and their manifestations continue to be greatly respected, even today. This is certainly the case as most parents have expressed the wish that their children be allowed to explore their potential by determining their own educational training. This is the result of the idea that all individuals have their own potency and potential accorded through *pinnogortitaq*, creation, and consequently applying the triad that make that possible. The Aningaaq couple explicitly expressed that their children were allowed to find their own potential, and they trusted that their children would find their own setting — contextualizing themselves — in the future.

The couple we interviewed felt that the inculcation of their children’s responsibilities was an important aspect of their combined effort to bring them up. They agreed that they did not want their children to be fond of material goods and brought them up accordingly. They also felt that their children need to be well-informed about religious practices, in this case Lutheran practices.

The children’s names were something they as parents decided together, independent of other family members. While this may have been unusual in earlier generations when grandparents played a great part in the naming of new family members, many parents today in Greenland select the names for their children, and these may not be directly linked to the generational practices of the naming system that Nuttall (1992) described earlier. Whereas initially the Lutheran Church did not welcome the kalaallit names due to their attempts to eliminate the “heathen” realities of their new believers, adjustments have been made to at least mostly allow the old Inuit names through baptism today. Greenlandicized Christian names are allowed: for example, Gabriel becomes Kari or Gaabik. However, true Inuit names are also being sanctioned through the Lutheran Church now: for example, Ivalu, Tupaarnaq, Navarana, and Aqqaluk.

As it happened, the father of this family came from a prominently successful original Maniitsoq family; his upbringing was considered strongly traditionalist, and it is in this context that he carried on the tradition of teaching his male children to hunt. However, their female child was not taught the traditional tasks of hunting life. He and his wife admitted that his own upbringing is less influential as life goes on and
that the children would have to make up their minds in regard to their teaching as to whether they would use this knowledge later.

Their home was very comfortable, and they emphasized the fact that working together and keeping peace and harmony in their home life is important to them.

**The Nukartaakkut Couple**
This couple had three children: one boy and two daughters. According to the parents each of the children was expected to adopt his or her responsibilities as they were given, regardless of their sex. The following is what they shared with me about their separate roles at home. The family obtained their residence directly through the wife’s job, including the furniture, the curtains, pictures on the wall, and the tools for the household.

### Division of Labour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wife: Nukartaaq nuliaq</th>
<th>Husband: Nukartaaq</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inside the House</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inside the House</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sews, but any manual on technical instruction is the responsibility of the husband</td>
<td>• Looks after the children’s homework, since he is more talented (skilled) in that regard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cooks. Previously the husband did this</td>
<td>• Does paperwork for the household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bakes</td>
<td>• Maintains all electrical lamps, the furnace room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Looks after children at home if ill</td>
<td>• Electrical needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• General house cleaning: laundry, wall washing, dusting, vacuuming (The last three are in return for her husband looking after the homework with the children)</td>
<td>• Was responsible for the kitchen when children were small; now it is a question of interest and of having enough time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outside the House
• Shops for groceries

Outside the House
• His job
• Looks after the boat with children’s participation
• Looks after machinery, electrical, and furnace (saves the family money)
• Insurance business, including being ready to travel without much warning
• Looks after all paperwork from the officials
• Budget: itemizing plans, including earning extra income for family needs. Ensures that the family does not owe any money
• Has an interest in books. He has a better education and has a sounder background in that regard
• House repairs
• Drives the car

Sociability
• Determines the guests of the house
• Looks after everyone’s appearance in terms of hairdressing and clothes
• Responsible for the children right from birth, due to breastfeeding

Sociability
• Withdraws and does not participate much in hosting houseguests
• Responsible for the children. He spends more time explaining anything to the kids, and that leads to his contribution to their homework
• Takes on the role of learning about any new information, such as new ways of communication, newspapers, communication with the outside world, also through writing letters

Hunting
• Helps cut caribou carcasses

Hunting
• Hunting equipment
• Butchers the animals caught (sea mammals)
• Sharpens knives
Recreation
• Evening recreational activities, for example, she looks into evening courses (adult education)

Recreation
• Hunting for recreational purposes

Health

Social Control
• Takes on the role of delivering parental talks to their offspring, taking care to adapt content to their level of understanding, including about taking on responsibilities

Church-related Issues

While the Nukartaakkut couple had separate jobs, they combined their income and together decided on things such as how their holiday should be spent, the furniture for the house, and so on. They also cut their caribou carcasses together. They decided on the names of the children together and named each one of them with both the paternal and the maternal family surnames. Thus they ensured that all their respective relatives were named through their children. This is a practice that has recently developed: parents decide to name their children collective surnames rather than naming them after an individual.

Child rearing was done collaboratively; they had separate responsibilities regarding the children, but they had agreed on who carried these out as well as how they were carried out. Both felt responsible for overseeing their children’s schooling.

The couple also stated that they did not seek friends outside their marriage but, rather, both entertained the maternal kinsfolk extensively. They consulted each other when attempting to overcome mistakes and made sure that the conclusion at which they arrived had a positive effect on both of them.

They both agreed on Christian values and worked together on the ceremonial aspects in their lives such as baptisms and confirmations. Both agreed on individual freedom and on being able to make decisions without much interference from the other.
The Najakkut Couple
The next couple was very willing to be interviewed, and both wanted to participate in the research. However, I was not able to make any arrangement to interview the husband either on his own or with his wife because of our conflicting schedules. As a result, the household work and observations on their collaboration came from the Najakkut wife’s point of view. While there could be questions about whether there was bias on her part, I am inclined to consider her version acceptable and fair. The Najakkut couple had one child through an arranged adoption of a distant relative. They obtained their housing through the wife’s work.

Division of Labour

Wife: Najakkut

Inside the House
• Cooks
• Cooks the kalaalimerngig, the Greenlandic food, differently (renewing it: nutaarsarlugit)
• Washes the floors
• Oversees the clothing in terms of taste and physical appearance
• Decides on the furniture of the house and is responsible for the appearance of the household
• Looks after the basic sewing, knitting, repairing aspects of the household

Outside the House
• Earns about DKK10,000 per month working in small children’s care
• Holds her own bank accounts

Husband: Najakkut

Inside the House
• Does dishes
• Does the laundry periodically
• Hangs washed laundry outside and brings the clean laundry back in
• Vacuums
• Looks after paying bills for the telephone, the electricity, the mortgage on the boat
• Looks after the practical clothing of the family

Outside the House
• Partakes in a co-operative ownership of a trawler, where he is responsible for the paperwork
• Has access to a car through his work
• Looks after much of but not all the shopping for the family since he has access to transportation
• Holds his own bank account
The couple sometimes shopped together for groceries and often together for gifts. They were both very close to nature, and the husband made the choice of their child’s name based on that, which they both accepted. Respect for one another was emphasized. They liked hunting for caribou together, as well as preparing — drying, smoking, salting, and freezing — the food, including arctic char. All this took place depending on available time.

Both enjoyed independence and took pride in being able to support themselves without relying on others. This was the reason they had separate bank accounts. Through example, they wanted to instil the skill of being self-sufficient in their child.

Their child bound this couple together. They were appreciative of love and being able to be on familiar terms with one another. This became constant, particularly as they had the mutual responsibility of their child. The wife mentioned that support was important, and both demonstrated that toward the other. She related this in terms of the fact that she could now enjoy the company of other women rather than being “closed in.” She felt that it was important that a partner accepted what the other wanted.
The Akulliit Couple
The Akulliit couple had been married for more than thirty years and had five grown children. To my surprise, the wife informed me of her special relationship to my paternal grandparents as she was a namesake of one of my deceased paternal aunts, someone I did not know. She and I consequently connected well during the interview.

Division of Labour

Wife: Akulliit nuliaq

Inside the House
• When the children were small, she knitted and sewed some of their outfits, but she has lately not done much handiwork
• Responsible for any work inside the house
• Went to husmorskole (housewife training), and is interested in cooking, especially preparing food while ensuring good use of the available resources. Very interested in pursuing different ways of preparing the national food dishes
• Looks after furnishing the house and even painting inside the house

Outside the House
• Works outside the house, and has long participated in union work

Husband: Akulliit uik

Inside the House
• Does not tolerate any mess around the house or anywhere, and therefore takes on the role of being the organizer for cleaning/clearing up, and admonishing the children

Outside the House
• Initiated the move to Maniitsoq from a smaller settlement within the municipality of Maniitsoq, motivated by his wish for their children to have better educational opportunities
• Worked at the fish processing plant, but has obtained other work since
• Also works for union-related issues
• Looks after the boat, the hunting equipment
• Looks after the oil/gas needs of the boat, and ammunition needs
Sociability
• Visits with her family more often than with her husband’s family. The husband thinks that this has to do with the women relating better to one another

Hunting

Recreation
• Since their children have grown up, she has taken up her hobbies more often
• Interested in choral activities

Health
• Looks after health issues

Social Control
• Though she enjoys it she does not appreciate having to buy any kalaali-merngit – in fact, she feels ashamed of buying any national food. This is because she expects her husband to provide the food
• Feels strongly about proper appearance, particularly in terms of clothing

Church-related Issues
• Pursues religious matters more than the husband and relishes churchgoing

Sociability
• His siblings visit very rarely

Hunting

Recreation
• When he does not work, he hunts recreationally for the family

Health

Social Control
• Has no use for self-indulgence in terms of physical appearance
• Shies away from clothes that show off too much

Church-related Issues
• His outlook on religion is that it takes a secondary status compared to his needs to be out on the sea and in nature. He does not want to deny the existence of it, and feels that he has it inside him

The Akulliit couple conveyed their conviction that any negativity should be openly presented in their relationship. They did experience conflicts raising their children as they had differences in opinion.
Much like the first couple, they felt strongly about their collaboration involving the pilineq: salting, smoking, drying, and preparing the renewable resources around the town. They felt strongly about supporting one another and ensured that good collaborative teaching was expressed to their children as they raised them.

Both of them sensed the importance of work and supported one another in terms of not being late for work. They also felt it important that they pursue their own interests now that the children were grown.

All five children are named after someone in the extended family. At birth the firstborn child’s names had already been planned. The next child was named after the Akulliit couple’s husband’s friend. The husband decided the third child’s name, and the wife arranged the fourth one. The youngest child was named after someone in the paternal family.

The Akulliit couple had a joint account, and both have a say in how the money is spent. The move from the smaller settlement is something that both had negotiated, and both supported the idea in order to give their children a better education. They both enjoy the riches of kalaalimernigit and certainly enjoy the new ways of preparing the food.

The Akulliit couple felt strongly that birthday celebrations are important, particularly if these are celebrated with their children. They also realize the enormous financial cost of such celebrations and agree on this priority.

They felt that health issues could be dealt with by eating sensible, good food, and both were trying to abstain from alcohol since they agreed the cost is frivolous. They had plans to stop smoking in the house.

After more than thirty-two years of marriage the Akulliit couple’s major conflict was regarding the husband’s boat outings. These were so frequent that the housekeeping had become of secondary importance, which the wife did not appreciate.

This couple felt that they have achieved well since they have had no problems with their children and felt that they had been giving and had contributed well enough to each other while raising their children that these values had been passed down effectively. They are seeing evidence of this now that their children are having offspring.
The Mumingasukkut Couple
This Mumingasukkut couple approached our undergraduate student to volunteer their time. They had listened to the radio interview and had really wanted to be interviewed since they felt that their contribution was a worthwhile one. They felt that they had a unique couplehood and wanted to share their ways of living.

**Division of Labour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wife: Mumingasoq</th>
<th>Husband: Mumingasut</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inside the House</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inside the House</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wakes up the family and looks after breakfast</td>
<td>• Looks after all the housekeeping tasks such as the dishwashing, dusting, cleaning up, and the plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Looks after the children’s school lunches</td>
<td>• Homemaker of the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cooks and looks after laundry</td>
<td>• Looks after the hairdressing needs of the family, and is the person who stays home when children are sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Responsible for all the financial aspects of the family</td>
<td>• Chose the name of their firstborn and second child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensures that their children’s clothing needs are met, depending on the price of the clothes</td>
<td>• Is very grateful to be a father to four children, and that he is the homemaker for them, ensuring their safety; takes his role in that regard very seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• He did not achieve much educationally, and has pushed and supported his wife in that regard. He actually gave up on his education, and ensures that he supports his wife’s achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Has great problems overcoming the stereotype of men not being the homemakers in the society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outside the House
• Has a job that provides the family income, and can hardly imagine being a homemaker
• Rarely picks up children from the daycare center
• Attends the meetings with the daycare center and the school on the basis that she is the person of the couple who is trained and educated to deal with issues surrounding such meetings
• Pursues her own educational needs

Sociability
• Makes the effort to connect with the husband’s family, and is very thankful that this family lives somewhere else and not in the same town
• She breastfed their children

Hunting

Recreation
• She plays bingo regularly

Health

Outside the House
• Responsible for delivering children to the daycare centre

Sociability
• Responsible for the social upbringing of the children
• Makes plans for birthday celebrations
• Not close to his wife’s family or to his own family
• Likes being alone as he finds being social too burdensome

Hunting

Recreation

Health
Social Control
• She does not drink any alcohol
• Drinks, but a very limited amount
• Ensures that their children learn about the cautionary kind, the teachings about love, being able to communicate
• Makes sure that everybody in the family learns to trust one another; ensures that the home is a peaceful place for all
• Finds himself much more close to evaluating what really matters in life than his wife and wants to achieve the more positive and effective ways of living

Church-related Issues
• Responsible for instilling religious values in the children, and makes sure that they learn traditional sayings: oqaassutit/inerterineq

This family, including the children, did the dishes together. The couple prioritized the children's needs in the family affairs and had done so together right from the births of the children. They liked doing the housekeeping tasks together and liked the idea that they were never in need of anything as they collaborated in ensuring that their needs were looked after before running out of things. They did the shopping together and deeply appreciated being able to communicate well with one another.

They gave the younger children names that they had chosen themselves and did not necessarily follow the practice of naming their children after someone who passed away.

The Mumingasukkut couple had decided to get married in a church and have their children baptized. They adhered to religion mainly to celebrate lifecycle occasions. They had chosen friends who were openly friendly to anyone, but the friends who visited them at home were more often female than male. They deeply appreciated the settling of the family and the peacefulness of their home.
The couple did not mind living a lifestyle opposite to the norm with regard to gender roles, though the husband had a somewhat difficult time overcoming the pervading stereotype of the male as the typical breadwinner.

The Mumingasukkut couple wanted to instil in their children the need to get an education. They both, especially the wife, felt that providing a good example in this regard would be effective. They both felt that each of their children needed to do their homework well to get ahead as adults. They wanted to inspire them to live their lives financially independent of others. The choice of education was very much up to the individual child. The couple was convinced that if they as parents made a choice for any of their children, the child's own desire to get that education would not be sustained.

The couple wanted to see that their children obtained a proper knowledge of sexuality and wanted this information to be delivered in a respectful way.

What is the strength of their marriage? The religiosity and their devotion to their life-long love; they talked very candidly about this becoming more and more precious for them as time goes on, even to the point of finding that parting from one another seemed strange. Over all, they wanted to achieve contentment.

The Aqqaluakkut Couple
At the time of our interview the young Aqqaluakkut couple had just one son but the wife was pregnant with their second.

### Division of Labour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wife: Aqqaluakkut</th>
<th>Husband: Aqqaluakkut</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inside the House</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inside the House</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Looks after the inside of the house</td>
<td>• Looks after the technical aspects of the household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changes diapers more frequently than the husband</td>
<td>• Looks after any financial aspects of the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feels she has more say in the decoration of the house, and looks after the plants</td>
<td>• Does not really care how the house is (in terms of tidiness)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outside the House
• Contributes to the family economy by working half days. Has her own business, and all her income is used for the family groceries
• Has her own area for sewing and owns a sewing machine
• Explores the stores more than he does

Outside the House
• Responsible for the car, the boat
• Works for a company as director of finances
• Looks after the outside part of the house, including shovelling snow
• His personal income is used for payment of the house mortgage and payment of the family boat

Sociability
• Entertains her family
• Takes no interest in her partner’s hobbies or interests, including that of learning a second language (in this case, Danish)
• Ensures that their children’s toys are educational ones, and prefers the toys that have more developmental value to children

Sociability
• Makes sure their child has someone to play with

Hunting

Recreation
• She pursues her own interests including handicraft work and skiing

Recreation
• Enjoys boat outings
• His interests include any format of news communication such as radio, television, Internet
• Enjoys documentary presentations
• Enjoys watching videos (although he sleeps through these, according to his wife)

Hunting

Social Control
• Has never smoked
• Final say in making the decision to have an earlier abortion
• Since the birth of their child, she has totally gone off any alcohol drinking

Social Control
• Working on quitting smoking

Health

Health
Church-related Issues
• Takes more responsibility and is more active regarding religious matters, such as listening to the radio Sunday mornings (church sermon is nationally transmitted Sunday mornings)

• Does not emphasize religiosity, but enjoys the church gatherings

The Aqqaluakkut couple’s collaborative decisions and actions were nothing if not ambitious. They had recently bought an expensive good-sized boat and owned a large house. While many young couples opt to rent apartments, this couple preferred to own a house they could call their own.

They enjoyed making food choices together and relished the thought of being able to eat “whatever [they] felt like eating.” They always tried to ensure they ate together. They did not eat much traditional food and preferred to eat imported food, since the latter is more affordable. This is another case of them deciding together what to spend their money on. They also enjoyed grocery shopping together, following a list they made up in advance.

They had not established couple friendships yet and seemed to have their individual friends. They enjoyed driving around together. Sometimes they skied together but rarely.

The couple enjoyed being able to talk to each other without great disagreements and peacefully. They took delight in having a child and had agreed to prioritize their attention on the child. They didn’t care for much emphasis on clothing and admitted that most of the clothing they had for their child was inherited from other children in the extended family. Both desired to have children. They agreed on their child-rearing practices and enjoyed the security of agreeing on this together. Specifically, they did not want the child to be defended when doing anything wrong, nor did they want the child to become so much a priority that he or she got away with anything and became the “boss” of the family.

The couple felt compelled to name their first child after the male family members. It happened that both maternal and paternal grandfathers had passed away not long before the birth of their child, and the negotiation between them was on whose name should be the first. They said that they had continued this discussion even during the car trip to the baptism.
They expressed a desire that their child and future children should arrive at their own decisions as to what kind of education they would want to pursue, and their responsibility as parents was to “fill” the child(ren) with their love. The rest would take its own course.

The Angajulliit Couple
This couple had been married for more than fifty years and remained very much devoted to one another. They felt that life had been good to them and were rewarded by the fact that all their seven children stay in touch with them. Although we had approached the couple to interview them with regard to the question of child-rearing practices, discussed in the preceding chapter, we also asked if they could be interviewed for this part also. They agreed, and the following is their rendition of their roles.

### Division of Labour

**Wife: Angajullikkut**

**Inside the House**

**Outside the House**
- During the late 1940s she assisted her husband in his entrepreneurial work by being the person who cooked and cleaned for her husband’s work crew. She scrubbed the workmen’s clothes and cleaned their quarters. They were accommodated by another family, and they brought their own small children whom she cared for at the same time. She travelled with her husband when he had contractual work elsewhere in the municipality. Back then she also worked as a cashier while looking after their children as well. Some other places she worked were the local co-op grocery shop, the clothing shop, furniture shop, and also the local daycare centre.

**Husband: Angajullikkut**

**Inside the House**

**Outside the House**
- Became the Royal Greenland Trade trader, looking after the ordering of material goods
- Later became an artisan, and when Greenland was to be modernized back in 1951–52 he did a workshop at the Technical Institute in Copenhagen. Those were the years when the Greenland Technical Organization was created
- Created his own business in 1956, and was the first person to live from his business in Maniitsoq. He has been actively involved in the organizational meetings, which has often taken him travelling; participated in creating the practical training of artisans for Greenland
Sociability
• In their family life, she had taken the role of being mainly responsible for their children’s upbringing

Sociability
• Always felt compelled by the teachings of his father, and felt very strongly that these be carried on by co-operation and helping siblings
• His father died and left the young Angajullikkut husband to become a determined, independent provider for his mother and younger siblings. He is the eldest of the siblings and took his responsibility very seriously at a young age

Hunting

Recreation

Health

Social Control

Church-related Issues

This couple had agreed on the need for the education of their children. Both strongly agreed on the Lutheran belief system. They had both decided to follow the naming system for their children, except for the youngest children. These latter ones were given any name they took pleasure in.

Observations on the Separate Spheres
Religiosity and Family Life
One interesting finding is related to religiosity and family life. It seems that this sphere is a more feminine one in that the women in this study were much more inclined to adhere to Lutheran church practices than their male counterparts. As the Najakkut wife declared, she was the one in the household who, much more than her husband, was devoted to religious matters. The wife told me that she was more unquestioning on church-related issues than her husband, who tended to cynically question church matters.
This was also true for the Akulliit family; the husband preferred to go out boating while the wife attended church. She became annoyed about his strong insistence on recreational hunts and that his insistence was so vigorous. She felt that his absence had become an excuse not to do his chores around the house. He, on the other hand, assured me that his lack of church attendance had very little to do with his religiosity or spirituality. He felt that being out there away from urbanization made him feel spiritual, and he did not need to have that confirmed through church sermons.

As we saw with the Angajullikkut couple, the wife had opened up her own Sunday school for the children of the town, but in this family the husband was just as appreciative of the church and Lutheran beliefs as his wife.

It is intriguing to see that in the Mumingasukkut family, the husband was the one who felt the responsibility to instill religious beliefs and practices in their children. He was also the one who taught the children the “sayings” (oqaassuitit).

Of the young Aqqaluakkut couple, the husband liked church gatherings, though not so much for the sake of religion but for the occasions, the large coming together of families. His wife did not attend church services regularly but made a point of listening to the broadcast of church sermons on Sunday mornings. His statement explained much to me as to why women generally more actively pursue church activities. One can take the social responsibilities of women and see that the Lutheran church functions as a social conduit for power dynamics. Women get their alliances through the church and feel certainly more obligated to attend services since they themselves are the social conduct conduits within their own families.

Inside the House
Generally speaking the women interviewed looked after the décor for their homes. They decided on the colour co-ordination of furniture and curtains, for example. They decided on the pictures to be hung and even the kind of furniture bought, although the latter was usually constrained by a combined thriftiness. Women make the choices of houseplants. In traditional Inuit houses plants would have not been seen, but since colonial times and certainly over the last forty years or so, houseplants have become part of the household. Today, women can order in seeds from Denmark and start their own plants, but many visits are made by individuals, couples, or family members to southern parts of the world and some bring back exotic plants. These are usually shared among family and well-established friendships. I would say that
one can trace social connections through the kinds of plants you see in houses. This is the new manifestation of the sharing and generosity that Inuit are famous for.

**Social Control and Women**

Most of the women interviewed expressed that they felt responsible for instilling “social” practices in their household members. It seems that kalaallit women have gained great influence in external relations, and they are responsible for the physical and social appearance and behaviour of their husbands and children. It is very clear to me that women claim to hold the primary responsibility for bringing up their children; most interviewed felt in much greater control of this area than men. This particular aspect does not necessarily sit well with all wives. The Aningaaq wife conscientiously made an effort to unload family responsibilities on her husband. She realized that she had taken on too much over the years, and she was literally instructing her husband on how to take on some of the family responsibility.

Many of the women decided on the style of clothing their children and husbands wore, but they didn’t always get away with it, as the Akulliit husband declared. He disliked clothes that were too showy, unlike his wife who preferred the opposite. Many women even decide their husband’s hairstyle in addition to the hairstyles of their children.

**Food Preparation**

**Overturning Previous Cultural Practice**

One great change that has happened within the last ten years is that women do not necessarily have the task of cutting up any mammals brought to land by the husband. Many of the husbands are now totally responsible for butchering the animals that have been caught. This trend was very obvious across all the interviews. One of the elderly interviewees even wondered if the wives of the hunters ever get to hear how, where, and what husbands had caught and remarked that they probably never even saw the caught animals. Just a generation ago, besides butchering the mammals, the woman would likely have looked after the pattern of distributing the meat. As one saw in the listed jobs of men and women in Maniitsoq, the activity of butchering animals easily became a collaborative effort when more extended trips were made to obtain sustenance. Such might be the case when hunting caribou, musk oxen, or even when piliniarneq (preparing for winter) took place. Interestingly, men continue to keep the task of sharpening knives of the household.
There is no doubt that many women are responsible for the daily cooking. Due to recreational hunts many men have become responsible for looking after the traditional food preparation. Among the women, however, the trend is to prepare the local food using European or Asian cooking techniques. Many of the couples interviewed prepared the food together by drying, smoking, and freezing, and they expressed deep appreciation of this kind of food. To many individuals such practices give great satisfaction through the associated cultural and identity values, especially knowing that many, many generations have enjoyed this kind of food, and they themselves become part of continuing cultural practices. The new ways of preparing the traditional food offer the kalaallit women an opportunity to show how accepting and modern they are in terms of the very rapid cultural changes.

Sociability
One finding in this research indicates women as being in great control of the couple’s social life. Many of the interviewed men declared that their wives determined who entered their homes as guests. It seems that the female family relations are the ones most often invited for significant celebration purposes such as birthdays, baptisms, confirmation, weddings, and funerals. Very few male relatives enter the house, and men rarely receive visits from their own families. Instead, the wife’s family often visits. Much has been written about kalaallit families centring on the patriarchy in the past, such that extended family ties were initiated through the fathers and male siblings. Today this notion is challenged by the findings of this study. There is no doubt that female family connections are the dominant ties today, compared with just a generation or so ago. My own family ties were patriarchally organized; my mother moved to my father’s household and lived with the family until she had her third child. More recently, during the last generation or so, the kalaallit are experiencing a strongly matriarchal society.

Men’s Sphere of Duty among the Maniitsoq Couples
The interviews show that another women’s sphere — that is, in addition to religion and religious matters — is within their homes, including the upbringing of their offspring and social networking. The men’s sphere, however, strongly involves the external areas of the household. In many cases this relates to men having to look after the boat of the family. A good part of the house repairs and renovation work falls to the men. Inside the homes, the men’s area is looking after the technical and mechanical aspects of the household. The husband generally looks after the furnace room and household machinery. Two of the interviewed men had built their own homes.
Financial Aspects
Recreational Hunting
Most of the men interviewed hunted recreationally, and the products of the hunt constituted the main meals of the family. The Mumingasukkut couple had no access to boating even through their extended family connections, and certainly due to their financial concerns they had chosen to eat imported Danish foods. In the case of the Aqqaluakkut couple, both came from families that cherished the traditional food and the hunt, and both had access to these through family connections. But much like the Mumingasukkut couple, this couple decided to rely on Danish food since it was more economical.

Sustenance and Identity
In earlier chapters I mentioned Sejersen’s notion that eating kalaalimerngit (traditional food) was part of the Greenlandic identity. This is certainly true in terms of most kalaallit in Maniitsoq, but it was surprising to see that the Mumingasukkut and Aqqaluarlarksut couples were explicit in saying that they do not eat much kalaalimerngit due to financial considerations. The two were young couples with several young children, and they made their choice of not living off the local food because it was too expensive. Instead they relied on the subsidized Danish imported food, which they adamantly claimed to be generally much cheaper than the local food.

Isolated Men
As I started to analyze the interviews I could not help noticing the fact that many of the interviewed men found themselves isolated and preferred this seclusion to socializing even at home. As was stated earlier, the extended family ties are more often strongly connected through the wife, and at least two interviewed men stated that they rarely saw their siblings. The Nukartaaq husband expressed his isolation or seclusion by saying that he withdrew and did not participate much in hosting houseguests but instead preferred to be in the background when there were guests in their home. He and the Akulliit husband expressed the fact that all the sociability that happened in their house was something that was arranged and decided by their wives. The Akulliit husband saw very little of his own siblings despite the fact that they live in town. Thus, entertaining and sociability define a women’s sphere of activity.
The non-involvement of men also occurred with regard to child rearing, where the women strongly felt their primary role. However, as mentioned earlier, the Aningaaq wife had been overwhelmed by the expectations of her role and had decided to unload some of her responsibilities on her husband. This included shopping for gifts for birthdays and Christmas, and taking on more of the responsibility regarding the children.

Out of the seven couples who were interviewed, two lived in apartments. Today, many more Greenlanders live in apartments rather than own their own homes, and this reality must drastically alter the expectations of both men and women with regard to the male sphere of duty surrounding their abodes. One of the interviewees reflected on the scenario and concluded that men's identity is much related to doing repair work on the outside of the house, and men living in apartments have no way of attaining this role; he felt that men's identity is as a result dangerously compromised. Thus, according to the interviewee, many such men must experience an absence of a sense of manhood. The vice-principal whose interview I presented in chapter 4 also mentioned this frustration as creating a feeling that one lacked masculinity.

The isolation of men is also expressed in their lack of enthusiasm for church functions, which we established as being the main conduit for social relations. Men do attend church services but often more out of family obligation than for the sake of religiosity. This is not to say that men are less religiously engaged but, rather, that men express their religiosity differently than women. After all, many more men than women actively pursue the recreational hunts, an exercise closer to the environment than most women's experiences, and which is considered deeply spiritual in terms of communion with creation, nuna, and the animals.

**The Collaborations of Couples in Maniitsoq**

Without exception, all the couples declared love to be the foundation for their collaboration in their relationships, and this is refreshing to add since most books on Inuit relationships rarely mention love. What is portrayed in those studies is mainly physical, but I am certain that love comes into the picture within most Inuit marriages and does develop among couples, including in the marriages arranged by others. This was previously discussed by an Inuk elder in Canada (Wachowich 1999).

It was interesting to see how couples collaborated within and outside their homes and how their partnership affected their home life with regard to decisions which they made jointly. I realized that even with just the seven couples interviewed for
this research I could discern three patterns of couplehood. There is what I call the “traditional” model, exemplified by the Nukartaakkut, Akulliit, and Angajullikkut couples. The kind of work they did in their homes was very much delineated by gender, including expectations surrounding their jobs. The collaborations also seemed very regular and explicitly negotiated.

The second model denotes relationships in which expected collaborations are not necessarily obvious; each individual carries out tasks independently, without necessarily making any reference to the partner. This is a model of the “detached” couple. The Aningaaq and Najakkut couples practised this kind of marriage. Here, the wives had separate bank accounts, earned their own incomes, and handled their own finances. As the Najakkut wife told me, her husband looked after paying the telephone and electricity bills and the mortgage on the boat. She paid for the apartment rent and the food. In the case of the Aningaaq couple, the wife had her own car and snow scooter and felt independent enough to make decisions without the participation of her husband. When I presented this model to the research group in Maniitsoq, several of the women were openly surprised that some women in town had their own bank accounts.

The third model is what I called the Muminosukkut, meaning the reversed couple. As I said earlier, this couple volunteered their own interview, and I was very grateful to them since the research group did not identify this couple initially as being candidates for research interviewing. The husband in this couple was the homemaker while his wife was the breadwinner. She had professional work, earned the family income and was detached from housework and the instilling of social responsibility in her children. She looked after all the financial aspects of her family; he looked after all the plants, the décor of the apartment, and any required housework. Again, women in the research group were surprised that a couple like the Muminosukkut exists in Maniitsoq.

I did not in any way sense that the above models presented better or less successful marriages. Throughout the interviews and certainly across the various models I noticed a strong devotion to one another among all the couples. The above models only speak to different ways in which marriages work in Maniitsoq. I am certain that other, different models of marriage can also be found.

It is interesting to see that the thoughts that we as a research team had of finding one marriage model were easily dispelled by the various other models. Finding differentiation indicates that each couple explicitly negotiated their individual roles.
within their unique household establishment. Each couple recognized the talents and skills of their partners and collaborated in their duties accordingly. Note how the Nukartaaq wife took on the baking, the general housecleaning, laundry, wall washing, dusting, and vacuuming. She also did the grocery shopping so that her husband could, in return, look after the children doing their homework, since he was better educated and therefore best suited to this task. Look at the way in which the Mumingasooq husband decided to support his wife through her education. He realized that she was much more talented with regard to education and in this respect it made more sense that she be the breadwinner. To balance this, he took on the task of being the homemaker.

At the outset of this study, we had also discussed the fact that there are a number of known homosexual relationships in Maniitsoq and that maybe we should include them in the interviewing process. After a brief discussion we decided against the inclusion of such relationships, not to exclude them but in recognition of the fact that most such relationships were not well established and that our goal really involved gender differences in the division of labour. We thought that there would be very little benefit to the goals of the study to include a same-sex relationship.

**Thriftiness in Maniitsoq**

Thriftiness among the Maniitsoq couples was not necessarily discussed directly, but it is an important characteristic among couples. Many of the couples talked about buying furniture and clothes when they were on sale and often both wife and husband were frugal. Women do a lot of their own sewing to save money, and many men go out hunting to contribute food to the table. The Mumingasukkut couple bought only imported Danish food, insisting that it was cheaper than the native food. While each individual exercised her or his own form of economy, collaborative financial thriftiness in order to set priorities seemed important among the Maniitsoq couples.

**Marriages and New Developments**

Many of the Inuit societies across the circumpolar world have been experiencing rapid cultural change, the kalaallit no less than other groups, and as I have noted this study is to find out how egalitarian principles fared among Inuit-descended kalaallit couples in Maniitsoq.
There is very little doubt that Inuit-based societies divided work in accordance with gender, and in the earlier hunting society the lines were very clear. This is also true for Greenlandic society. Today, due to cultural changes, the lines have become blurred, and couples are left to their own devices to figure out what will work according to their individual needs and their needs as a couple. These models of collaboration exemplify that, and there is no doubt that as the kalaallit society becomes increasingly industrialized and Westernized, the issues surrounding the division of work will escalate to something different from previous generations. Some of the developments have already been expressed by the Najakkut couple: the husband is taking on responsibilities earlier associated with women’s work. He does the vacuuming, the dishes, and laundry. The Mumingasukkut husband has totally reversed the standard roles of men.

As a research group we discussed the issue of new economic and social developments in Greenland and talked about the fact that Greenlanders these days have high hopes of locating oil and gas, and that if the employment implied by such activities materializes, opportunities will arise and new types of couples are likely to develop. Should this happen, the politicians and social officials will have to recognize problems that will be associated with the long-time absence of workers. Social programs may have to be developed to offset any negative impact on families in the future.

**Disagreements and Problem solving among the Maniitsoq Couples**

I expressed earlier my surprise that the interviewed couples had been so willing to participate and that they did so very openly, including their answers with regard to the roles they played. One particular aspect was unexpected. As a research group we had never thought to ask anything about marriage problems.

Each of the couples emphasized how their home should be a place of peace for them as a couple and for their children. This obviously is only attainable through effective problem solving. The Aningaaq husband conveyed that he came from a family with a strong traditional background, and he had the tendency to use that as a model in bringing up children. His wife, on the other hand, came from a much less traditional household and wanted to see their daughter being included in learning the traditional skills. The husband taught their sons hunting skills, but their daughter had not been taught anything in this respect.
The Aningaaq couple were experiencing a lot of stress based on the fact that the husband was absent a good part of the year participating in the trawling fishery. The husband’s absence usually lasted up to three months at a time, and after he had landed, he was at home for a couple of weeks and then went off again. This kind of practice is very new to an Inuit-descended couple, as couples worked together in most economic activities and shared responsibilities. Where trawling is involved, the wife takes on all the household responsibilities, and as far as the Aningaaq wife was concerned, such a practice was so new that she found no one to whom she could go to for advice. She felt that many couples who rely on trawling for their livelihood go through a lot of troubles without much sympathy or understanding from others, and efforts have not been made to replace the husband’s role in daily family operations. Maniitsoq does rely heavily on trawling activity at present, and many of the men who work in industry become part of the crews. I tried to interview a number of young women who are in such relationships, but they all declined. This is significant and requires considerable further investigation.

The Nukartaakkut couple’s disagreements usually occurred around child-rearing practices. Coming from different homes with different values, setting up a household in which a new set of social values has to be negotiated is not an easy task. During our conversations the use, or rather misuse, of alcohol came up. The husband had an alcohol problem, and the wife reacted to his behaviour in a hurtful, vindictive way. Furthermore, her response to his alcohol use was to smoke cigarettes heavily. As well, the Nukartaak husband felt that the differences between them on how the finances needed to be organized represented a difficult issue for them. He wanted to be free of any bills, and his wife had a tendency to buy goods while being indifferent to their economic situation. Obviously their differences had created rifts in their marriage although they were working steadily at making their marriage work by trying to understand what their individual emotional needs were and how each of them needed nurturing in their emotional growth.

The Najakkut couple had also experienced difficulty regarding child-rearing practices. The wife often felt that her husband reacted angrily when correcting their child. The husband was not an outgoing person, and he complained about her being far too outgoing, particularly when she was inebriated; he did not drink. They obviously did not share social spheres.

During my fieldwork I had also contacted a number of young couples my research partners had recommended I interview. I was surprised when they declined since I had thought that they would find the experience of being part of the research
interesting. I wondered for a long time about their lack of interest. I later thought that the ongoing negotiation between the partners — that is, in establishing their relationship as a couple — was still so young that they perhaps did not want a nosy novice anthropologist complicating the process.

Questions I would have liked to ask included why kalaallit easily accept casual relationships, behaviour which was often thought to be promiscuous by non-kalaallit. Many couples have had multiple relationships prior to settling into couplehood, and many have already had multiple children before getting married, which continues to be the case today. In previous generations weddings were not the norm, but permanent marriages were recognized. In that regard Petersen (2003, 75) writes, “In the East Greenlandic communal society marriage was different from casual relations in terms of several criteria: 1) a shared economy, that is shared ownership of the part of the man’s catch which is not included in the shared stores of the household; 2) a division of labour; 3) shared obligations toward the children; and 4) shared plank-bed sections.”

There is of course much more to processes involved in marriage than what Petersen suggests, and timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu illustrate that. The mechanical, materialistic, physical aspects to which Petersen (2003) refers are only workable in addition to the sense of metaphysical connecting. Correlating the three aspects of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu in a partnership creates permanent Inuit and kalaallit relationships. However, timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu are ever-evolving, and their aspects need to be nurtured and respected. If this does not happen, individuals may feel threatened, and their energies may be reinvested in more appropriate relationships. The above illustrates a direct animation of how timikkut, tarnikkut anersaakkullu is negotiated amongst Maniitsoq couples.
Chapter Six

Gender Division of Labour in the Workforce

Boletta wanted to know what kind of jobs there are in Maniitsoq and how they are divided in terms of gender. Having seen how women and men in couples separately and together negotiated their spheres in their household, now we examine men’s and women’s spheres outside the home, namely, in the workforce. As a group we thought that Boletta’s was an interesting question, worth pursuing since the answers to the question would likely provide us with a picture of the societal positioning of men and women in the workforce. How do jobs relate to the notion of genderlessness and the dimensions of *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu*?

It is interesting to note, however, that “labour” and salaried employment in Greenland is a relatively new concept as most of the salaried labour has only been generated in Greenland since the post–World War II era. Before that the colonizers, Danish men, held remunerated jobs in Greenland. Today, Greenlanders hold many significant positions, and men and women compete for these and fair salaries without much reference to gender. In an earlier chapter I stated that today *kalaaliussuseq* includes the ability to adopt a lifestyle incorporating ancient Inuit and modern European values. The arena of jobs outside the home is the very place where the people of Maniitsoq negotiate their European lifestyle. Most jobs are attained through competition, and the qualifications for such competitions are based on an education system that is basically Danish.

Attaining an education is strongly desired and is generally well supported all through childhood despite the assimilationist policy. My parents’ generation saw the value and potential of having a good education. Since then, improvements have been made to the education system so that Greenlandic now is the most often spoken official language in Greenland, being used more commonly than Danish. Many of the teachers in Greenland are kalaallit; most of them practising in Maniitsoq are either Maniitsormiut or at least married to someone in the community. In such a setting, grade-school education can be obtained without the social upheaval of moving from the home community to other areas, as many of us had to endure. Young adults are sent away and thus leave the community to get further education. Depending on what kind of education they desire, individuals may live in centres such as Nuuk, Sisimiut, or Qaqortoq in south Greenland, or in Denmark, for higher education. This process requires individuals to learn to speak and write Danish, and other languages
are also learned. Life without educational qualifications offers little economic opportunity for individuals and families, even in towns such as Maniitsoq.

The other intriguing aspect of jobs in Maniitsoq relates to the relationships between kalaallit and Danes. Before the Home Rule Government was introduced, jobs in Greenland were associated with the process of colonization and administering to the colonies in the form of trade, religion, and, later on, education, justice, and health. These jobs related to the regulatory structure and were not available to kalaallit until just recently. Today, Danes hold many of the top positions in Greenland’s Home Rule Government and top-level kalaallit civil servants are required to be at least bilingual. Most Danes residing in Greenland do not learn to speak kalaallisut; they operate effectively supported by their bilingual kalaallit colleagues.

### Jobs in Maniitsoq and Gender

Initially, I thought that I would be able to find the answer to this issue by obtaining information through the Maniitsup Kommunea, the local municipal office. When I contacted the municipal office I was referred to various departments and found out that none of the municipal offices held complete information about jobs in Maniitsoq. One office looked after information dealing with income tax, but this office did not have information as to what kinds of jobs provided income to tax. Another office provided information relating to employment and education opportunities but again no information could be obtained to give a complete picture of jobs in Maniitsoq. At one point I was referred to a person who looked after tourism in Maniitsoq; he had just started to make a list of jobs in Maniitsoq, which was incomplete. However, this gave me an opportunity to make a thorough questionnaire to investigate the job composition of Maniitsoq, and it also gave me a chance to ask specifically about women’s positions and status in Maniitsoq.

The questionnaire was sent out to more than 500 workplaces in Maniitsoq that had been included on the incomplete job list. The local telephone book provided additional workplaces. The translation from Greenlandic to Danish was done by one of the administrative assistants of Kilaaseeraq School in Maniitsoq. Before the questionnaire was sent out I realized that Danes, both men and women, would inevitably hold some of these jobs. Since my intention was to figure out the Inuit-descended jobholders, I asked respondents to identify themselves culturally in the questionnaire.
What kinds of jobs do the women in Maniitsoq hold? What kind of a structure was discernable, and where are women within that structure? Did kalaallit or Danes hold the jobs?

After receiving very little response from this questionnaire by mail, I contacted a number of businesses and workplaces and met with the individuals able to provide answers. I held meetings with my research colleagues and encouraged them to contact employees and divided the task among them. Later on we hired an assistant in our attempt to complete the work. She was to report back to the research collaborators and send the information to me. This was dismally unsuccessful.

I decided to contact Grønlnds Statistics in Nuuk where our problem of incomplete or absent records was confirmed. Salary and income tax statistics are not calculated on an individual basis, whether for married or common-law couples; instead, the law for income tax calculations in Greenland is to consider a couple’s collective income. In other words, a list of married couples’ income separately by individual was not available. Single persons’ incomes (male and female) are carefully calculated and reported annually in Greenland statistics.

Our findings for this question were therefore disappointing, and our inquiries into the division of labour by sex in workplaces were by some seen as irrelevant, irritating, and too politically loaded.

As previously noted, Maniitsoq’s post–World War II economic development depended very much on the fisheries. The location is south of the Arctic Circle, and since the Gulf Stream reaches the Maniitsoq area the sea remains free of ice most of the winter, facilitating year-round fishing. Today, Maniitsoq’s main economic resource is still the fishing industry. After World War II, cod was plentiful around Maniitsoq and the economic system was geared toward the cod fishery. Back then, Maniitsoq was seen as one of the towns in Greenland with great potential.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw drastic change, during which fishing activities shifted from cod fishing to offshore shrimp trawling. This was a tremendous change for families as well as the fish processing industry. Today another shift is happening: trawling shrimp is not necessarily sustainable any longer, and other fishing activities have been adopted for diversification. During my field research many of the local fishermen were trying their luck with snow crab, a new venture for both families and the fish factory.
Each of these shifts is very significant in terms of local economic sustenance. There is no doubt that fishing and fish processing have played a significant role in Maniitsoq's economy, and over time more Maniitsormiut have depended on salaries directly or indirectly from the fishery. Today, this has not changed, and it is not surprising to see that many Maniitsoq men and women are employed in the fishery or fishery-related occupations.

There are a number of very affluent companies in Maniitsoq whose success stems from shrimp trawling. Different families and couples may own these companies collectively. I interviewed two successful owners, and in both cases the companies make more than CDN$60 million a year. Each of these enterprises hires mostly men, and it is only in recent years that women have joined the workforce within the trawling fleet. One of the trawler owners makes a point of hiring non-smoking individuals. The company has done extremely well. The owners have diversified their company so that they are not solely dependent on the shrimp industry.

During the time of this research the Maniitsoq fish processing plant employed more than a hundred people. Most of these were seasonal employees, forty women and forty-eight men. The factory employs mostly men at the managerial level, but one very capable woman who has been working in the plant for many years is part of the management group and is proud of her achievement.

The fishing industry has employed the greatest number of people in Maniitsoq and has brought in the greatest income. The shrimp trawlers are extremely expensive but bring in tremendous profit for the owners and crew members. Most trawler owners are men, and licences are given to men. In Maniitsoq one trawler owner is a woman; she co-owns and co-runs the business with her husband. Their situation is unique. The woman told me that everything she knew about how to run things in shrimp trawling had been self-taught; she also relied heavily on advice from their Danish lawyers for running the business.

It was not clear how many crew members there are in the Maniitsoq shrimp trawling population, but I was able to count at least seventeen men in Maniitsoq who are involved in their own small entrepreneurial fishery activity. These individuals own their own good-size fishing vessels. I also tried to find out if the ownership of a boat or a fleet of trawlers and the licence go to women in case of widowhood. I was not able to obtain reliable data in answer to this question, even when I contacted the Department of Fisheries in Nuuk. There might be some residual attitudinal
significance to the fact that so far there are no records, or at least no readily available data on this question.

About twenty-four men in Maniitsoq, called *umiatsiaararsortut*, live by hunting, fishing, and selling the produce to the local people, the fish processing plant, or through the local produce shop: *kalaalimineerniaartarfik*. These men own relatively small, usually open boats with single outboard motors. No women were directly involved in *umiatsiaararsorneq* that I could find at the time of the study, so the endeavour seems to be a wholly male domain today. I had known women in Maniitsoq previously to have had their own enterprises selling their own fish produce. In any case, such activities provide meals on the table for immediate or extended families but may not represent a reliable or steady income.

These men bring in the traditional food to the local community, and many Maniitsormiut rely on the product that *umiatsiaararsortut* bring. Although their chosen occupation is reminiscent of the hunting lifestyle of previous generations, on the other hand *umiatsiaararsortut* are individuals who for some reason or another may not have adopted Western lifestyles and out of necessity choose an *umiatsiaararsorneq* as a way of life and make do with the unstable and unpredictable income. Their income is highly seasonal. In Maniitsoq some of the *umiatsiaararsortut* are single men, and others are well-respected individuals who are well cared for and are doing their very best in sometimes difficult circumstances. The *kalaalimineerniaartarfik* is usually the location where the *umiatsiaararsortut* congregate, much like that of a coffee break for others with waged work. The location is mainly a male-dominated area.

If one looks at the larger picture of seeing the kalaallit society as inherently deriving from the Inuit hunting society, where men do their work in relation to hunting mammals on the sea, life in Maniitsoq today can certainly be described as continuing the division of labour where men remain seagoing and women continue their work on land. If one is really looking for a division of labour along gender lines in Greenland this is where it is most evident. When I first started to formulate and explain my study to officials in the Maniitsoq municipality I was assured that there was no differentiation between men and women in terms of attaining a job or salary; as far as the municipal office was concerned, gender equality exists in that regard.

Leaving the fishing industry and exploring other occupations, we found that workers at the Maniitsoq hospital were mostly women. There were seventy people on staff and sixty of these were women. There were a few Danish doctors and administrators;
otherwise the majority of the staff was Greenlandic women. Most of these women are qualified nurses with a degree obtained in Greenland (Nuuk). Others work as cooks, midwives, receptionists, translators, and cleaning staff.

The same pattern can be observed within the Maniitsoq municipality centre, where fifty-two women were employed and only fourteen men. The town hall manager took great pride in the fact that the Maniitsoq municipality was the first office in Greenland to be manned by Greenlanders themselves, and the office managers have been called upon to talk to other businesses about their experience in running the municipal office without much reliance on Danes. Maniitsoq women head the majority of various departments. I was told that there were only five Danes working for the municipality, and they dealt with civil engineering matters.

Many more women than men work in the retail industry in Maniitsoq. Some thirty-five women worked in Pisiffik, a retail store that used to be Royal Greenland Trade, while only seventeen men worked there. Privately owned clothing shops are owned by women and run by women. At the time of the interviews there were at least two competing hair salons, run and owned by women.

The daycare centres of Maniitsoq are also run by women. There are at least four daycare centres in Maniitsoq; these employ more than fifty people altogether. I am aware of just one man employed in that sector. In homes for the elderly, one generally sees women, and there were eighteen women in the Maniitsoq home and only one man.

Not too long ago mentally and physically disabled children were sent to Denmark from all over Greenland. It is only recently that Maniitsoq has been selected by the Home Rule Government of Greenland to host an institution to house such individuals. Today, the home for the physically and mentally disadvantaged employs twenty-four women and five men. A local person who has a degree from Denmark manages the institution.

Women work next to men in the two schools in Maniitsoq. I was not able to obtain the numbers from the bigger school, but the smaller school, Kuuttartoq School, employed eight women and seven men. Most of the teachers are professionally trained, fully educated individuals, and others may have training but have become substitute teachers. At ATI (education related to the fishery), the local learning centre, three women and six Greenlandic men were employed. There were four Danes who worked there as instructors and administrative managers. Maniitsoq
is also a centre much relied upon for general shipping, and the national facility for ship repairs has a shipyard in Maniitsoq. Three women and eight men worked there. The community electricity generating plants have only employed men so far (ten).

At the time of the interviews the mayor of Maniitsoq was a woman. This was much celebrated, although there had been other women in recent history who were very involved in local politics. Maniitsoq’s ordained Lutheran priest is also a woman, and her national head, the bishop, is a woman. These appointments are relatively novel ones; just a generation ago women as priests were far from the norm. During my childhood Lutheran priests were consistently Danish men who in varying degrees succeeded in speaking some Greenlandic.

Many privately run businesses are owned and run by Danes in Maniitsoq, but during the last fifteen years or so many of these are now owned and run by Greenlandic men themselves. These include electrician, carpenter, house painter, and small appliance repair companies. Others are boat and motor repair companies, office cleaning enterprises, taxi firms and other small companies undertaking such work as plumbing.

Indeed, despite our initial frustration and disappointment, we were fortunate enough to receive responses to the questionnaire, and we were able to obtain some sense of where men and women work in Maniitsoq. As noted above, “labour” and salaried employment in Greenland is a relatively new concept as most of the salaried labour has only been generated in Greenland since the post–World War II era. Until then the colonizers, Danish men, held remunerated jobs in Greenland. Today, Greenlanders hold many significant positions, and men and women compete for these and fair salaries without much reference to gender. We have seen the spheres that men and women generally occupy but also that each sphere’s boundaries can generally be crossed by the opposite sex.

Gender and Equality seen through Greenland Statistics
Do the above findings really present a utopia? Is Greenlandic society so egalitarian that employment inequality does not exist?

When I contacted Greenland Statistics I was sent information regarding the difference between single women’s and single men’s income, and that regarding the average taxable income of couples in Greenland. Revealingly, single women’s income is on average CDN$5000–$6000 per year less than that of men. Why? How is it that
in a seemingly egalitarian society single women earn less than their male counterparts? The information I was forwarded even showed that the difference is increasing. For example, in 1998 the difference was more than CDN$6000, whereas the difference was about CDN$4000–$5000 in 1993. I can only speculate that married women earn less than their male partners because as noted earlier the numbers are obscured by the Greenland income tax regulations.

Another interesting Greenland statistic is that, on average, married or common-law individuals earned more than single Greenlandic men. In Maniitsoq the taxable average income in 1998 was DKK131,174 and the earning capacity of single men that year was DKK110,000. Single women that year averaged an income of less than DKK80,000. I have no firm data as to the causes of the difference in income by gender, but the numbers do indicate that single women earn on average DKK50,000 less than their married counterparts. The number is about CDN$10,000 less than their married counterparts.

Multi-dimensionality and Jobs in Maniitsoq
Analyzing the jobs in Maniitsoq requires the reader to understand that jobs in the colonial period assumed an unequal relationship between men and women. Kalaallit inherited the problems of the governing system in which women’s societal positioning was seen as lower than men, much as in Western nations. Indeed, when salaried jobs were introduced to Greenlanders, they were much more for men than women. This is in juxtaposition to the Inuit egalitarian principles of the kalaallit, where men and women are equal and their work, despite being clearly delineated along gender lines, is appreciated as equal. A kalaaleq woman needs her man, and the kalaaleq man needs his woman: together they join their qualities into a unique unit.

Earlier I wrote about the reciprocity between the Inuit and their living environment. Remember that the Inuit are a hunting society and owe their existence to the good will of animals and the living environment. How does this relate to the realities of Maniitsoq where assimilation has greatly affected the citizens and jobs do not necessarily relate well to the natural environment and the animals?

It seems that jobs and the related education process have become inculcated with the processes of individual development. It is good that individuals can obtain well-paying jobs, but what value would that have if the individual was not at ease with himself or herself in relation to their surroundings, people, and otherwise? Note how much investment goes into spending time on the land, building the illuaqqat around
Maniitsoq to simply enjoy and regain energy from such an interaction. The boats that couples in Maniitsoq buy to travel to open land are at times as costly as a house. Building supplies for the summer cottages are not free. All equipment to spend time on nunavut consists of imported goods, from stoves to ammunition to socks. A large amount of planning is undertaken for such an endeavour. This is the evolving relationship with nunavut that is reminiscent of the process of reciprocity. Indeed, the Inuit economy across the Arctic is very mixed (see Wenzel 1991); individuals have access to salaried jobs to be able to afford hunting activities. Maniitsoq’s general public is not an exception to this rule. Individuals or families who have no access to hunting can choose to buy fresh local foods or depend on others through family or friends to get access to such food. One can study such relationships to understand the relationships between men and women in Maniitsoq.

When the raw data was given back to Boletta she was less than satisfied. Indeed it was difficult to analyze men’s and women’s separate financial contributions, and we hope that this finding will encourage the government of Greenland to make changes to its reporting system. Such a move will allow clearer analysis. It is in that context that this chapter asked many more questions than it answers, and obviously more work needs to be done. The next chapter sheds light on kalaallit women’s role in the development of Maniitsoq.
Chapter Seven
Kalaallit Women and Development

Biillaat, whose mother worked at the fish plant for many years, wanted to know how women in Maniitsoq have contributed to the development of the town. Vivi was curious about the implications of change in women’s perception of themselves. Did they regret being women and envy their men? This chapter looks at both these questions.

History and Kalaallit Women
As mentioned earlier, Maniitsoq was established as Sukkertoppen in 1781 (Lyberth 1982), as one of the centres where Danes established and administered their colonial claim to Greenland’s west coast. Greenland’s colonial status officially ceased in 1953, and the kalaallit gained Home Rule Government in 1979. No exception to other colonial regimes around the world, Greenland’s was thoroughly patriarchal in structure, outlook, and operation. From the administrative point of view, the presence of women was not treated meaningfully. I will give two examples of this.

The first example:
In 1982 a book was published celebrating Maniitsoq’s 200 years of existence. It documented that on 1 October 1855 the population size of the Maniitsoq district was 768, with sixteen Europeans. Later that year, as of 30 October, the administrative director of the Maniitsoq district, Frederik Waldemar Arntz, gave an account of the population:

- 27 good to very good hunters
- 74 relatively good hunters
- 13 medium to bad hunters
- 14 beginner hunters
- 2 medium of the above, but productive providers
- 20 to 30 qajaq paddlers, some are boys, who could be described as fishermen or individuals who look after the fishing nets
- 35 persons between 13 and 20 years of age
- 8 to 10 dozen between 21 and 56 years of age, and furthermore 4 to 6 old and weak who do not own qajaq
- 137 persons who own rifles
- 31 persons who own umiaq and
- 16 indigenous people who work in the Trade and 9 catechists — the latter are categorized under hunters. (Egede 1982, 77; my translation)
Where are women on this list? Did they not matter? What is the reason for not listing them? Omissions like this make it very difficult to discern the historical role of the women. It is because of writings like these that attempts have to be made to better understand the kalaallit women’s roles in society. As we have understood from previous chapters, kalaallit, much like other Inuit groups, organized their societies around egalitarian principles, and the women’s roles were and remain essential in all aspects of Inuit and kalaallit life. What was the kalaallit women’s role in the development of, for example, the Maniitsoq settlement?

Soon after 1721 when Hans Egede arrived in Greenland, he and his crew observed lucrative trade between the local populations and the whalers who arrived from other parts of Europe. A string of “colonies” was created all along Greenland’s west coast to stop these activities so that the trading and the benefits of trade could be directed toward the Danes (Gad 1984). Did Inuit women take part in trade? More than 200 years later a descendant of the Egede family writes, “The whalers eased our existence. Hunting tools were improved by the introduction of iron and steel. We came to use foreign tools that eased production of utensils. Introduction of knives made of steel substantially shortened the butchering of seals and great whales. Women obtained needles different from the ones made of old bones” (Egede 1982, 75; my translation).

The latter sentence is of interest to us. Here we can clearly see women’s involvement in trading, and obviously they benefited from the interaction as much as their men. Needles were of utmost importance to kalaallit women, as hunting tools were for men.

*The second example:*
Egede (1982, 83) writes the following about what was traded in from the Maniitsoq district between 1845 and 1849:

- 689 barrels of seal and beluga whale blubber
- 147 barrels of humpback whale blubber
- 165 barrels of liver [likely shark and cod liver]
- 84 pieces of fox skins, blue
- 58 pieces of fox skins, white
- 2,049 pieces of sealskins
- 630 pounds of eiderdown, uncleaned
- 3,649 pieces of caribou skins
- 66 sets of sealskin with the hair taken off, used for making waterproof aprons. (my translation)
Again, the role of kalaallit women remains elusive until one looks at the text above with the understanding of how kalaallit families worked collaboratively and how most individuals participated in labour with expectations and tangible results. If we were to apply this principle we would begin to better understand women’s economic, cultural, and spiritual roles. How much would they have contributed?

From the practice of previous generations we know that once the seals had been brought to shore, it was the women who cut up the animals and appointed the recipients of the customary distribution. In this, their detailed knowledge of group networks and kinship was vital. Thus, the extraction and likely the conservation of the seal blubber prior to the trade would have been the women’s responsibility. There was no mention of the seal meat and we can safely assume that this was consumed by the family and shared with other community members. The cooking, preparation, cleaning, and gifting of meat would have been the responsibility of the women.

The butchering of larger animals such as beluga whales usually required more help, and men and women would have worked together. The sheer size of the humpback whale simply demands collective work such that anyone capable of helping would participate. Knowing that the mammals can weigh up to 150 tons (Olsen 1996), one can appreciate the extent of physical exertion for everyone involved.

Foxes were usually trapped using cairns normally made by men, but collecting the trapped animals was not necessarily a male-dominated activity. Women would have cleaned the carcasses and skins: the 2,049 pieces of sealskin that were sold between 1845 and 1849 would have been carefully cut, cleaned, and cured by the women. The skins were priced according to a quality grading system, which would have been related to the women’s execution of the work.

For the 3,649 pieces of caribou skin, many women would have participated in the hunt. In the Maniitsoq area, caribou are only accessible in the fjord systems of Kangerlussuaq to the north and Isortoq to the south. Women would have rowed in the umiat while the hunters used their qatsat (sing. qajaq). Women carried the equipment necessary for the caribou hunt inland. The tents, pots, equipment, and even the boats would all have been carried to inland camps, and at the end of the hunt all equipment was carried home again, along with the catch and the 3,649 skins. These caribou hunts were mainly conducted in kin-linked groups and often involved walks of some two or three days. Women carried the smaller children and some chattels too. The 3,649 pieces of caribou skin were largely cured by the women, a much easier task than working with sealskins.
Caribou hunting often coincided with trout fishing, although the location was not always the same. Trout was not mentioned in the list of traded goods, and I conclude that obviously the families kept the fish for themselves. Women and children partook in the fishing and many of the fish were dried for winter. Drying racks were built, and the drying process was work for the women, who turned the fish often to knock off houseflies and prevent it from rotting. The latter part of the caribou hunting season was also time for berry picking. The women and children undertook this while their men concentrated on the hunt. Berry picking is a much favoured activity even today.

Eiderdown is remarkably lightweight, and 630 pounds is a noteworthy quantity to trade. Women were the ones to pluck the thick outer feathers and separate the down for sale. In the Maniitsoq area other birds were also obtained that were not on Egede’s list.

The numbers of skins that Egede mentioned is only an indication of what was traded as quite a number of them would have been kept for private use. During this particular time kalaallit used the skins for clothing, mittens, boots, mattresses, bedcovers, and tents. Others were made into ropes; some would have been made into walls inside the winter houses. The men’s qajaat were covered with sealskin, as were the umiaq boats used for transporting families from one place to another. So the quoted number of traded skins would not have been representative of the overall catch.

These details give only a partial picture of the involvement of women in terms of what was traded during 1845–49, during which time the women would have worked closely with their husbands, making and executing plans according to the seasons and availability of resources. Just as the description that Frederik Waldemar Arntz produced about men’s duties and roles indicates for the men, some women would have been extraordinarily productive, others less so, but the description speaks nevertheless to the active involvement of kalaallit women during the nineteenth century. Women were operational participants in production for trading and would rarely have been passive members of society. The reason Frederik Waldemar Arntz omitted the role of the kalaallit women in his description may have had to do with the social values of his period. During the 1800s colonial men dealt with men as the “heads of families,” and business was carried out patriarchally. Furthermore, kalaallit back then would have practised strongly gender-based networking when communicating outside their immediate families. But to conclude from such social practices that kalaallit women did not matter in the process of delivering goods for trade is simply wrong.
Women worked and co-ordinated tasks not just mechanically but also psychologically, economically, and spiritually. We also know that kalaallit welcomed the interaction with the Europeans in early history, adopted the Lutheran Church, and strongly adhered to Lutheran teachings.

The term “post-colonial era” used in earlier chapters of this study implies colonization and, with it, social institutions organized along the lines of patriarchy. Greenland was no exception in that regard. Again, one might assume the involvement of women was muted in the early history of contact. “Not so,” said the female Lutheran priest of Maniitsoq. She took her training in Nuuk Ilisimatusarfik, where she learned that when the Egede family began their work in converting the kalaallit to Christianity shortly after their arrival in Greenland in 1721, they were greatly influenced and guided by individual kalaallit women. She told me about Arnarsaq (see Kleivan 1975), who was known to have carried on lengthy philosophical conversations and was not at all intimidated in expressing the shortcomings of the gospel (see Vebæk 1996). The process of conversion to Christianity was not only for Inuit men; women were obviously willing participants. Kleivan (1975, 248) speculated that getting rid of the taboos motivated the women into Christianity. She wrote, “The introduction of Christianity provided a number of points that made it easier for the women: by giving up the old religion it was no longer necessary to adhere to the multitude of taboos which dictated what one should do and not do. These rules applied particularly for women during menstruation, childbirths and deaths…”

Women’s willingness to give up their old beliefs coincided with that of their men, who also agreed to do so. It is intriguing, however, to find out that Niels Egede (the son of Hans Egede) complained about their problem in reaching out to the Greenlanders at the time: “In their effort to attract pupils to missionary stations, the missionaries in the early period wound up with marginalized individuals such as widows, girls and children” (Dybbroe 1988, 129). As we saw earlier, Maniitsoq women remain strongly involved in church activities and indeed are the ones whose social activities are church-centred today.

While the administration of colonies and the associated institutions were resourced by men, the activities of women prove to be equally interesting as we have learned that kalaallit women entered the colonial setting with equal status with their men and from their own cultural context. Only in the context of and from the point of view of the colonial setting was the kalaallit women’s position presented as secondary and subordinate to men. Women did not fit well into the world of colonization and the establishment of the governance structure. Thus, how could they work in it? Their
cultural and economic activities were overlooked; their efforts and activities were credited to their husbands and the patriarchally oriented colonial institutions.

What is striking in the relationship between the colonizers and the supposedly colonized people is the mindset of each. The Danes called settlements such as Maniitsoq “colonies.” The term and the implications thereof were not at all used in the kalaallit language. The kalaallit used niuertoqarfik, meaning ‘a place to trade.’ They also used qallunaaqarfik, meaning, ‘a place with qallunaat.’ The two terms do not in any way imply colonization. Although it is tempting to explore this statement further, for our purposes it suffices to note that the interaction becomes significant and gains interest in presenting kalaallit women’s entrance into the new social order.

One might think that kalaallit women’s roles would be predictable. The first role was as an aid to a Danish household, a kiffaq. A kiffaq was an assistant to a Danish servant and was usually an adolescent or young woman. Her tasks involved cleaning the inside of the house, doing laundry, fetching water, and looking after the children of the house. From the point of view of processes of colonization, this is the very first step into the world of the colonizers.

Later, kalaallit women could become midwife assistants, and according to Kleivan (1975), the first kalaaleq to receive such training was in 1835. The particular woman who received that training was a kiffaq who then was taken to Denmark by the Danish family that she worked for in Greenland. In 1933 a high school was established in Aasiaat (Egedesminde) for girls, four years after one was begun for male students. The high school for girls did not provide for more academic education, as “special importance was attached to their acquiring a basic training in the proficiencies of a house-wife, esp. cooking and sewing” (Dybbroe 1988, 118). Since then, however, other educational opportunities have arisen for kalaallit women so that today they compete competently if not more effectively than kalaallit men. The current situation will be discussed in detail in the concluding chapter.

Using the patriarchal, colonial framework to understand kalaallit women gives an impression of individuals who are not engaged productively. Their position becomes predictably dry, uninteresting, and uninvolved. Seeing what I have described as kalaallit women’s roles, one appreciates that kalaallit women were — even as kiffaq — already well occupied in their own homes. The kiffaq status in Danish homes merely represented an additional function to their existing home responsibilities. Where in Danish colonial eyes kiffaq status may have been seen as an economically desirable status for kalaallit women, in earlier times many individuals from kalaallit homes may have seen kiffaq status as an added
responsibility and therefore not necessarily desirable. However, as money became more entrenched in the kalaallit society kiffaq status may have become more and more desirable. I would still argue that the job was obtained in addition to already pre-existing expectations of other responsibilities on the home front.

The term kiffaq was not only used for women. Kalaallit men were called kiffat, working for the Danes in qaallunaaqarfiiit (Olsen 1996). The above statements fit well with the discussion paper that Dybbroe (1988) produced. She also discussed kalaallit women’s participation in development and came to the same conclusion: that kalaallit women played an important role but were not recognized for their participation because of double standard attitudes prevalent during colonial times.

Enfranchisement and Kalaallit Women
One of the greatest accomplishments and in fact one of the landmarks of early feminist movements was the enfranchisement of women in the Western world. This is often used as a measure of how societies around the world have progressed. Danish women obtained the right to vote in 1915, but kalaallit women did not gain this right until 1945–46. Danish and other European women fought strenuously for the right to vote, and their achievement in that regard is remarkable. While kalaallit women at the time were expected to fight for the vote, they did not, in fact, make an issue of it. Their non-participation is not surprising in light of my previous assertion that kalaallit women held equal status with their men on the home front and their roles were not denigrated as were those of their colonist sisters in Europe and elsewhere.

Where enfranchisement of European and Western women had been based on human rights, the kalaallit women’s right to vote was granted for the sake of progress and development of Greenland: “The women, according to one of the political leaders of Greenland at the time, Nicolaj Rosing, are not used to mingling in how this country is governed, and it will only delay development if one is to wait for women to demand their vote” (Kleivan 1975, 264). Rosing felt that women already contributed vitally to developing Greenland and therefore deserved enfranchisement. He felt that women, in the course of child rearing, could influence new generations of kalaallit to partake in developing Greenland.

Piniartorsuaq: The Great Kalaalleq Hunter
What consequences does kalaallit women’s historical absence from the picture of participation in the community economically, spiritually, and culturally have today? I
believe that the above analysis is helpful in explicating and understanding the roles of women in Maniitsoq. The process has been greatly aided by the notion of genderlessness, so that matters are put in a gender-neutral context before we proceed to analyze the written material on the subject. This understanding has been furthered by timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu, the dimensions of which help to illuminate all relevant spheres of male and female identity and activities. All these have given us tools to animate kalaallit women’s roles at earlier points in this chapter. Occasionally in the written literature wrongful assumptions, misinterpretation of prevalent social practices, omissions, and biases have trivialized kalaallit women.

As a result of the prevailing devaluation of women — in this case kalaallit women — discernable bias has been shown the males, to the extent that Inuit and other hunting-based societies are often assumed to be male oriented (Jessen Williamson 2004). The general assumption is that there is a total dependency on men for life in the Arctic. Few have realized that this dependency goes both ways and that indeed men depend on their women as well. In celebrating the achievement of men an image has been produced of piniartorsuaq, the great hunter in Greenland. According to this image, it would seem that men alone achieved such status, and indeed much credit has been given to men. Again, one wonders where women fit into this image.

Bodenhorn’s 1990 article showed insight into the relationship between hunters and their wives. She found that among the Inupiat of Alaska reciprocal relationships are important between husbands and wives. Much like the kalaallit hunters, the hunters in Alaska believe that the animals give themselves up to men. But animals differentiate and prefer to give themselves to specific men “whose wives are generous and skilful” (61). Bodenhorn intimated that while it is “man’s responsibility to treat the animal properly, […] it is the woman to whom the animal comes.” I was therefore quite struck when reading Petersen’s (2003) account of hunters in northern and east Greenland. He writes, “Makkorsuaq’s son, Tobias, was also one of the greatest hunters. His catch was rarely less than 250 seals a year, and in one year he caught more than 300 seals. The smallest number he achieved in the catch lists to which I had access was 145 seals a year. The ordinary hunters rarely took more than 60–70 seal a year” (110). Indeed catching more than 300 seals in one year is impressive, and while Petersen attributed the success to the father, Makkorsuaq, I could not help but think of the women behind the success. Imagine the mother of Tobias, namely, Makkorsuaq’s wife, and her participation in light of Bodenhorn’s findings. She would have been the person who more than others ensured the mental realities of the hunt. The relationship between her, her husband, her children, and the community in relation to the spirit world had to be considered. Her intent concerning
the animal would have had to be correct, and her actions too before the hunt could be successful. While her husband Makkorsuaq and, for that matter, her successful son Tobias were technically and mechanically prepared and extremely successful in other living activities, spiritual matters had to be considered and well thought out by all three (or more). The wife of Makkorsuaq would also have butchered all the landed seals, prepared them, and distributed the meat as required. She would have had to process her husband’s and her son’s seal catch and deal with at least two or three skins each day. This would be in addition to any other catch. It is also very likely that Tobias was married at the time of his successful hunting period, which would bring his wife into the picture of his success. Petersen (pers. comm. 2005) lamented the exclusion of women and the lack of more extensive name lists. He wanted to point out that even in isolated locations other women were “imported” when the great hunters’ wives were not able to keep up with their husbands to avoid waste. The care of animal relationships warranted such actions.

This term, *piniartorsuaq*, is much romanticized today, often portraying a social icon in Greenland. While I respect the achievements of great hunters and what they must have done to endure their alignment of *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu*, I insist that the status was never achieved without the active participation of at least one woman. Recognizing the hunter alone extracts and isolates the man away from his wife’s achievements as a good and capable woman. Jensen (1971, 16) puts this much more directly when he says, “The husband is extremely dependent on her. A hunter is merely what his wife makes of him, that is what the old Eskimos used to say.”

Vivi and Biillaat both assumed that we would easily find the answers to their questions. However, since cultural paradigms play a significant part in constructing the answer, they were not. From one cultural paradigm we understood that women were secondary to men, with their economic, spiritual, and social contributions evaluated in relation to men and colonial institutions. In that framework women seemed powerless, passive, secondary, compliant, dependent, and even mindless. They had no say, and in many instances their actions were omitted. On the other hand, viewed from a different cultural paradigm, we gained understanding that kalaallit women were at least on an equal footing with their men. They worked hard and delivered goods in trade and contributed greatly in matters dealing with spirituality. These insights were gained through the notion of genderlessness and the application of *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu*. Each perspective is obviously dependent on the eyes through which the situation is seen. For the purposes of this study, it is clear that in order to see the true picture, rather than impose a European, Western, or colonial view on Inuit life, examining this life from an Inuit perspective is far more effective.
From Hunting to Fishing
As I informed myself about the Maniitsoq population’s involvement in fishing I saw that this made good sense. During my interview with a local fish processing plant official, I was told that early in the development of the fishery, fishing activities involved whole families. Husbands and wives fished, cleaned together, and sold the goods as one entity. This kind of collaboration between men and women is reminiscent of the social structure and organization of the previous era, obviously continued until other forms of modernization were introduced. The official told me that fishing and the processing of the fish was done as a family unit and showed me the old photographs hanging in the cafeteria of the fish plant, naming the husbands and wives and even children who worked together as a unit. The information was a surprise to me as it stood in strong contrast to the operation of the fish plant today, where men and women work as individuals. Because of this I had never considered the possibility of fishing involving the participation of women and children.

According to Dybbroe (1988), fishing increasingly became a male activity, even to the point of excluding women. Where beforehand women had prepared the skins of seals and other mammals for trade, men now finished the product and delivered it, leaving women’s tasks pre-empted. In light of what we have discussed so far — in terms of labour division between men and women — pre-empting individual responsibilities is rather unusual in the kalaallit and Inuit task-oriented world. In most cases, fish skins are useless for making clothes or any garments. During the colonial period kalaallit women entered a period of unprecedented insignificance in economic activities. Spiritually speaking, kalaallit embraced the Christian belief system during the time of this separation. Women played no importance in that context, as fish have no particular spiritual potency as sea mammals did (Roepstorff 2003), which would have annulled kalaallit women’s religious and spiritual contributions. So, as physical contributions became limited so did women’s economic contributions. These were compounded by the loss of their spiritual importance. Kalaallit women became the losers in kalaallit society during that period while their men enjoyed the enhancement of patriarchy. Besides fishing, some men worked as sailors, store employees, carpenters, teachers, administrative assistants, and Lutheran priests.

Kalaallit Women and Development
This transitional period when Greenland’s economy was increasingly becoming fishing-based coincided with the period when Inuit kinship-based social organization was challenged by a new social organization based on money. To our research group, it represented the tumultuous times after the Second World War. Dybbroe (1988, 120) writes, “The period after 1950 can be characterized as the period of planned
development. This year the so-called Great Commission defined the goal of development policies as being the acquisition by the Greenlanders of the technical and socio-psychological conditions to raise the standards of living by their own effort. Fishing... was to form the basis for this economic and social progress.”

Even by the post-war period, some kalaallit women had acquired wage-earning occupations, but the majority had yet to do so. Some women earned money intermittently as laajat (day labourers), “fetching water, unloading supply ships... cutting and curing fish at the salt houses” (117). Others worked in hospitals as nurse assistants and midwives, and still others as teachers and shop assistants.

As I mentioned earlier, kalaallit women obtained enfranchisement in the context of Greenland’s development. It is therefore not surprising to see that when plans for substantial economic expansion were made in the 1960s, capital growth relied on women’s labour. The architect of Greenland’s economic expansion was Mogens Boserup (1963), who recommended basing development on industrialized fishing and expansion of the public sector. At the time, both kalaallit and Danish officials called for radical measures to tackle widespread poverty and the consequent poor health of the kalaallit. These were to be improved upon by an investment regime involving the building of harbours, roads, power stations, ship repair docks, hospitals, schools, and housing. “These investments were already necessary from the humanitarian point of view” (Boserup 1963, 4; my translation).

Acquiring the human resources necessary to accomplish the planned development proved challenging. The kalaallit population was very geographically dispersed, and the education system had yet to reach beyond the level of religious instruction. The displacement of people to partially fulfil the machinery of development brought tumultuous times, which I have already referred to. This caused understandable stress. People were moved from north to south, east to west, and many of the outpost camps were closed. However, even these measures did not satisfy the need of development, and many workers were imported every summer from Denmark to build roads, houses, schools, harbours, heliports, powerhouses, and hospitals. At the time, town sites seemed chaotic, at times surreal, as whole rock sites were detonated to make room for buildings. Rock dust was constant, as was the sound of banging as new edifices were built.

During these turbulent times women entered the workforce, finding employment in the fish processing plants and in other places, in droves. In many cases women went into these places eagerly, particularly considering the collapse of their previous
status. This culminated in many families relying on money and much less on the kinship-based hunting economy.

In many cases, family life suffered. Some women became heavily involved in organizing workers’ unions (Olsen 1996), and considering the times, during which there were no childcare facilities, many women relied on other family members to take over some of the more urgent home responsibilities. Some families were lucky to have grandmothers in town, and grandmothers’ responsibilities intensified. For some, responsibilities increased as multiple daughters who had children went out to work.

In other families, older daughters and sons became responsible for their younger siblings. Time was of the essence for this kind of work and industrial dock discipline was observed. Lactating mothers were rarely given more than the allotted fifteen minutes during morning and afternoon coffee breaks. At the noon-hour lunch break, women walked home, cooked, breastfed, ate, and walked back to the fish plant. Some even did laundry before they rushed back to the factory. My own paternal aunt worked in the fish plant. She experienced frustration in not finding enough time to satisfy her multiple children’s needs physically, emotionally, and economically, despite the fact that she gave what she could in the factory. She worked hard, and on top of it all did the laundry, the housekeeping, the shopping, and coordinated the activities of her children and husband. Needless to say that degree of commitment to this kind of work was not always possible, and many left the place on and off throughout their working years. It was unusual, too, for kalaallit mothers to be away physically from their children. In previous times women were readily available and tended to the needs of the children while working.

Fish factory work is physically strenuous, but it provided women in Maniitsoq income to contribute to the family economy. By the very act of working in the factory, women contributed to the industrialization of fishing in places such as Maniitsoq and thus directly to the development of Greenland as planned by Boserup and others. What is interesting in this is the perception that this was the first time that kalaallit women contributed to the family economy. As we have seen, this is erroneous.

Kalaallit women’s contributions to the family economy were cut short only for a while by the patriarchal system of the colonial economy, and kalaallit women were simply regaining their Inuit “right” to contribute equally to the family economy next to their husbands. Many of the new generation of Greenlanders in power enjoy their status today because their mothers worked in the fish factory.
Three-Generational Perceptions of Womanhood

As a research group we were intrigued by Vivi's curiosity. She asked if elderly women had regretted being women and envied men their roles. The answer throughout the interviews was negative. There were references to hard work, but everybody worked physically hard back then, regardless of their gender. I was surprised that the answer was so solidly negative, and I think that the question as posed perhaps reflected the seemingly endless opportunities that women have today. If women so choose today, they can enter any profession available in Greenland. This from the perspective of Vivi's question is an enviable position.

What did come out of the interviews, however, was the elderly women's perception of contemporary kalaallit women and their bodies. One felt that breasts in particular have become sexual objects, which had never before been the case. This did not sit well with elderly women since breasts, in their view, are primarily the founding of the relationship between mothers and their offspring, embodying a mother's offering toward the latter. In their view women's bodies have increasingly become objects of men's sexual desires, such that they can be 'man-handled' any time of the day. The elderly women thought that they had possessed much more autonomy in regard to their bodies than did contemporary women.

Conclusion

Both Vivi and Biillaat wanted to know how women played a role in the development of settlements like Maniitsoq. As shown above, the answer was not easily obtained in the interviews conducted in Maniitsoq during our fieldwork. The answer really lies in the cultural frameworks and perceptions that one derives from each. Two views were presented here. One derives from the colonial attitudes toward kalaallit women, the other from the point of view of the Inuit-oriented framework that was developed for this study, namely the notion of genderlessness. The timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu framework has also been applied and utilized to find some answers concerning women's contribution to the family economy and development in Maniitsoq.
Chapter Eight

Unataaneq annersaanerlu:
Violence and Gender

Ilibooraq, one of our research collaborators, was curious about women who are physically and psychologically abused in Maniitsoq. She wanted to know what the violence was about. She thought that individuals who have been physically abused must have a lot to tell. Ilibooraq came from a family that had been moved from Appamiut to Maniitsoq, and she too had felt the less-than-desirable social effects of such a move.

I did not feel comfortable taking this question directly to Maniitsoq through interviews. I resorted to responses volunteered by individuals who were interviewed for other questions. This approach allowed me to explore violence in what I would describe as a safe environment. The data for this question were delivered conversationally in an environment that was safe for both the interviewees and me, without them feeling any finger-pointing or insensitivity on my part in the quest for facts.

When I attempted to speak with Health Services, the police, and the Justice of the Peace, I was either turned down or unable to make appointments with them. The Justice of the Peace’s insights would have been useful in exploring violence as experienced through the court system in Maniitsoq. I also asked the local Lutheran minister to discuss this issue with me. She felt that she had to decline since the issues brought to her in that regard were told to her in confidence, and such confidences were to be respected and thus not to be shared.

It is worth noting that none of the interviewed couples had an abusive relationship; in fact exactly the opposite is true about them. They did not use violence to solve any problems, but I felt that their candid conversations about their specific disagreements and misalignment might indicate to us possible reasons for abuse in other couples. These observations, then, are from the couples interviewed for an earlier chapter.

The Nukartaakkut couple expressed their concern about their internal differences regarding rearing their children. They did not tell me the details of these. However, the husband was prone to excessive alcohol drinking, which was readily answered...
with excessive, vindictive behaviour by his wife. The dissonance was further aggravated by the husband’s objection to his wife’s cigarette smoking. Disagreements about how to use the family’s financial resources also compromised the couple’s wish to live together harmoniously.

When I asked them how they overcame these problems they referred me to misigissutsip tungaatigut allanngoriartuartarneq, the understanding or appreciation of the necessity to make adjustments to socio-psychological development. This couple very astutely exemplified the fluctuating reality of misigissuseq. They also referred to this in their child-rearing practices, which exemplified the life-learning (different from Western thought, learning through misigissuseq is lifelong learning) aspects of misigissuseq, as adults continue to make adjustments according to their physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. Balanced actions reflective of timikkut, tornikkut, anersaakkullu are not necessarily easily attainable; in fact, the search for this is a lifelong process, something that is usually left for individuals to come to terms with. The Nukartaaq partners worked on understanding the attempt to successfully achieve wholesome development for one another. This had not been easy for them. They assured me that their effort in regard to this development was not only for themselves as a couple but also included concern for the children’s development.

In another couple, the Najakkut wife found her husband’s child-rearing tactics too anger-filled and therefore too distressing for her, particularly when he sent their child to bed. They had disagreements about what videos to watch and arguments about forgetfulness although the matters were inconsequential. She felt that she had been overloaded in terms of housework and he was not contributing enough to help her out. She acknowledged that she drinks and this arouses conflict between them since he does not drink at all; he stopped some years ago. He didn’t like her behaviour when she was under the influence and felt that she too easily overdid the drinking. She confessed that he was really the person who took care of the children.

Yet another couple, married for more than thirty-two years, experienced conflicts about his boat outings. The Akulliit couple’s conflicts were so frequent that the housekeeping had assumed a secondary significance and the wife did not appreciate this. Drinking was an issue for them since the cost is so great. Their differences of opinion regarding child rearing also caused conflict. The Akulliit husband felt that his wife asserted far too much uncompromising control and that spilled over to his spheres of activity. This was offensive to him and he strongly objected to it, as dominance over another person is not in accord with the kalaallit traditions of
autonomy of individuals. According to him, his wife rarely stopped talking until she got her way. Such behaviour was always directed toward a specific person (himself), he said. She, on the other hand, found him too shy and too much in the background. He was also somewhat of a closed personality.

These couples are not known to have used violence toward one another but it is interesting to extract “violations” of individuals in their couplehood. Violence as is expressed by men in the above interviews is in reference to drinking in most cases, but obviously drinking crosses the borders of gender. As the interviewees presented it, drinking is a salient problem and use of alcohol seems to interfere with couples’ attempts at connubial alignment.

Officials in Greenland have developed programmes seeking to combat the abuse of alcohol in recent years, which are now widely available. A centre called Qaqiffik (‘the ascent’), located in Nuuk, is open to individuals in Maniitsoq and elsewhere in Greenland. Individuals must apply, and each has to prove readiness and motivation to quit drinking. The promotion of the programme received support from prominent kalaallit political and cultural leaders who themselves had undergone treatment. People talk about such treatment very openly now, in contrast to earlier periods. For example, in the Greenland self-government development era, admitting to excessive use of alcohol was seen as a personal weakness.

**Relocation and Violence**

At the outset of my study I mentioned my experience of violence within my extended family. My own home in Maniitsoq became a refuge for various aunts and cousins, even as my family grieved for our father after his death in 1969. Many of the smaller communities in Greenland were closed in the 1950s and 1960s, and my family was just one of the many who had to relocate. There is no doubt that the policies of koncentrationspolitik had significant ramifications for the small societies of outpost dwellers and the small communities to which outpost people moved, such as Maniitsoq. Besides those from Appamiut, people from Ikkamiut and Kangerluarsuk also moved to Maniitsoq. Others moved to Sisimiut or Nuuk. During the time I was conducting my field research, I heard a number of the elderly, original Maniitsormiut mention the effect of the newcomers to the Maniitsoq scene; the elderly felt that the newcomers brought along with them their social unrest, which affected Maniitsormiut lives.
The socio-cultural and economic changes that accompanied the exodus from outpost camps and the consequent population explosion in the now existing communities such as Maniitsoq can only be imagined, since little has been written about the upheaval. The publications about this era typically give statements such as: “The town population increased dramatically in the 1960s as a result of the Danish Government policy of concentrating the population in towns (and major settlements)” (Greenland Statistics 1997, 31).

The relationship with the environment mentioned in the first chapter is integral to the violence and abuse that resulted from this migration. Profoundly bound to their place of birth, the process of depopulation extracted individuals from their traditional lands, their long-rooted habitat, affecting individual identity. People lost their sense of belonging, and social structures literally crashed. Life in the towns was reduced to a matter of survival. There was great competition over housing and jobs. Social stratification was immediate and obvious, with the townspeople (the original Maniitsormiut) being prioritized over the newcomers.

The members of the research group talked at length about these problems. We discerned that many of the individuals who were victims or victimizers in violence, especially those exhibiting heavy drinking, were from families whose ties to their original places had been severed. These young families had internalized the problems of the previous generations, and since the social services are run by Danish-style administration there is no hope of resolving deep-seated generational problems as the administration operations are linked to Western psychology, with its view of health in terms of the body and mind dichotomy. In reality, this view lacks the third component, as we have learned, of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaak-kullu. Much education, improved policies, and service delivery are needed to combat social ills that contribute to unravelling in societies undergoing these processes of colonization. Decolonization in Greenland has so far not only failed to help solve these existing problems but also has facilitated an escalated anxiety about sumigiinnagaaneq, meaning ‘total neglect.’ Leaving the intimate interaction and knowledge of surrounding landscapes, seascapes, and memoryscapes (see Nuttall 1992), let alone the spiritscapes, could not have been easy for the people, since the Inuit psyche is animated through these.

The study of gender and violence and abuse is much related to the Western assertion of the ability to understand power relations, which stems largely from the point of view of Western values, attitudes, structures, and regulations. However, just as life as a kalaaleq is to be evaluated or seen through timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu,
violence and abuse need to be analyzed through these as well. Physical violence is only one aspect of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu. Men especially seem to suffer spiritual or psychological abuse in that their identities are being slowly stripped from them such that their traditional responsibilities are no longer well-defined. The church supports women’s spheres of activities yet not men’s. This is perhaps a reason why the men attend church less and find more satisfying spiritual experiences in communion with animals and nuna. If the church does not cater to men, where do men go when they suffer? Are men hurt differently, then, than women? This is where the elements of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu come into play, as a tool to explore this possibility.

The interviewees had already alerted us to the fact that men and women do take different approaches; however, historical events also need further analysis as the basis for violence. Much has been written about violence in Greenland, and while some have attempted to analyze it (see, for example, Sørensen 1990), no concrete solutions have been found. What about the ontological aspects of violence; in other words, what happens with regard to the other two elements, tarnikkut anersaakkullu, the soul and the spirit? These are abstractions, qualities that are difficult for Western thinking to assess. When I presented these in my discussion with the committee that was establishing the Study of Living Conditions in Circumpolar Areas (SLICA), we were told that souls and spirits are not measurable items and would ill fit the study. Organizers of SLICA are not alone: Huntington (2002, xxii–xxiii) states in regard to Arctic climate change:

> When speaking of indigenous perspectives... it is essential to include the full range of indigenous worldview and not just the subset that fits most neatly into the current scientific paradigm. Although the spiritual dimensions of the environment may be inaccessible to science, they nonetheless play a vital role in shaping perceptions and actions and thus must be taken into account when discussing appropriate responses to environmental change.

Such arguments are also reminiscent of the endless discussions surrounding quantitative and qualitative studies. Indeed, mathematics is capable of deep abstraction, but certainly it has proven very useful in the advancement of Western thought and living.
Ontological Dimensions of Violence

It seems to me that the women of Maniitsoq are well positioned and well supported as far as churchgoing and church-related activities are concerned. They willingly participate in most of the church-prescribed activities, and their own activities are easily accepted and regarded well by the church.

What about men? Generally, men go out boating rather than to church. This was expressed by a number of the individuals interviewed. Is it because the Lutheran belief system does not nurture the needs of Maniitsoq men’s spiritual or religious desires? Men obviously make a deliberate choice: they go out small-scale hunting, submitting themselves to the will of nature and the animals. They assured me that they gain a different kind of fulfilment, still a spiritual one, and their activities should not be seen as indifference to church and religion. I came across the same statement during my field research in Pangnirtung some ten years earlier. There, Inuit men spoke of nuna — the environment — talking to them, telling them things, and they were always trying to figure out what those things were.

While our field research did not necessarily provide direct answers regarding violence and abuse, it might be useful to see violence in a more encompassing way to see what is going on in the surrounding areas, specifically the circumpolar regions. I will offer further analysis at the end of this study, which, among other things, looks into the criminalization of Inuit men.

Conclusion

Much has been written about the phenomenon of violence in Greenland in general. It clearly indicates and evokes images of maladjustment of Inuit to a Western lifestyle. Viewing this phenomenon in light of the principles that I presented in earlier chapters, we discerned sensitivities regarding being mindful of individuality and how this individuality is reacted upon defensively or offensively. This chapter clearly indicates that other forms of violence should be explored that might be more meaningful to specific communities, such as Maniitsoq and other Arctic communities. I will analyze this further later in this study.
Chapter Nine

Kalaallit Ways of Knowing: Theoretical Contributions

We can now look back on this study and arrive at some conclusions. In this chapter I want to revisit and clarify the model of *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu* and the notion of genderlessness, and how they relate in studying gender among the Inuit. I detail how these two notions, unique kalaallit contributions to human knowledge, are used in kalaallit society to illustrate differences in how the theories are used — the Western versus the triad and notion of genderlessness. The chapter concludes with some recommendations for further study.

**Timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu in Contemporary Kalaallit Society**

As I explained in chapter 3, the framework of *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu* revealed itself to me when I ran into difficulty in making meaning out of conversations with an elderly widow in Maniitsoq. I have deliberately included that particular interview in order to highlight how the *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu* model manifests itself in the interview (see Appendix A).

Seemingly endless stories of dreams were what got me started. I sat for hours with the widow as she vividly told her stories of these dreams while I tried to understand how I might possibly extract from her tale the inner strengths of the widows that allowed their participation in Maniitsoq society. Note, for example, the dream conveyed to our informant by one of her elderly friends. He dreamed of being in a beautiful home that is beyond this world and of individuals that he saw in that house. He went out of his way to make sure that our informant knew exactly whom he saw in the dream. Years later, our informant realized that the individuals this elderly friend met in his dream were the very people who had been buried next to his own grave. I discovered later that this dream was not so much about the rendition of the dream as about premonition. The man dreaming did not know that the individuals he saw in the house were to become his graveyard neighbours — this was a premonition that our informant figured out years after the death of her friend. This had a profound effect on her, and she was obviously awed by the potency of dreams.

Another example of a seeming premonition was when our informant’s adult, and unbeknownst to her, soon-to-die, son requested an unusual favour: to be hugged and cuddled like a small baby. In Inuit society, this kind of demonstration of affection is
virtually never shown adult children, even where a strong acknowledgement of bonded love is obvious. Our informant acceded to her son’s request without judgment and feels satisfied at having done so. This was the last time she ever held him. He and another younger son died soon after this event, together with a third young man. Earlier that year, the son had had a vivid dream of him asking not to be taken — “not now.” After the simultaneous loss of her two sons the widow’s life was driven much by what dreams had to offer, both good and bad.

The timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu framework allows individuals to explore dreams and find meaning in them. In the “Western” world, dreams are not necessarily appreciated as having the ability to construct meaning. They are rarely seen as guiding one through life. In Greenland and in the Inuit world, however, dreams are like missing pieces in a puzzle; they are additional components to the mundane realities of daily life. In our informant’s case, dreams are significant for making sense of her life and the lives of other people around her.

Dreams are a substantial part of kalaallit conversations, and the widow interviewed was no exception in that regard. I mentioned in earlier chapters that individuals are born with gifts and already have in them the drive inherited from the time of creation, and a specific personality that comes with their name (Nuttall 1992). Our informant was born with seizures. Even though she did not elaborate on these seizures and their social effect, the resulting vulnerability gave her a chance to stay with her grandparents, who gave her a stable, loving early childhood. She acknowledged her own vulnerability. She had no control over the seizures but rather drew from them her drive and energy: “I live a life in my weaknesses,” she states, “I see myself as being the weakest of the weakest.” She prayed often for strength and felt guided.

She was thankful for having handled her life in “stupidity,” which she recognized as being a positive quality. I found it difficult to appreciate stupidity as a positive and constructive quality, as I was brought up to believe it a strongly undesirable quality. I had to reconsider my own values and juxtapose myself in relation to what she gave me. She appreciated this state of mind — that is, stupidity — saying that otherwise she might have ended up feeling very bitter and negative had she tried to evaluate what life had offered her. Most importantly, her principle was to avoid negativity. This is wisdom that she knew worked best for her, and she wanted her children to avoid creating any negativity, however challenging their circumstances might be.

When questioned about advice that she might give to other widows-to-be she resorted to an emphasis on their qualities of life: “They can decide to follow their
feelings, the ones that they have found and chosen.” Her advice came with assumptions, assumptions of individual giftedness and recognition of its potency from the very beginning.

I also noticed the dismay expressed by some of the adults interviewed about the diminution of religiosity in present-day kalaallit society. A number of the interviewees mentioned their regret in much the same way that Jessen (2004) does in his book. Each claimed that religiosity in the Christian context is typically a kalaallit way. I wonder if the pattern of time spent on religiosity was not inherited from pre-Christian times, when individuals extensively meditated to align the body with those qualities of tarnikkut anersaakkullu.

Appendix A provides an example of a conversation using the timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu model. The particular widow used it to construct her conversation with me, and it illustrates how she applied these components in a meaningful way to guide her life. Her life story was not a rambling delivery of words without context. On the contrary, she delivered her life story in a well-framed manner — the way she knows best — and it was up to me as a novice anthropologist to make sense of her world. Without seeking to understand her use of this framework, I could have inadvertently related her story in a way she did not intend, in this way twisting her story from her intentions and against Mimi’s instructions. But by allowing the widow to present her story the way she wanted to, we gained an analytical tool that gives new insight into human knowledge, as was shown in previous chapters.

How Maniitsormiut Use the timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu Paradigm

Each of the Maniitsormiut interviewees, regardless of age, told me that they were named after deceased people: this demonstrates what Nuttall (1992), Guemple (1995), and Williamson (1974, 1988) wrote about the Inuit naming system. One wonders why Inuit and kalaallit — the latter striving so much to become Westernized — would hold on to the tradition. The naming patterns of the Inuit obviously remain very strong even in Maniitsoq, which has had more than 250 years of Christian and Danish influence. Where Petersen (1982b) traced families through the surname system, it would be interesting to map Maniitsormiut according to first names. This would perhaps be more interesting and revealing because first names have greater connection to personal, soul, and spiritual relationships. Mapping the souls/name network of Maniitsormiut would provide a human perspective that is unique and different from that offered by the standard European surname system.
In chapter 4 we gained an understanding of Inuit women’s behaviour and their activities using *timikkut*, *tarnikkut*, *anersaakkullu*. The model enabled us to understand, for example, why menstruation was a taboo subject of discussion among kalaallit. We discovered that menstruation, while physically (*timikkut*) present, provided Inuit women a chance to contextualize their personal soul (*anersaaq*) with that of inner strength (*tarniq*). During the time of menstruation, women were able to put the physical, the soul, and inner strength together, providing them the opportunity to put things into a holistic perspective. This may be reminiscent of meditation and of achieving holiness. Today, menstruation is simply a regular natural occurrence, devoid of activities dealing with souls and the inner strengths. As elderly widows and other informants told me, sexuality was so repressed during their own early adolescence that some were never informed about their oncoming periods. Our informant in Appendix A had not even been informed about the process of giving birth to her first child. In her unknowing state of mind, she thought that her buttocks were becoming dislodged from her body.

Explicitly or implicitly, Maniitsormiut use the *timikkut*, *tarnikkut*, *anersaakkullu* framework. While many parents in Maniitsoq want their children to do well in an education system that has a strong Danish influence, school authorities experience great difficulty in involving parents directly. Parent–teacher interviews barely work, and only very recently have parent–teacher associations begun to crop up in Greenland. One wonders at such reluctance to become involved despite the parents’ strong educational aspirations. Do schools not respect the incipient energy that individuals are born with (*tarniq*), and does the school system not address that? There also appears to be a major discrepancy between mainstream educational philosophies and the kalaallit philosophy that acknowledges the giftedness of the individual (*anersaaq*). Thus the innate energy and giftedness are not acknowledged in the school system; instead, children are seen as empty slates in need of factual or symbolic enrichment. Maybe the non-involvement of parents in the school system is due to their inherent disapproval of this philosophy.

In chapter 5, I showed that the spheres of men and women in their homes encompass both explicit and implicit negotiations of the inherent qualities of *timikkut*, *tarnikkut*, *anersaakkullu*. As researchers we deceived ourselves by imagining that we would find stereotypical roles along gender lines in Maniitsoq homes. However, we found that most couples negotiate until they arrive at a common ground that is most conducive to allowing each partner to flourish without jeopardizing the other’s potential related to the life qualities of *timikkut*, *tarnikkut*, *anersaakkullu*. Marriage partnerships are not only formalized, structural physical processes but also involve
deep-seated realms of the soul and inner strength. In the Inuktitut language and in kalaallisut (in northern Greenland) “twosomeness” is recognized grammatically, as one can say “let’s go out (as two)” in one word: anilluk, or nerilluk: “let’s eat, the two of us,” and so on. The “twoness” is indicated in the suffix “-lluk.” This unique social construction needs much further examination than what this study allows. In my opinion, these negotiations of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu are the very essence of what the notion of genderlessness is about. Individuals in a relationship negotiate their strengths and weaknesses of the physical, the name/soul, and inner giftedness in a partnership. If there is too much misalignment, couplehood does not succeed. The aspects of timi (the physical), tarneq (the soul/name) and anersaaq (the inner strength or giftedness) are to be respected and nourished in a relationship; if not, these can be detrimental to individuals. Tulluutinngitsut is a term used for couples wherein the qualities of the triad do not complement each other. Individuals in such a relationship are strongly encouraged to end it because it will be unproductive and detrimental to mental and physical health to all involved. As the Nukartaaq husband explained and as we have come to understand, the three are dynamic, and negotiations through this framework continue throughout couples’ lives. Clearly, these dimensions become even more complicated as children are brought forth. Indeed, family dynamics would be intriguing and interesting to observe with the triad framework in mind.

Our look into the gender division of labour in the Maniitsoq workforce was extended to the chapter dealing with kalaallit women and development. The latter in particular illustrated how the use of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu adds to our understanding of Inuit women’s economic, cultural, and spiritual contribution in kalaallit society beyond that available from the written sources. It showed how gaps in literature could be filled, and how the spoken language contributes meaning and sensitivity. My argument for women’s involvement in matters dealing with the family economy is based on our understanding of the value of the individual. The value of the individual in Inuit and therefore kalaallit society is based on the potency of the individual endowed with the aspects of the body, the soul, and inner strength and the way these are joined in one person.

We used this same framework to understand violence in a more holistic way. Violence cannot be regarded only as a physical action (timi); aspects involving the other two (tarneq and anersaaq) must be applied to obtain a more holistic perspective. Such an approach could be a better tool to deal with contemporary violence, a constant problem in kalaallit society. The framework offers a tool that can provide a better understanding of how Arctic men are more affected by the loss of the spiritual
dimensions of tarneq and anersaaq than women. As long as the dimensions of tarneq and anersaaq are ignored, Arctic men’s suffering will be silenced, suggesting then that they do not also suffer abuse. I believe that when physical actions (timi) alone are overemphasized, the result is that cases involving men are misunderstood by all involved.

**Kalaallit Silaat**

Kalaallit talk about *sila*, meaning ‘intellect’, and use the term *silarsuit* for knowledge systems. *Qallunaat silarsuanni* easily translates to what is in the minds or imagination of the Qallunaat; namely, the Qallunaat worldview. Dorais (1990) wrote about *Inuit silaat*. I would extend his observations to say that kalaallit *silaat* consists of the combination of *timikkut*, *tarnikkut*, *anersaakkullu*. The framework is significantly different than the traditional definition of kalaallit *silaat*, which leads to serious misunderstandings both cross-culturally and sometimes even within kalaallit society. Kalaallit *silaat* is a layer of socially constructed elements involving language, mindset, and an understanding of time, space, and interpersonal and soul relations. There is logic and reason behind the *timikkut*, *tarnikkut*, *anersaakkullu* structure (Smith 1999), as with any other way of thinking and knowledge. It is the kalaallit contribution to human knowledge.

The *timikkut*, *tarnikkut*, *anersaakkullu* framework and, I argue, kalaallit *silaat*, is not chaotic: on the contrary, it presents a complex way of thinking that provides the user with a systematic way of organizing knowledge, bringing meaning and relevance to the evaluation of human experience. It seems to me that the model is best used in the way the elderly woman constructed her conversation in Appendix A. Her way of telling her own story takes the form of other kalaallit life stories that have for years been broadcast over *Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa*, Greenland’s national radio.

While until the 1960s great efforts were made to eradicate indigenous knowledge, the emphasis has since shifted to its enhancement. As Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000, 19) write, “[t]he heritage of an indigenous people is not merely a collection of objects, stories and ceremonies, but a complete knowledge system with its own concepts of epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity.” I do not doubt that *timikkut*, *tarnikkut*, *anersaakkullu* offers a solid foundation for others to gain greater insight into kalaallit *silaat*, worldview. My effort is just a beginning, I agree with Petersen (pers. comm. 2005), Dybbroe (pers. comm. 2005), and Ingold (pers. comm. 2006) that much more needs to be done to document and expand on the existence of *timikkut*, *tarnikkut* *anersaakkullu*. As I noted above, my
work here was in fact a derailment and developed tangentially from my intended work: studying kalaallit gender relations using the Inuit notion of genderlessness.

The Inuit Notion of Genderlessness
When I began to plan my extensive study of kalaallit post-colonial gender relations, I was interested in the social positioning of kalaallit women in that setting. In the academic discourse of gender studies, it is generally assumed that indigenous women occupy the lowest social positions, particularly in male-oriented societies such as the Inuit. However, I was inclined to believe that this assumption does not completely hold true in communities like Maniitsoq. I had also learned that gender studies in general assume unequal treatment of men and women, both presently and in the past.

It was through discussion with Dybbroe (pers. comm. 2005) that I was introduced to grounded theory. My reading affirmed that what I did intuitively could have been framed by grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Before going out in the field I had a sense that Inuit gender relations could be further explored and better understood than they had been so far. I justified that judgement by developing the notion of genderlessness. Once I was in the field I realized that the elderly widows’ renditions of their life stories were based on different dimensions than we had been taught in the education system. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998, 12):

The researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data. Theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the “reality” than a theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experiences or solely through speculation... Grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action.

The authors posit the creativity of the researchers as an essential ingredient, with such undertakings building on rather than testing existing theories. Some of this has to do with my recognition that attitudes toward women in Inuit myth and legends and in the Bible contrasted. In the story of Adam and Eve, the woman was an afterthought whose actions were deceitful to the man, while Inuit myths and legends include women as godly and strong. In the traditional creation story, the moon is the male and the sun is the female, and both become celestial beings. The woman in that creation story is not an afterthought; from the outset she participates actively, effectively, and heroically (Jessen Williamson 2000).
Thus I set out to explore kalaallit gender relations using the Inuit genderlessness framework that I devised and strongly argued for prior to my Maniitsoq fieldwork. It was through the Inuit notion of genderlessness, according to which human and individual qualities transcend gender divisions, that I was able to persuade my research partners in Maniitsoq to join in the project. The notion made sense to them and encouraged them to develop questions for the fieldwork. The same notion also allowed me to draw on the insights of each of the interviewees. This was conveyed to potential interviewees orally and on paper.

The notion of genderlessness establishes a neutral field in which men are not more important than women or vice versa. We have seen in chapter 1 that this neutralization extended to other relations dealing with the land and animals. In this regard the human being is just a part of creation and not its apex in the way that the theory of evolution and the Bible would have us believe. The notion of genderlessness allows emancipation from rigid stereotypes of what men and women do or ought to do. It enables all involved to explore the realities of gender and related roles as they are in the eyes of the interviewees through childhood, homes, the workplace, violence, and some aspects of the kalaallit governance. Chapter 4 dealt with gender, childhood, and sexuality, and we learned that childhood is a period for the strong instillation of individual responsibility. Expectations increase as children develop. It seems to me that gender orientation in relation to tasks depends on household attitudes more than on the sex of the individual. As a research group we expected that there would be significantly different responsibilities according to gender. Recall the Akulliit couple, who are contemporaries and grew up in a smaller town than Maniitsoq. As a child the husband learnt to knit, and did all the tasks normally associated with women. The wife initially found it difficult to explain the differences in tasks that male and female children were expected to undertake. It was with some coaching on my part that she was able to talk about this, and we learned that the differences only came about as the children grew older. In that sense we learn to appreciate that the question was not so much about what children did in form of gender-related tasks as about becoming responsible as an individuals.

In chapter 5 the notion of genderlessness helped us to understand household responsibilities. I am certain that had we not had a neutralizing framework we might have reinforced the stereotypes of what men and women do in their homes. The notion of genderlessness revealed the diversity of how couples in Maniitsoq operate within their own households; we also came to understand how Maniitsoq couples negotiate their strengths and weaknesses. A number of couples were able to express how negotiations continue in the course of personal development premised on aspects of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu.
In chapter 7, the notion of genderlessness, in association with timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu, helped to fill in the missing pieces in the literature on kalaallit women’s contribution to the family economy, spirituality, and the development of Greenland as a nation.

The above speaks to the potency of the two concepts — that of the notion of genderlessness and that of the timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu framework — and how each on its own made this study unique. As I have related, I did not expect to find timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu, literally stumbling onto it in my fieldwork after having set out to use the notion of genderlessness as a framework. The latter may be more widely applied in gender studies and for comparative purposes, whereas timikkut, tarnikkut anersaakkullu is specifically an Inuit framework. This leads us to a consideration of the implications of its use.

**When timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu is Best Used**

The most obvious use of the triad, beyond its use in forming the structure of conversations, is in the language of the kalaallit and Inuit in the Arctic. As the reader will have noticed, I made a deliberate choice to use kalaallit terms throughout this book. I wanted to introduce and acclimatize the reader to an Inuit and kalaallit worldview and mindset. This allowed me to maintain a sense of cultural groundedness that is invaluable in showing the potency of language to convey the philosophy of the Inuit. Inuktitut (kalaallisut being simply a dialect of Inuktitut) is significantly different from any of the European languages. The Inuktitut sounds and grammar structure present a significant enough challenge to any non-Inuktitut speakers that very few non-Inuit learn to speak the language. These challenges are compounded by the great differences in the mindset and worldview. I recall having had great difficulty understanding postulations and theories when I was taught theories of education at Ilinniarfissuaq. The difficulty probably originated from not having a solid grounding in timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu, which would have equipped me and my instructors in comparing other theoretical foundations. In that light, non-Inuit theories had very little relevance and remain largely meaningless to Inuit and kalaallit audiences.

Language reflects culture, and kalaallisut is no exception. Inuit philosophy emanates from the language, which expresses the value of the human being prior to the development of a fully-fledged identity imbued by gender ideologies. From this principle — that human beings are valued before gender is even considered — comes the notion of genderlessness. There is of course much more that can be achieved
when analyzing the terminology of the kalaallit language to find the real meaning of the terms in original Inuit thinking. Looking to illustrate this, I was surprised when I came across Vebæk’s story about female shamans in East Greenland and her statement that an older woman told her impatient apprentice, “qilaga pissavat” (1996, 34). I was surprised at the use of *qilak*, as in contemporary kalaallisut this translates directly to ‘heaven’. “Qilaga pissavat” then literally translates to ‘you will inherit my heaven,’ but how can one inherit a heaven? After I re-examined the sentence and saw other related terms, I concluded that the word *qilak* was the term used for “shamanic knowledge.” I believe that shamanic knowledge was gathered through the triad, and the newly gained knowledge that we have produced with this endeavour is comparable to that. Please inherit my *qilak* – my knowledge – and use it wisely. The missionaries must have borrowed the term in their enticing of Inuit into Christianity and changed the meaning of *qilak* to “heaven.” Certainly, my effort in deconstructing the notion of pinngortitaq in chapter 2 is directly supported by Vebæk’s usage of *qilak*.

Today, the kalaallisut language enjoys a prominence in the much-politicized scene of the Home Rule Government. In fact, the kalaallisut language has been seen as the very foundation for the creation of a kalaallit national identity, which is widely promoted through public media. The strength and the widespread use of the language is something that other Inuit groups, in Canada and Alaska, admire. As I mentioned in the introductory chapters, kalaallit use their language as their creative outlet.

Next to the use of language, kalaallit best use *timikkut, tarnikkut anersaakkullu* through art. Aka Høgh’s artwork is directly influenced by Inuit myth and legends, and she is well known for respecting her own giftedness. When she started creating art in the 1970s, virtually no one in Greenland sustained himself or herself through artwork. She was one of the very first full-time artists, and she has done this successfully. In some of her earlier work she animates Greenlandic landscapes by portraying faces and bodies of human beings as landscapes. This, to me, directly speaks to the Inuit understanding that the land is alive and animated. It has a mind of its own. Similarly, kalaallit have a great appetite for music. Newly produced CDs sell like hotcakes. Much of the poetry associated with the music is about the animation of souls of the animals in the Arctic, the land, and how the ancestors who invested in these make contemporary life possible.

As mentioned earlier, the Inuit naming system remains alive in the practices of the Lutheran Church. In my opinion, this demonstrates a continuing investment in the
works of the *timikkut, tarnikkut anersaakkullu* framework. Parents use the framework in bringing up their children — as we saw in the interviews with the parents who stated that the instillation of kalaallit values is in addition to what the children learn in schools. Children are taught to seek wisdom, which is a much desired quality among the Inuit. Wisdom is clearly the balancing and integrating of the three qualities of *timi* (the physical/the body), *tarniq* (the name/the soul), and *anersaaq* (the inner strength or giftedness, the energy that originates from the creation). For some this requires tedious work; for others that quality is innate.

As mentioned earlier, the kalaallit made a conscious choice in keeping the education system largely Danish. As anxiety-ridden learners in such a setting, we were encouraged to learn but reminded that the education system is just one system, and if all should collapse, there are other more important treasures, namely, that of our giftedness, which surpasses any material thing. No one can buy or take away that individual potency and potential.

**Implications**

I have described how kalaallit best use *timikkut, tarnikut, anersaakkullu*. These examples can be used to critically analyze the existence of the framework, but there will be other discoveries, once the discussion is opened. There may also be strong reactions against the framework. As I have mentioned, kalaallit society deliberately chose to “move forward” by adopting Qallunaat ways of doing things. (The Qallunaat in this case would specifically be the Danes.) Having done so, embracing the elements of *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu* too enthusiastically could be seen as backward and belonging to a bygone era. The expression “kalass!” could be used to indicate this. When I mentioned to the Angajullikkut couple my many baptismal names, this term was thrown at me. The wife felt that my eight names were excessive and unacceptably backwards. The same term would be used for seemingly unassimilated individuals who cling to past practices of the Inuit. Another example is the dying practice of adopting the first grandchild. For many, the practice is no longer necessary and therefore belongs to the past: a *kalak* behaviour.

On the other hand, becoming too Danified is not tolerated either. So, *kalaaliussuseq* really is about negotiating between the past practices of the Inuit and those of the Danes. Making good sensible adaptations of these two cultures is what makes a kalaaleq.
Self-governing Kalaallit and Kalaallit Siloat

In this post-colonial setting the knowledge (kalaallit siloat) that originates from Inuit tradition is not recognized as a systematic, organized form of knowledge the way it is in Canada and Alaska. There it is used for policy-making in government structures: for example, Canadian Inuvialuit and Inuit incorporate their unique knowledge into governing systems, which is how co-management boards have been created. Many of these are concerned with renewable resources in land claims areas (Caulfield 2000).

Kalaallit, having inherited their governance structure from Denmark, basically cut out the home-grown knowledge that remains that could have been used to improve their own lives. It is, however, readily and easily dismissed by officials, both kalaallit and Danes. Currently, learning institutions in Greenland operate on knowledge systems that Danes have defined, and kalaallit knowledge as I have explained it in this study is seen as secondary at best.

Since the kalaallit gained self-government, the economy that supports the post-colonial structure has relied heavily on renewable resources, primarily various forms of fishing. For some, ways of thinking about relationships among humans, animals, and the land have drastically changed. One such change relates to spiritual aspects. The kalaallit embraced Christianity to the extent that, with very few exceptions, virtually all are baptized Lutheran. Kalaallit celebrate most ceremonial occasions through their church. Churchgoing is taken seriously. People make a point of being physically clean, but they also prepare themselves psychologically and spiritually. Most dress up for even the common Sunday sermons and make a point of arriving on time. Kalaallit men and women rarely use perfumes or colognes, but churchgoers find this is an opportune time to use them. Whereas spiritual or religious beliefs in pre-Christian times were instilled and invested in the individual, these have become much more institutionalized and very public.

Another great change that altered the kalaallit relationship to the animals and the habitat has to do with industrialization and the consequent preoccupation with the economy and money. The reciprocal relationships I described in chapter 2 are not necessarily on the minds of kalaallit entrepreneurs and others who exploit resources. The knowledge system that is relied upon for such exploitation is what I call assertive knowledge, since it aggressively imposes on the knowledge system on which previous generations relied, one based on the wisdom concerning the relationship with the habitat, the animals, and their related souls and spirits. In larger urban centres, many kalaallit have little appreciation of other knowledge systems than the Qallunaaq one and would find it difficult to imagine that they
could have less knowledge than the land and the animals around them; the hierarchical system of seeing the human being as the pinnacle of creation is well established: Christian thought and assertive knowledge see to that.

**The Social Positioning of Kalaallit Women**

We have ascertained that kalaallit women played an equally important role in most social, economic, and spiritual matters in earlier generations, and that the portrait of their passivity, inactivity, and non-contribution is due to prevailing societal norms during the colonization period. We have also learned that the kalaallit women’s positioning was grossly denigrated in places like Maniitsoq when there was a drastic change from hunting to fishing in early days as Maniitsoq was becoming an industrialized society.

We have also established that kalaallit women now enter the job market, competing confidently and competently along with or against others in Maniitsoq and elsewhere. Greenland Statistics (2005) states that, since 2000, women are more actively engaged (consistently by 2% or more) in the labour market than men. Also, more men are unemployed than women. These realities are consistent with the numbers that I presented for the Arctic Human Development Report (2004). The situation in Maniitsoq is no exception to this.

As of 1 January 2005 the female population of Greenland numbered 26,650, about 4000 fewer women than men. Where are these women? This is significant considering the population size was only 56,969 (Greenland Statistics 2005). The greater number of women in the labour force in relation to the smaller number of women residing in Greenland calls for further analysis.

Education is another sphere in which kalaallit women are slightly ahead of men. Greenland Statistics’ (1998) numbers between 1993 and 1996 showed a difference of only eight in 1996, in favour of women. I predict that the discrepancy will become greater on the basis of what has been happening in Nordic countries as well as in Nunavut. Women have surpassed men in terms of education.

**The Social Positioning of Kalaallit Men**

As mentioned earlier, this study started off with the purpose of specifically analyzing the social positioning of kalaallit women. Soon after my initial consultation with the research collaborators we agreed that we also had to examine and understand
kalaallit men's social positioning too as part of this understanding. We were all aware of the interdependence between kalaallit men and women, and our findings alarmed us. Kalaallit men's social positioning had deteriorated extensively on many fronts.

First of all we learned that, as seen in chapter 5, kalaallit men feel isolated even in their own homes, insofar as it is the social network of the women that determines the household sociability. This leaves the men without much visiting from their extended family members. Moreover, kalaallit women have gained considerably more control over child socialization processes, leaving the fathers desiring more say.

We also understood from the interviews that some men are left without a sense of fulfilment of responsibilities because many in Maniitsoq live in apartments. Apartment living takes away the formal responsibilities of most individuals but especially the men, as men are not given a chance to look after the external aspects of their homes, which is seen as typically male-oriented work.

I was also much interested in men's lack of interest in church functions and found it difficult to find answers to this. In conventional feminist discourse Christianity is often criticized as patriarchal. God created man, and the woman who came from the rib of a man, according to myth, was created to accompany the man. So why would men in Maniitsoq not care about church and its functions? Each of the men I interviewed made sure I understood that their non-involvement with the church had little to do with disbelief in Christianity but then failed to explain to me what troubles them. I didn't pursue the subject, but I recognize and appreciate the fact that within the spheres of men that I addressed in chapter 5 and elsewhere, men cultivate spiritual relationships in relating directly to animals and the land. These relationships remain important to those who continue to hunt and provide kalaalimerngit for their families. We have seen in chapter 4 that female activities are well supported by the church. While the church and its functions support women's social control, it has to be said that the animals that Inuit and kalaallit men relate to are not mentioned in the Bible. One does not read about seals, walruses, polar bears, caribou, or ptarmigans, for example. The Bible says very little about how to look after the reciprocal relationship between arctic human beings and arctic animals, the land and seas of the Arctic, and their related souls and spirits. Perhaps this is the reason men stay away from church. Is it that the church does not support their hunting activities and their relationship with the arctic environment?

The fact that men's spirituality differs from the kalaallit women who are more inclined to adhere to the church's belief system poses a question with regard to
communications, which Bodenhorn (1990) alluded to. She mentioned that wives are really the hunters, and the alignments of communication that Bodenhorn’s informants referred to are, in my mind, the qualities of tarneq and anersaaq. If Maniitsoq men — and in fact the Pangnirtungmiut across the Davis Strait — are preoccupied with their spirituality as it relates to the arctic environment, while women relate much more to the Christian belief system, what happens to their spiritual alignment? Bodenhorn’s findings of aligned communication between men and women invite the question as to how men and women in Maniitsoq and Pangnirtung deal or do not deal with this.

I also dealt with Ilibooraq’s question of violence against women in Maniitsoq by finding answers to that issue from a different perspective than she had intended; that is, I relied for the answers on information volunteered in interviews already conducted as the subject seemed too sensitive to be broached otherwise, and I had encountered difficulties in setting up interviews. Those interviewees gave me their insights into and experiences of physical and psychological abuse and how they conquered their experiences through patience and perseverance. However, I was determined to find other ways of approaching the issue.

As mentioned above, timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu can provide more insight into how to prevent violence and/or abuse. We know that physical (timikkut) abuse exists, but do we know about abuse with regard to the soul (tarnikkut) and spirit (anersaakkullu)? While physical abuse is obvious, perhaps kalaallit men are psychologically and spiritually violated; these possibilities have not yet been dealt with.

I recounted my conversation with a counsellor freshly arrived from Nuuk and how I felt that the approach to “healing” troubled individuals is undertaken using Western notions of psychology. We felt as a research group that such an approach is unproductive and shallow in light of the non-Western subjects. It is our suggestion that the kalaallit develop more culturally appropriate treatment; perhaps the aspects of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu could be developed to meet this need.

According to Greenland Statistics (2005), 2,837 convictions were recorded for criminal offences in Greenland in 2003. Greenland Statistics documented 132 cases of sexual offences involving rape, attempted rape, and other sexually deviant behaviour. The category of crimes of violence totalled 432. This included 419 assaults, five homicides, and eight attempted homicides and other offences against
life or body. Because of the nature of the statistics, I was unable to analyze these findings according to gender.

Suicide in Maniitsoq is just as problematic as elsewhere in the Arctic. Suicide is much more prevalent among kalaallit men and women than among any other cultural group in the Arctic, including Canadian Inuit men. There are gender differences in suicide rates in Greenland. Young men up to twenty-four years of age seem much more directly affected by this phenomenon (Jessen Williamson 2004). Greenland Statistics (1997) termed suicide as “non-natural death,” and reported that out of 1000 male deaths, 25.4 of those were suicides. For women this ratio was 14.5. These numbers are high and had been this high even before the kalaallit obtained self-government over twenty-five years ago. The gross neglect that the Akulliit wife addressed in chapter 4 has finally become fully exposed for discussion across all Greenland. The president of professional early childhood educators threatened to bring the gross social neglect to the International Human Rights Commission Court unless the Greenland Home Rule Government made tangible decisions to address the issue, particularly as it pertains to young children and youth (Atuagagdliutit-AG, May 2005, 36). The Danish prime minister has asked to be briefed about the issue by the kalaaleq prime minister of Greenland.

The devaluation of men’s traditional roles in Greenland, I suspect, plays a very significant role in the occurrence of male suicide; if this insight is correct, it needs to be addressed on both the individual and societal levels.

Life expectancy also varies across gender. Kalaallit men’s life expectancy is 61.7 while for women it is 68.5 (Greenland Statistics 1997). These ages are on average ten years lower than those of their counterparts in Denmark. These statistical snapshots indicate that the welfare of kalaallit men is much more in jeopardy than that of women. This is in contrast to the assumptions of feminist discourse on gender issues, and helps us understand that violence and any violation of the individual needs to be seen from a larger perspective in the Arctic as well. Modern development is, in fact, systematically disenfranchising arctic men (Jessen Williamson 2004).

The deterioration of men’s social position is also related to prohibitive international wildlife conventions. I believe that these “criminalize” the Inuit and kalaallit men in their activities of hunting and fishing. During the 1970s there was a strong anti-fur movement in Europe, the United States, and Canada, which had a devastating effect on both the kalaallit economy (Lynge 1992) and Inuit in Canada (Wenzel 1991). The European Union Seal Skin Directive of 1983 banned the importation of sealskins. Even earlier, the US Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 prohibited imports and
exports of marine mammal products. Sealskin and other wildlife products are strictly prohibited in the United States (Caulfield 2000).

The creation of the International Whaling Commission in 1946 under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling took place without input from the Inuit whale hunters of the Arctic. Only after considerable effort was expended by various Inuit governments and organizations were kalaallit allowed to carry out their harvesting activities. This seriously affects Inuit and kalaallit men. More male hardship is to be expected with climate change in the Arctic as the movements and the behaviour of the animals on both land and sea will not be predictable. New insights will be needed to deal with this and with the contaminants that have entered the Inuit food in recent years.

This situation speaks to the deterioration of kalaallit men’s status in their communities. This is evident in their own homes, in public, in numbers incarcerated, in education, life expectancy, employment, and on the international political scene. Abuse in all forms, whether physical, psychological, or spiritual, as it is evidenced among the kalaallit, will increase unless the kalaallit government and other Inuit self-governments across the Arctic develop programs immediately to remedy the serious situation of kalaallit and other Inuit men. Western psychological methods are not culturally appropriate and do not deal with historical or spiritual injustices. Other methods need to be developed to intimately and accurately deal with how kalaallit see themselves as human beings with valid knowledge, logical methods, and organizational skills. I believe that our newly found framework of timikkut, tarnikkut anersaakkullu would offer great insight.

**Kalaallit Home Rule Government and Gender**

All this strongly suggests the need to go beyond the regular discourse on gender relations in order to accurately understand developments in Inuit societies. Through our research we found a significantly different perspective that allowed us to more aptly explore and comprehend kalaallit post-colonial gender relations.

While the term “post-colonialism” speaks of an era, it also implies a government. The kalaallit negotiated Inuit self-government but inherited a Danish structure based mainly on Danish agrarian and urban macro-social organization. That structure was transplanted into an arctic environment, where people depend on fishing and hunting, not farming (Jensen 1971), without significant modifications.
What, then, are the proper roles of men and women? We have already established that in the early days of Greenland’s colonial history, kalaallit women were not involved in most aspects of the government structure. It was not until after the Second World War that this changed. But in each colony prominent women played significant roles. In Maniitsoq they were nurses, schoolteachers, and wives of fishermen. After the Second World War kalaallit women also began to organize and engage in non-kalaallit life. The first women’s organization, Arnat Peqatigiit (‘union of women’) came about in 1948: “[i]ts purpose was to educate women so as to make them capable of participating in political decisions” (Dybbroe 1988, 127). Later, another organization was created, called Kilut. Dybbroe states, “From its inception Kilut was specifically focused on gender politics and the abolishment of women’s subservient position in society” (127). For some reason yet to be fully investigated, the two organizations never succeeded in getting members into parliament; nor did they succeed in furthering kalaallit women’s voice in the politics of Greenland, although a school for women in Sisimiut was created. This is part of the Knud Rasmussen’s High School, which young women can attend to learn the traditional women’s skill of preparing skins for sewing.

Inherited patriarchal values persist, however, as many more kalaallit men actively pursue political careers than women. As the Home Rule Government became an entity two prominent political parties were created: Siumut (meaning ‘forward’ – social democratic) and Atassut (meaning ‘the link’ – between Denmark and Greenland – and which was right wing). Not too many kalaallit women entered the political scene at that time. Shortly after the Home Rule Government was created, however, Inuit Ataqatigiit (‘Inuit United’ – the left wing) came into formal existence, and from its inception young women have played an active role in that party.

In contrast to that of women in Canada, kalaallit women’s political leadership has been slow in developing. This may be attributed to a combination of inherited values of governance that were based on patriarchal ideals and the fact that, because Inuit societies operated on individual spheres in which men and women had explicit responsibilities much accentuated by gender, kalaallit women might have assumed that kalaallit men would look after their interests in their absence.

Interestingly, Inuit women across the Davis Strait have been much more active in politics than in Greenland. While political leadership has yet to materialize in Greenland, as the trend becomes more “matrifocal” (Dybbroe 1988), surely kalaallit women’s political leadership is just around the corner.
As of the 2002 election, eleven women entered the kalaallit parliament, occupying almost half of the thirty-one seats. Inuit Ataqatigiit (the Leftist party) brought in four women. Atassut, which is a right-wing party whose purpose it is to strengthen the links with Denmark, brought in three. Siumut, the party that led the kalaallit into self-government, brought in only two. A relatively new party, the “democrats,” brought in two women members. The newest political party in Greenland is Arnat Partiit, meaning ‘women’s party.’ They did not succeed in electing in any members, let alone female members.

Obviously power and prestige can be understood differently depending on the framework, as my comparison of the ancient Inuit paradigm with that of European-based knowledge has revealed. Inuit assume egalitarian principles, and Qallunaat assume inequality between men and women.

How the Perspectives Stemming from the Inuit Notion of Genderlessness and timikkut, tarnikkut anersaakkullu May Differ on Gender from a Western Point of View

The notion of genderlessness was developed from my own sense of the kalaallit philosophy with respect to gender. This sense originated from my early childhood of being told stories of Inuit myths and legends by my maternal grandmother. A widow for a long time, she was instrumental to my development during my summers in Kangaamiut. She and her children knew me as aanaap panissua, the ‘grand daughter of grandmother.’ She filled my mind with endless stories, taking many hours to tell of the fabulous, the awful, and the banal. At times these were confusing stories to others and me. I’ve spent many hours attempting to determine the meaning of these stories, and this effort continues today.

It is in the context of Inuit stories and the story of Adam and Eve that I perceived significantly different assumptions as they apply to the value of men and women. Thus, if I were to have taken a Western point of view, where it is assumed that women are disempowered, I may not have explored the collaborations of men and women in Maniitsoq homes. If I had assumed inequality between men and women, it may not have occurred to me to look for the collaborations that Mariaanna wanted to know about. I may have ended up being rather defensive about women’s rights and in fact looked for unequal treatment in the interviewees’ homes. Although the experience of kalaallit women in relation to governance certainly reveals that they are disempowered, we must ask whether that translates into general female disempowerment in kalaallit society. My work argues against it.
Similarly, we saw Saladin d’Anglure’s (1994) attempts to analyze Inuit sexuality through Western theory (structuralism) in chapter 2. Saladin d’Anglure argues for homosexuality and transvestism — as a third gender — in relation to obtaining shamanic powers. These notions, I would argue, are foreign to the Inuit since homosexuality and transvestism are categorized profoundly differently. Inuit in Maniitsoq categorize those realities in relation to roles: “should have been a woman” (homosexual men) and “should have been a man” (gay women), and Inuit expectations would be that these individuals take on responsibilities according to their roles. So gay women may be expected to take on more male roles and responsibilities and indeed become great hunters in their own right. Homosexual men would be expected to take on female responsibilities. Here, the world views and associated social categorizations and organizations are very clear for the same phenomenon. One is not more right and the other more wrong, but if one is to extract accurate information to understand culture and individuals, using another framework to make judgements can be not only forced and inaccurate but unfair. Not all scholars realize the skewed assumptions in written material. Using and reusing these assumptions through the system of refereed, peer-reviewed system can cause the distance between the researcher and the researched in cross-cultural settings to become greater. We have seen this through the use of terms like “infectious times” and “pollution” for menstruation. These terms are not used in kalaallisut, and I wonder about their validity in other communities. Much of the kalaallisit mindset is based on oral traditions, which can pose problems for researchers who are not well-attuned to them.

There is very little written material to rely on in the case of Inuit women and specifically kalaallit women in a period of research spanning more than 250 years. Only in 1721 do scholars gain insight into Inuit in Greenland, and that is through Hans Egede and his family’s settlement in Greenland. His writing comes, however, from a paternalistic, Christian orientation, as his agenda was to further Christianity among long-lost Vikings in Greenland. He was extremely disappointed in not locating one Viking and took to converting the available Inuit to Christianity. To Egede Inuit had nothing to contribute: their language and spirituality created obstacles, and their social organization was obscure and ran counter to Christian ethics.

**Methodology and the Research Group**

As mentioned in chapter 1, when I left Greenland during my undergraduate studies in Ilinniarfissuaq, the Teacher Training College in Nuuk, I entered a North American university setting. During my graduate studies at the University of Saskatchewan,
I was introduced to research conducted using the participatory action research (PAR) method. Teaching anti-racist education, I promoted this as a much more democratic way of obtaining and sharing knowledge. This, I understood, is different from using knowledge as power, where a few privileged people gain access to knowledge (Ghosh 1996). PAR made good sense to me, and I employed it for this study. What new insight this has provided us.

PAR has not been well utilized in Greenland as it has in Canada, Alaska, and elsewhere. The interest of my collaborators was piqued, however, when I introduced it through my Maniitsoq research. The participants were awed by my invitation to collaborate and quickly embraced it, as each of them was curious about the subject and wanted to go beyond what they already knew. The sense of having some ownership, design, and the prospect of being given the answers to long-existing questions enticed them.

The PAR method requires, of course, a network of participants. To reach the necessary numbers I approached personal acquaintances in Maniitsoq and had help from my older sister, Boletta. While this helped a great deal in my research, nevertheless, as one has seen earlier in this study, even cultural membership does not grant one immediate access to good understanding.

Maniitsoq is in many ways an isolated community with a relatively small population size. Most Maniitsormiut know one another and are capable of connecting individuals to dramatic events. In an environment like Maniitsoq difficulties can arise in terms of the anonymity of the participants interviewed. Shortly after I gave the research partners the raw data, every one of them knew who I had interviewed despite my effort in erasing the names, location, age, and so on. I had to resort to the good will of the individual research group members; I fully trust their discretion and expect them to keep their guesswork to themselves. Having said that, I would question the practice of not acknowledging the interviewees by name in works such as this. I imagine that many Inuit who contribute knowledge to scholarly work would like to be acknowledged in the same way as other knowledge holders are when their work is published. I was therefore struck by Fox’s (2002) transparent approach. She listed the names of individual Inuit she interviewed and acknowledged individuals by name in her list of references. This is refreshing, and I would suggest that other researchers should perhaps check with their interviewees to see if their names could be acknowledged.
The Maniitsoq network became solidified as we were exposed through various radio interviews. Unusual activities in a small town like Maniitsoq are easily noted, and there are always urgent requests for news. Our research then became nationally known; this communication binds one to fulfilling the expectations created and easily exposes one to disgrace if those expectations remain unfulfilled. The radio interviews gave each participant a chance to be part of knowledge creation. One of the radio listeners later told me that the research partners’ obvious empowerment impressed him.

I mentioned in the introductory chapters the fact that the values and behaviours of the collaborators informed the protocol of this study and reflected the kalaallit way. I hope that such a down-to-earth approach is atoriminarthoq, a useful and befitting research process in which the participants were not strangers to the researcher and vice versa. I also hope that the hierarchical structure of the researcher and the researched can be broken down, as real partnerships are needed for future Arctic scientific research, both in society and in nature. Arctic societies have undergone rapid cultural change — some of it due to assimilation and introductions of religious and government structures — but further change is guaranteed, fuelled by the realities of climate change and northern contaminants. Arctic dwellers and scientists need to explore together the realities, both cultural realities and natural phenomena, to understand better, as we have done in this research endeavour. Science too needs to enter a reciprocal environment in which researchers depend on the sensibility and groundedness of the researched.

**PAR and Personal Effects**

The research partnerships I established in Maniitsoq led me to greater and deeper meaning than I had imagined. Had I carried out the research on my own, it would never have occurred to me, for example, to look for cultural meanings of menstruation to Inuit and kalaallit in order to help answer Mariia’s question (see chapter 4). Once I “reconstructed” the meaning of Inuit women’s menstruation, we found an answer to a seemingly simple question that was more involved and revealing than expected.

Similarly, the question posed by Mimi strained me tremendously as conversations with the widows in Maniitsoq were emotionally taxing. Their life stories daunted and haunted me and will continue to do so the rest of my life. But it was also through this question and through the agonizing search for answers that I was able to highlight the structure of the philosophical foundations of kalaallit knowledge.
As an individual who attended a school system heavily influenced by assimilationism, I was away from family, friends, and community during a good part of my development. Consequently, I felt that I was not able to see things in an organic and holistic way. This study provided that integration for me. Undertaking it allowed me to fill in the missing pieces of my understanding and cultural experience. I believe the assimilation process we all (the research team) underwent had a profound effect on us, often confusing us exceedingly.

**Recommendations**

At the outset, I stated that this work was exploratory in nature, as it explored kalaallit gender relations in a post-colonial setting. This exploration, however, led to a profound finding that could not be set aside, with the result that much time and effort went into redirecting the focus of the study. This leaves much more to be done to study the relationship between men and women in kalaallisut-speaking society. My work is not to be seen as exhaustive or final. It is an initiative with a large potential that others can also take on; I know that it will feed my own curiosity throughout my career.

The *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu* paradigm is not just about gender relations. It is certainly applicable to anthropological, educational, political, psychological, sociological, and architectural discourses on other ways of knowing. Archaeology should be mentioned explicitly here since Inuit women's space and use of the environment need extensive analysis. I imagine that the triad could be applied profitably to renewable resource management, and individuals studying philosophy, medicine, or economy, for example, would benefit from framing their studies and policy making with it. I would therefore suggest that studies about the prevalent use of the framework be carried out in Greenland and among other Inuit populations. Kawagley’s (1993) tetrahedral model is very similar to the *timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu* model. I would not be surprised to see something similar found among the Canadian Inuit.

As my investigation of kalaallit terms has yielded such rich insights, I recommend that much more study be done in the area of linguistics to reconstruct the Inuit world view beyond the recent salient social influences that Inuit and kalaallit have experienced. Indeed, Dorais (1990), Christian Berthelsen (1990), and MacLean (1990), to name just a few, mention the power of the Inuit languages.
This methodology is tentative or exploratory, and requires greater evaluation and assessment for the purposes of making policies for research activities in Greenland. Kalaallit living in a post-colonial era have an enormous appetite for learning, and they reserve great admiration for good use of intellect. I do not doubt that many individuals would offer their active participation in good, well-grounded research on most aspects of their society to arrive at grounded, utilitarian knowledge that can effectively improve lives in homes, communities, relationships, and governance.

Qujanaq iseravit

Thanks for coming by
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Appendix A

Interview with a Widow: Exploration of Where Kalaallit Women Get Their Strengths

The task of interviewing these individuals was an onerous one. Much weeping took place among the interviewees and me as they told me their stories. I decided to translate the conversations directly into English and include one such interview to show the way the answers to Mimi’s questions were presented to me by one widow. Her particular story haunted me for many months, and her way of presenting her life story illustrated the kalaallit way of structuring conversation as well as their lives. It was through this interview in particular, with all her dimensions both real and unreal, that I realized timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu, important aspects that shape kalaallit experiences, played a large part in the telling of life stories. I was therefore able to understand more clearly the relevance of parts of their stories. Here, I am presenting the interview with minimal changes, and I have decided not to present it in ways that clearly indicate the aspects of timikkut, tarnikkut, anersaakkullu. Inuit and kalaallit use stories to enlighten their listeners. Kleivan and Sonne (1985, 11) account for stories having “keen interest in the origin of the many phenomena in the world surrounding them... when world and humanity had still not assumed their enduring forms.” This life story is reminiscent of that, and the story will be interpreted depending on the individual listener’s own experience and development.

The first woman I interviewed lived with her youngest (adult) child, who was never at home during the interviews. She was so pleased about being interviewed that she had prepared poorlut (buns) and poured me lots of tea. At the end of the interview, she was so relieved of what must have been a tremendous burden on her shoulders that she decided to request copies of the tapes for her to give to her grown children. She wanted her children to know her life, and for them to understand the experience from her point of view.

When we first started the interview she wanted me to do the leading, which was not the purpose at all, so I assured her that she could lead the conversation any way that she wanted and maybe the starting point should be how she retrospectively perceived her life.

She started, “If I were to say something about my life, I would have to say, very briefly, I went through some easy parts of life as well as heavy parts of life. I was born here in Maniitsoq and remember living in a split house where we lived next to my paternal uncle, akkok. The houses were really small then, but for us the house where we stayed, I always thought it was such a big house. Life was very trying then,
and when my father got his wage my uncle received his salary. Akkak would give us some money to go buy bread. I am not sure which of the buildings was the baker’s shop, but we crossed ikaartarfissuaq, the big bridge, to shop. Back then, the church was on an island and only approachable by two bridges. It is not like today where the old church seems located on a flat area... Yes, we lived back-to-back, that’s what I remember and when we no longer found any comfort in lodging with my uncle, we decided to move.”

“What do you remember most of your childhood?” I asked.

“I remember spending a lot of time with my grandparents, who lived not far from the old school, ooh, I can just see everything. That’s where I came to my consciousness, silattorpunga. I could not spend too much time at my paternal aunt’s, as I did not feel at home in that house. Even though I was merely a child, I did not feel any comfort, because of this [makes a gesture in reference to drinking]. Akkak’s family drank heavily very often, and when the drinking started they would invite absolutely anybody. Hence my stay at my grandparents: I found their home comforting. I had seizures when I was a child, where I actually lost consciousness. I remember my grandparents’ warm stove, I can just picture their illeq, communal bed, back then people had such beds. It was so wonderful to be in between, and such peacefulness. I believe that they kept me because of my circumstances, my grandmother and grandfather. Actually he was not my biological grandfather at all, and I did not get to know about that until I was long an adult. That does not matter at all, I saw him as my grandfather — truly so.”

 Shortly after, the interviewee was desperately trying to find her way in and out of her stories from her childhood. I intervened by asking her to think of telling about her childhood in a way that her children or grandchildren would understand.

“Yes, yes, what do I remember most of my own childhood? It was the time when there was no machinery around and people travelled strictly by rowing.” She talked about two small islands but had forgotten the names of these islands, but one of them her mother used to point at and state, “The place one got so miserable with blubber.”

“My father had caught a porpoise, and decided to land on that island to stay overnight. I must have been a fair-sized child; my younger sister was born at that time. I was discovered sleeping sucking the blubber off the porpoise! They left me in that position as they were busy. I must have smelled something awful! Apparently, as the evening came about I was not feeling well. My face swelled up so badly that I could not open my eyes. At the end they all got so worried, as I was throwing up so badly. Imagine, one would feel sorry for me — just kidding!

“We were catching cod in my father’s rowboat; these were covered with
seaweed. As we caught more we covered the fish with more fresh seaweed. We then started to row back to Maniitsoq. My father apparently travelled a lot, and he did get tired every now and then. They built a small house, the way that people did back then, of sod and rocks, and it was an old house that they just fixed up. My parents often took off to Maniitsoq, but my mother was taking her turn to have to put up timber, as this was particularly important. We [she and her sister] went along with my father who rowed the boat to Maniitsoq to sell the cod.... Our mother was steering the boat, and was planning to do the rowing when we got tired. The weather was incredibly beautiful, and some seals were popping around us, as there were no noises that they could be disturbed by. The seals kept popping around, but one was literally following us. Even as we were entering the Maniitsoq harbour this seal kept on surging right behind our rowboat. At the end all of us got really frightened by the presence of this persistent seal, and my mother threatened it with the oar demanding, ‘Stop following us.’ It did not listen at all, and just kept on popping up and down. It was as if the seal was looking after us. I have no idea. When we arrived my mother was telling about this specific seal, she had forgotten which type of seal it was. I can just see the huge eyes of the seal, and they frightened me. My father brusquely accused it of wanting to be around women...”

“Well, maybe it recognized somebody?” I asked.

“Maybe it did. It certainly was not anxious to do anything harmful and kept popping behind and around the boat. I can never forget those huge eyes, and the seal was so very close. Scary!”

“Childhood is such a wonderful time,” I challenged.

“Indeed, being a child is such a delight, and the memories come about so easily. Now that I am getting aged, I have started to be forgetful. That saying is so totally true: one can never forget one’s own childhood. At this stage of my life, I often think about my childhood even though I am getting very forgetful. I put things behind and forget about them, and take them back. I guess it is also true that one has to go through such a period.”

“So,” I asked, “You were an unmarried girl here in town?”

“Yes, indeed I spent my youth here. Back then — gee, everything is about back then... everything costs and my mother... I recall that my father allowed us to go to a dance, after they had a bit to drink. They did not drink heavily then, at first. But because they had been drinking, they gave us permission to go to a dance. The entrance fee was 10 øre, so they gave us 20 øre for the evening. It was just about seven o’clock in the evening. I was so elated since we had never been treated that way before. When we got into the dance hall everything was ready, accordions and everything. Back then they had to finish off before midnight, and even before nine o’clock there was the shouting... everybody in Maniitsoq could hear the roaring,
commanding that my sister and I come home! That was so embarrassing [she laughs].
I am not kidding you, everyone in Maniitsoq could hear it, and everybody — anyone at
the dance — knew exactly who the roaring was intended for. When we reminisce
about the incident my saying is, ‘It was not as if they were going to look after us all
our lives!’ I guess that the intention was really a good one, but I used to get so
offended by it. In the long run, I appreciate their good intentions; they just wanted
the very best for us. Wherever one goes, one does have a home to go to, and one has
to learn the limits in anything one does. At this uncertain point in my life, I have come
to terms with my thoughts, the fact that they really wanted the best for us, even
though it was extremely irritating to experience it.” [She laughs again.]

“What do you remember most in your youth, reflecting on your life?” I asked.

“During my youth, I worked hard; I had to fulfil many demands during my
childhood. I worked for a number of households.” She names three or four prominent
Maniitsoq households she worked for, and one household where there was a single
child in the family, to whom she practically became a sister.

My informant talked extensively about a specific household and described in
detail her experience as a household maid and the conflict between being a
subordinate helper (kiffaq) and becoming a new member of the family (such was the
claim of the household). The wife of the house, she said, was alleged to be tough but
she soon discovered that the wife was only tough in wanting to achieve the very best
hygiene. Rather than turning stiff with anxiety, my interviewee had enjoyed working
in the household, particularly as both husband and wife often defended her against
the competitive treatment among the household children. Many of the family
members pay her tribute even now, and some of the household members ask her
about details of their house, even today. It seems that the house foundation was
alleged to be built on a grave or even two, and the head of the house had cleaned the
burial place before building the house. She felt that maybe such treatment did not
accord with the respect of the spirits, and the bones should have been placed in one
spot and not scattered. She ended the story by confirming that reputable individuals
in Maniitsoq today are said to have seen or heard ghosts in the building, “But that
might be a typical Maniitsoq way of dealing with this,” she concluded. She herself
had never felt any apprehension during her time with this particular family. She had
felt so secure and peaceful that ghosts and their “baggage” must have eluded her.

“Maybe there was still a spirit there?” I asked her.

“That’s what people say, and indeed they do have great potency yet. That is why
I did not agree with the plans of location for a new graveyard. I felt that the area was
too swampy. I don’t have any concerns about it today since it appears fine.”

I contributed by saying that the developers had filled in the swampy area.
“Ever since they decided to fill the area in, it works well, as far as the appearance goes. That came with a price. At least for me, it came with a price. Am I changing subjects too much?”

“No, not at all, this is exactly the purpose of this interview. Changing topics is the uniqueness of the approach,” I assured her.

“I strongly disagreed with the plans for the new graveyard. I was feeling sorry for my children, since I knew that the particular area is swampy and in fact becomes a pool particularly in the spring. I said, ‘Nobody is going to bury me in that. You all know what terrible things I have gone through.’ After I said that, I added, ‘All right, when I die you might as well throw me in the sea if you must bury me in that graveyard.’ That’s how strongly I put it, I did not think anymore about the words I said. Whoever thought that these words would have any meaning?

“Then I worked and I was already getting to be mature. Somebody was looking for me, and when I approached him he said, ‘We are totally broke, I wonder if you could lend me some money to buy some sugar?’ I was working and I had 500 crowns in my purse, and I said, ‘I am not able to change the money, and I need some of it myself.’ He really did not look as if he would be able to walk any distance and back in his condition, so I said, ‘If you don’t mind three hours too long’ — that was back when we could work three-hour shifts — ‘if you don’t mind waiting the three hours, then I will shop for my needs, and buy what you need and deliver it to you.’ He really liked that idea. He had great difficulty breathing, and was easily tired. He stated, maybe because he was embarrassed about his situation, ‘My wife is using a lot of sugar.’ [She laughs.] “Blaming his wife!”

“So, I bought the two kilos and a few other things and went [to his house]. Apparently the man had gone to sleep when he returned, and he looked exhausted. When I entered the house, the wife was at home, she was not able to walk well anymore, and she welcomed my entrance [saying] ‘tamassarujussuaq.’ The husband woke up saying: ‘If I hadn’t heard your voice, I would not have been able to wake up.” I laughed and responded, ‘How could you possibly not wake up?’

“‘Truly, my dreams were just about to take me away,’ and he went to the bathroom and when he returned I asked him, ‘Whatever are you blaming me for?’ We teased one another for the longest time and felt free to talk like that. He poured his tea and offered me tea and then he started telling his story. He had dreamed that he was in a house. There were plenty of people inside that house. He remembered the people he saw. These were the people who were to be buried in the graveyard next to him. Apparently, [one of the old men] was very nice to me, at least he said that this man ‘treats you extremely well.’ He continued, ‘You know, they have a house right next to the Big Bridge and he passed away a long time ago. The wife is in the old folks’ home now. I don’t know them at all, and have no kinship with them.’ The man was trying to
explain all this to me, but I did not understand one bit of what he was trying to explain. What old person treated me like that? So many of the old people had treated me so well.

“The Sinna’s sibling Larsi, who is married to a person from Kangaamiut,’ he insisted. ‘Ole Hedengtide family. Ole was the most sympathetic one.’ Imagine, these are the individuals who would be buried next to him. He is down there in the graveyard next to all these people he dreamed about.

“I asked him, ‘How is the house that you were in? Is it dreadful, or is it messy?’

“It’s like any other house, it is a peaceful place.’

“I did not for one moment think about his story. Only when I thought about the past did I realize what he had told me, and it was as if somebody had poured cold water over me. My own saying haunted me, there is nothing much that can be done, we are only humans after all, and sometimes our words come out before thinking, and I do find my statement too strong: ‘I refuse to be buried down there. When I die, you might as well throw me in the sea.’ That is an unbelievably strong statement so I regret it, even now. I should never have said these words, and to measure my word against these words: ‘It is like any other house, it is peaceful.’ It is wondrous, absolutely mind-blowing.”

She told me at that point that she had never confided the story to anyone, and continued, “It is true that when one finds a person to talk to, words just come bubbling up like a spring without much shyness. This is the wonderful thing about a person one finds comfort in. It’s not that I don’t like anyone, but as human beings we have to find somebody who we can trust, and others that we can confide in.”

I responded to her assertion, “I believe that you are right, it’s not just the physical aspects of being there, but beyond the physical presence. I meet a lot of people and if I cannot connect with individuals through my sense of the spiritual and essence (anersaatigut tarningatigullu) then I find it difficult to approach them.”

She responded plainly, “Tassami taamaappoq, that is true. It is true that we are all individuals, and all of us have different needs. When I find somebody that I can trust and [in whom I find] comfort, then I let go. As I said earlier when I am treated badly, I have a tendency to respond to it, particularly if the other person did something wrong to me in the first place. I wanted the message to be that if one is treated badly one can receive the same thing, and surely the return would make that person think twice: ‘I should not have done it that way.’

Later in the interview, she said, “I usually state that I never experienced my youth. I married just as I turned eighteen. My youngest son snickers about my statement, and once challenged me, ‘Anaak [slang for anaanak], how does it feel to be jailed?’ He really made me think — whenever in my life was I in jail? [I] thrust questioning eyes at him, as I have never been jailed. That hurts your feelings, mamiatsaqaat?”
I responded that it was indeed a bit of a strong thing to say.

She continued, “Erniik, what are you talking about?” I asked him. ‘Whenever have you heard that I have been jailed?’ He said, ‘Well, you told me that you got married when you were eighteen.’

“I’ve heard my grandmothers talking about how lucky we were as we were getting married, in reference to me getting married at such a young age. I did not realize that all events, like the marriage of one’s child, would make a parent reflect and think that much, particularly as one’s life has already been presented with not-too-easy experiences. One gets hit with illnesses, and these are hard to go through, particularly when one is parenting young adults. When I think back I realize that some would approve and be jealous about me marrying that young, while others [might have] found it far too early.”

“In regard to the times back then, was your wedding regarded as being too early? Age of eighteen?” I inquired.

“I don’t really know.”

“Do you feel it was?” I asked.

“That’s how I felt, that I married too young,” she said.

I pursued, “In terms of your age or in relation to your feelings?”

“In terms of my age. Naturally, I sense the feeling of love, it was there, of course I had the feeling of love (even I). But in relation to what one has gone through, and understanding what life is about, my regret came far too late.” She laughs about that.

“Did you ever expect to be on your own ever again?” I asked.

“No, I did not realize since I did not know, but I always said what has come about is something that nourished me, as love is what love is about. I started having regrets about it, and it was already too late and things could not be reversed. I usually said that I lived a life being stupid — sianiiitsuugama — that is how I have been able to lay to rest a lot of negativity. So in reality I don’t regret, when I think thoroughly through; I have come to conclude this way: Thank goodness that I married young, this way I have come to understand what life is about. This way I have been able to put to rest a lot of negativity in life. I may have regretted this decision... and regretted too late. I made the effort to delay our wedding, maybe that is characteristic of a young person, but I don’t really know. I did not have great expectations. I don’t even really know what my thoughts were. I can’t even say much about that. But the reality is that my first child was born in Nipisat, and that was even before the prediction of the birth [meaning her child was born before the due date], and back then separation was totally impossible. [...] My husband’s family was from Nipisat. That’s when there were fish to be had, and my child was already mobile inside, and my husband owned a boat which he bought from another family in
Manitsoq, and the boat was really broad. When the plans were to go to Nipisat, I insisted on coming along even though my belly was rather extended. They did not want me to go, but I insisted, not knowing that I was to give birth. ‘How could I give birth when I am due much later?’ I said.

“So we went south. He had given me a ring, and I was a passenger. We stopped at one island, and there was such an abundance of cod. Fishing lines were lowered, and there were so many auks, and here it was around November 7 celebrating... iluartup illua... the ground was really slippery. I had sewn the soles on my boots, kamiiit, made of bleached skin and had sewn the soles with the sole pieces facing the wrong way... pieces of rocks were projecting. I went very carefully ahead and a number of the elderly people warned me to be particularly careful and to walk slowly. I didn’t even land the first step but fell down right away, and all I heard was a big crack. People behind me who were really worried were saying, ‘There she goes. Troubles are waiting!’ I laughed and assured them, facing them, ‘I am all right.’ Not realizing what awaited me; indeed, I was not going be all right. We went home, but even before reaching the house, I felt the need to urinate unexpectedly. I entered the house of my husband’s family; I secretly went to the corridor. There wasn’t a toilet back then, and we had to do the ‘business’ in a bucket in the corridor. There my buttocks were completely soaked, and it reached a point... I didn’t realize that the water sack had burst, what did I know, this was my first pregnancy! This was my first birthing and my husband was not around. He and the others arrived and stayed only for a brief time to sink the kisaaq (anchor), but brought with them a basket full of auks.

“These baskets are great big ones that need to be lifted in twos. So the matriarch ordered us to start plucking the feathers so we could cook. The men had planned to lift the fish lines; I am not even sure where they put the fish lines, but it must have been farther in the fjord. ‘We better make sure to be ready with the food when they arrive, so we better get cooking’ was the order. We started plucking the birds, attempting to finish even one bird was most difficult, and my buttocks were absolutely soaked; even though I kept on squeezing to stop, the flow just kept on. At one point, the matriarch noticed something and asked, ‘What’s the matter, is there something wrong with you?’ [...] I said, ‘I really do not have a need to urinate, but—’ ‘You are not to be here, go to the midwife right way. Take her to the midwife,’ she ordered. She was not going to be quiet about this and literally shouted her orders. ‘Take her to the midwife, and keep a sure hold on her.’ Ooh, how worrying. I did not realize that there had never been childbirth in the house, and I did not realize how frightened they were about me giving birth. I didn’t know a thing about such things, but I was so worried since she had never been so harsh. I was so frightened that they were never going to want me, particularly as she went about her orders
with raised arms. The midwife lived across from the church, in the opposite direction to the house where we were, and when we entered, the midwife’s family was eating their meal, and Dorothy, the midwife, said very softly, ‘Please, go in there, I’ll be there,’ while pointing the direction to me to a small sofa. ‘Just lie down, not sitting but lying.’ She was going to come when she finished her dish, and when she entered she started to feel me around my belly. ‘There, it is ready.’ And then she said, ‘Put on your clothes, and go and lie down on your in-laws’ bed. Do not use someone else’s. Make sure that they put on a fair amount of water for boiling, and get ready.’ She instructed us and assured us that she would be on her way, and we accepted her directions, and left.

“As we entered the room, the mother-in-law left the house and disappeared. I followed the orders of the midwife and went to lie down on the specified bed, and shouted to get some help. They had all disappeared; they had run away, being fearful [she laughs], the patriarch, as well as the matriarch. As Dorothy entered the house, she asked ‘Where is your family?’ … ‘Where are they?’ She searched but did not find anyone; there was no other person in the house. I did not even see them leave the house. As the contractions carried on it felt as if my buttocks were separating from the rest of my body, I had no idea what it was like to give birth. When I was a child I observed my mother developing a clear line up and down her belly right after giving birth, and my idea that births happened through the belly was reinforced by the fact that post-partum mothers’ middle areas were wrapped tightly. That’s how ill-informed we were. When Dorothy told me to take my pants off, this was unbelievably shameful, and where was she starting to handle me? How ill-informed, I felt like running away, and maybe I irritated her (or the foetus), as I had no idea. I really thought that I was to be operated on to take the child out. [She laughs.] Here I was giving birth, gosh… finally the poor child came out, and really at that point my buttocks were just about to fall apart, it felt as if my middle was going to fall off, it hurt so badly. When the child finally came out, it was so small, so small; and when I handled it, as the midwife brought the child to my chest, I started to look at it, and the child’s nails were not even formed. There were indentations where the nails were to be, the child was so small; and imagine all the agony I went through for such a small child.

“There weren’t any clothes for the child since we did not bring anything with us; Dorothy gave us some of her own infant clothing. She asked, ‘Did you bring any clothes?’ I said no, and she had brought with her some clothing and some diapers. She went home later, and the matriarch came back home. She had been drinking at somebody’s house and totally lost her anxieties, announcing that this was the first time ever that anyone had given birth in the house and she was really happy. She imitated some dance and clicked her heels… I can just see what she was doing.”
“... After I had given birth, next came the afterbirth. I had never thought of such things, and really thought that I was giving birth to a second child. And here were the contractions, and it was just the afterbirth. Dorothy calmed me down, saying, ‘It’s just the afterbirth, this time it is going to be much easier,’ and she said it so caringly and softly. As the afterbirth came out, the weather got really bad all of a sudden and it was as if the house had been hit by a huge piece of log. It was the northern wind, avannersaq.”

[The tape ended here, and by the time I realized that the tape had ended, the interviewee was deeply immersed in recounting a vivid dream that she had.]

“... I was in a deep valley, and the colours were unbelievably vivid, so vivid. I saw a small bump in this valley, and went toward it. The bump turned into a bench, and some people were sitting there. First I did not recognize them, but decided to approach them, thinking, ‘I wonder who they are?’ When I reached them, the middle person was a man, and it was as if I had seen him before — for sure, I had — [she laughs]. Just as I reached them, the man turned his face toward me, and it was my husband. He did not change his seating and looked at me, saying, ‘I have been waiting for you for a long time, come on.’ And I said, ‘Not now,’ that’s what I said, ‘not now.’ He stood up and started moving toward me, I was reacting to that very quickly. What is going to happen, I thought, and I was in such rush that I woke up. I could not get over the valley, the colours and the valley were endless everywhere you looked, vivid colours and the endless valley. It was incredible and good. It must surely be a wonderful place to live in.”

After this session, we turned the tape recorder off for a while, and I told her about some aspects of the wake customs of the Cree people in Saskatchewan, and we discussed these in terms of how their customs are organized in a way to strengthen family and community relations. This conversation led her to tell about her and her children’s experience when she lost her husband, the father of her children.

She continued, “It was not long after my husband had passed away and I went downtown with my youngest son. This of course was prior to the death of my two sons. Off we went, and it was a beautiful, sunny day. We had been to the graveyard, and went farther to town, I don’t even remember where we were going, and we ran into one of my son’s schoolmates who lived next to the main road of Maniitsoq. Seeing my son, the schoolmate shouted, ‘Aren’t you ashamed to be walking around, your dad has just passed away?’

“He shouted so clearly, and my son was right next to me. One of the teachers was busy with his boat not far away, and had overheard the shouting. Well, we all heard it. The teacher told his mother about this episode and felt really embarrassed about the whole situation, since he had experienced a similar kind of treatment when he lost his own father as a child. He apparently wept in the boat, and my poor son just
got closer to me. ‘Mom, this is the way he treats me.’ And that was the first time ever I’d heard any of this. I told my son, ‘Leave him alone; don’t respond to him in a bad manner.’ I have always emphasized not to respond to anything in a negative manner. Such manners are to be kept by the beholder, the words that come out are owned by the people who expressed these words.”

“It was really burdensome back then as I was on my own. It was a good thing that someone else heard the episode, and I sensed a lot of sympathy. It was not that I was looking for it, but others would most likely deny or dismiss the possibility by saying, ‘How could anyone do it?’ It requested that the episode be left alone. The boy kept on shouting until we disappeared from his sight, and despite my request to leave it alone, I was nevertheless hurt very badly. It was as if the boy wanted my son out of sight because of [his] father’s death.”

“I don’t even know where the kids would get such ideas or such aggression — sorraanneq is probably part of it. Kids have ways of ‘recording’ words, and I guess that he would have received these from his own upbringing.”

I requested to turn the tape off this time, and wanted to hear about the relevant events in her life. I had been in town when her husband passed away but had been away from the community during the loss of her children.

“My two children passed away at the same time,” she continued. “My husband passed away in the mid-1960s, and my two sons were lost in the late sixties. The older son was living with his partner already then, and they had a boat, but he came home often. We had a little sofa in the house back then, and one time he was visiting with his partner [and] as he arrived, he said, ‘Anaak [slang for anaanak], I am missing you so much. Could you lie down and cuddle me even for a short time, on this? Embrace me as if I were a child.’ This was what he said as he was entering the house, and imagine he was to get lost [meaning she was to lose him]. I had no choice, and I did not even think of becoming embarrassed about his request in the hearing of the others. I lay down next to him and embraced him as if he were a small child, hugged him. That was what he wanted. After that he went west, and the winds were strong, it was storming, and they got caught, I really did not want them to come home, since I was afraid then of any disaster. ‘How could there be any disaster!’ You know, my son was so optimistic, and that’s how he responded to my query. Who was it that they travelled with when they were going south? There was certainly somebody else, I have forgotten, the boat had just about sunk. I was told that the engine of the boat had broken in the middle of the night and they were among reefs, and they were just about washed onto the beach all night. And then my son goes, ‘Anaak, I have something to tell.’

“This is how he told it: ‘Look, it was so unbelievable. Right from heaven there was a streak of light that came and lit right onto our boat, and it was as if someone was looking after us.’ He had fallen asleep and dreamed that a voice was saying, ‘Not
now.’ The ‘not now’ was until the real disaster happened. They survived the winter, and that spring he started working in Nuuk.”

“The younger son had great difficulties since his father passed away. He threw temper tantrums, and his older brother wanted to look after him to see if he could help him. They invited him, my younger son, to go fishing with them — it was back then when there was more than enough cod. It was believed that they caught too much fish, and probably just literally sank [morsuinnarssimassangattippaat: it was said that they just literally entered the sea]. During that time the wind was blowing from the north, and the sea was just white. I really went through the feelings of a mother back then, again. I had absolutely no idea the day before they took off. I was working then and did not think of them. I did hear the news announcing a search for lost people, and all I could think of was, ‘Poor people. One wonders who they are this time?’

“I was in a situation where other people knew more than I did. I did not know, and here these people wanted to warn me or tell me, but did not have the courage to tell me. The supervisor was the person who called up and expressed his sorrow in all humility. At least we had gotten to know the supervisor, and it was fine that he called. The supervisor also worked with his brother. Everybody was told about the incident and we [she had another son with her] went to the graveyard and visited some friends....”

“As we entered the house, the wife said, ‘Thank goodness you came.’ And I asked, ‘Why?’

‘You haven’t heard anything?’

‘Like what?’

‘Ah, I thought that you might have heard.’ She acted as if she wanted to pretend, and I joked around to get her to laugh. And she went again, ‘Have you not heard, really?’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘I thought that you would have heard about the search.’

‘I just wonder who those poor people are.’ That’s how much I did not know anything about it. These people knew about it, and I did not, and just as we were leaving, she told me, ‘Here is the phone’ (their own telephone). ‘Use this telephone and make this call and ask for this person.’ She did not want to tell me herself. The person I asked for was not in; he had left and was not to be found. He had gone out to see if my sons had arrived, and maybe was organizing the search. Well, we decided that we were going home. My other son was in another town. And they knew already, and I did not really need to climb up the stairway to the house. I was wondering what people were looking at as I walked. I knew that they had some knowledge about some event. It was very clear from the way that they behaved. It was as if they were
wondering why I was walking around. And I had no idea. When I went out, I went to the radio station where Mads was working. I climbed these stairs and really felt heavier and heavier, and felt I would easily succumb to crying. When I reached the top, I noticed that the sea was in such an uproar that all of it was white. I just lost it. I could not help but cry. As I entered the station Madsi said, 'If you needed any help, I'll help you.' And I said, 'I want to send a telegram to my son that his siblings have not arrived.'

"He helped me, he wrote the telegram himself and I just dictated. I was so grateful to him for doing this, even today, I wanted to convey my gratitude to Madsi, who is now gone also. I did not realize that my oldest son had been alerted already, and I had just gotten to know about the disaster. I was on my way home and ran into my brother. They had been at my house twice already and found the house empty. We had been to the graveyard prior to that. It was very heavy going. How pitiful it was. It was as if someone was going to enter the house and ask for the clothing, that they had been found. One just wanted to hear such a message. It was pretty awful.

"So, I had to go beyond the problems, and worked hard on it, and honestly today, I can say that I have prevailed over the problems of losing the two sons. There was a third person [lost], but I don't really know that person. He was from a small town somewhere. It was pretty bad. And my son's companion went through a pretty awful time. I thought for a while that she would succumb. She had arrived here from down south. I could not go to meet her when she arrived. My oldest son met her as she arrived, as she went up the stairs to our house. She was crying so hard. What else could one do but feel pity for her. It was pretty bad. Thank goodness that she prevailed over the problems. Her parents had arrived with her, and entered the house with her. She did not go to her parents' house, but came here. Today, I stay in touch with her. I am grateful about that. We did not just forgive one another — [feelings of guilt are prevalent among those who lose relatives. It is felt that so much could have been done (in hindsight) to prevent the loss] — but our closeness is real. Today, she has another partner. I told her not to go the route I took, that she must look for another partner as she was young. If she kept on thinking about my sons she would never heal. I am ever so grateful; they have a small daughter."

"You were saying that you worked hard at overcoming the problems that you went through," I commented.

"You better believe that the process of overcoming such events was not an easy one. The problems can attach themselves and glue onto anything. You have to be really conscientious, silattuaqilluni. I was determined not to stay the same way for many years — this is how I dealt with it. Some of these I have forgotten now that I reached this stage of forgetfulness. I worked and all these events happened while I was working. One time — I guess that I so often think about these events — at one time I was on my way to work at two o'clock in the afternoon. I have no idea what
people thought of me as I met them. I must have surely met some people. This was in November and it was much colder those days than today. I found it very hard to go by the little harbour area; this is the spot, which opens out to the sea as I walk to work. In my thoughts this was a very troublesome area. I cannot walk by it on my own, and one time I told my friend, ‘You should really walk me to town.’ I found it very difficult having to face the sea on my own. I found it exceedingly difficult.”

“My friend said, ‘Okay, let’s go there today.’ I agreed to do so, and together we went. As we arrived at the spot with the view to the open sea, I could not handle it at all, and started weeping heavily right there on the road. I went through it, but back in November the ice was building on the sea. The forming sea ice is called qinuneq — that is such an unfortunate name [as it also relates to that of prayer. Pieces of qinuneq are sea-ice lumps that are slush of sea water, fresh snow, and ice; no one can walk on it], and they are round lumps of ice. Among these pieces — I must have experienced this in my thoughts — up came a head. Down there at that harbour: up came the head of my older son, next to him another head came up, and it was my younger son, and my older son talked to me: ‘Anaak, take my brother.’”

“As soon as he said that I lost my consciousness. That’s all I remember. I felt the urge to pick him up, but I also knew that there was no way that I was seeing them there. Not there, surely. Thankfully, I was heading in the opposite direction. I am grateful that I turned my back to them, and next thing I knew, I was right out here in the corridor. I held onto the stairs as if I were to lift them. My reaction to that is usually: when my son said, “Anaak, pick up my younger brother” and if I had jumped into the sea, other people would have claimed [I had] committed suicide!”

“This is how I conclude such things happen when repressing what needs to be expressed in words, and thoughts on their own make up such realities. I would have been made to commit suicide in attempting to pick up what had been ordered to me to pick up. I often think about that, and find myself grateful to have looked the other way toward home. I must have met some people on my way, but when I came back to myself I felt exhausted as I entered my home. The thoughts on the very disparate experiences make me… I give thanks for making myself become conscious, in a way that leads me to some direction. I pray, pray, pray and am grateful. These are my directions and of course with many tears. After such occasions I feel relief and peaceful. It gives me relief; I get a sense of relief after I have prayed. That is how I go beyond the problems to overcome them.”

“Thankfulness,” I said. “What are you thankful for?”

She answered, “How I was made to live a life like that. I was meant to have jumped into the sea, as I mentioned earlier, but I feel that I have been helped through that. I feel that I have been helped; I live a life in my weaknesses. I really feel that I am aided, and I am grateful about that.”
“Thankful about you being aided?”
“Yes,” she answered.
“When you are praying, what do you pray about?” I asked her.
“I recite the Father in Heaven. It is written that you start praying with the Father in Heaven, I use that to a large extent. He makes me live, he awakens me, and lets me sleep well. I am grateful for these mornings and evenings... That’s how I am.”
“When you look at all you have gone through in a challenging life... and now you are on your own. You were on your way when the...” I was not able to finish my question and she continued, “Yes, their father passed away in the middle seventies and my two children in the late seventies.”
“One could say that these events happened not long after one another. Did you feel that you had dealt with the death of your husband before the death of your...”
“Yes, I felt that I had dealt with my husband’s death. But when the memorial service was carried out in the graveyard, I pretended to be strong for my badly-affected children. One thing that really helped in the whole thing was the arrival of people from Nuuk, from their work. The big boss telephoned to apologize for his absence. He really wanted to be there but could not. His assistant came, and some others. Their presence gave me strength. Originally, I thought that it did not matter if they were there. Such a reaction is typical of me. They had asked for the service to be delayed so that they could be present. My oldest son had proclaimed, ‘They all want to be there, since they are all very sympathetic.’ I am not telling this to be ‘uppity’ but I really appreciated their presence. I felt humility when they requested to be there. When they all arrived from Nuuk, they came here, after the service they also came here. It was very settling to be treated that way. It felt good, and it was as if they lifted something from a heavy life.”
I asked, “Did you feel shocked when events happened like that?”
“This is my saying in that regard: I go through life which has been predestined. That is how I perceive the events that I have been going through. My grandmother and grandfather favoured me very much as a child, and I think that I follow what my grandmother has experienced. My own grandmother had lost a lot of lives. I don’t feel that I have been particularly hit; I believe that we are born with destiny of what we are to go through; it is as if they have been given. If that is the case that the Above has decided, I am not going to go against it. If I were to continuously regret the lost life, I know that this would alter my own life. Everything and anything in life has limits. I do indeed feel the bereavement; I have to set a limit for that. If I were to live a life of bereavement, I have to really change my own life, taking away the joys, and truly I would feel depressed all the time. I don’t want that and I want to experience what life has to offer while I am alive, the enjoyable as well as the times that are for grieving. I want to experience the letdowns of life but not beyond the limits.”
“So, experiencing a more balanced life?” I asked.

“Yes, I want to end it that way. Whatever is expected of me to go through, I want to go through, but I do want to go through only the happy aspects. I am really good at being happy, but I am also very good at feeling hurt.”

“How did you go about finding the balance in life?” I inquired.

“Like the experiences I just referred to a minute ago. If I were to be unhappy I know that my life can turn that way, and I have to make myself happy again; I steer myself away to other directions. The unhappy aspects are more than enough; those have to be stopped. I talked to myself that way. Sometimes my thoughts are expressed loudly in words; other times in quiet thoughts. It’s true that you can’t resist and repress feelings all the time, and sometimes the feelings come back and insist on staying. But I tell myself that is enough. Like I told you about the clothing [of her deceased sons]... I have now put it away. I will not put up with this anymore. Now that is enough. It is hard to resist something very close to any other person [one has lost].”

“Many individuals would say ‘Oh, my gosh, are you still single?’ Those are people who cannot be on their own. In regard to that I have been praying a lot, and singing hymns. It is very peaceful and it is good. Of course it gets lonely, but overall I think of myself as being very happy in my singlehood. My youngest son and myself — the youngest son is living with me — we say, ‘Our sense of peacefulness is a bit too much.’ Maybe it would be very different if we went ahead with drinking, no doubt our lives would be very different. That’s how I think.”

“How is it that you never took to drinking when there are so many who took to it?” I asked her.

“Alcohol. When I was a child and living at akkakkut [the house of her paternal uncle] maybe that is really what helped me, I don’t know. When I tasted alcohol, I found it is the worst thing one can taste. To me it is totally noxious. I have tasted it and have no feelings of longing for it. The things that I saw while I was a child... I witnessed pitiful people who when drinking lost their humbleness and became careless. I listened to what they said. These are the lessons that I learned, that’s what I think. A person would enter the house shy, and inebriation would alter that person to become reckless, could not care less about sleeping people, those I believe I learned from, that’s what I think.”

“Akkak used to invite whosoever, the crew of a boat, people in the village, anyone walked in. I used to feel sorry for Maaliaannaralannguaq, her eyes used to get red around the edge. I felt such pity the first time she entered the house, and I felt like embracing her. She was the person that I felt sorry for among all the people that came to our house.”

“Back then there was no abundance of mugs, and they were using empty cans for drinking. There were so many that entered the house that any usable utensil was used.
Some particular person would be coming in much later, and she would be using one of those lids to the water boilers. I felt so sorry for her, I can never forget her. She never took her hat off even, one of those that were crocheted with a ball on top. I must have really stared at her, but I just never forgot the scene. I wish that I could tell her to pick any of the mugs around here, and I would ask her to keep it.

“That’s how I have come to [my] conclusion. To my absolute regret every one of my siblings has succumbed to that. My brother has quit now, thank goodness. I struggled [with] and tackled the situation. Living such a life is indeed pitiful; the entire pitiful name-calling that comes between siblings... such as my siblings insinuating that I felt ‘better’ and that I looked down on them because they drank. So many of these kinds of occasions, I would visit them, entering their house in good humour, and I would leave their homes really depressed. I have decided not to do the visitations anymore, but since he [her brother] was hit by an illness I have started to visit again. I do miss my father’s house anyway. I do appreciate when people do understand.”

“So they understood?” I asked.

“I would think that they understood and quit drinking, they quit drinking, both he and his wife. Thankfully, they stopped,” she responded.

“You have lived a life that is incredibly severe: what are your strengths? What paths of life would you suggest?” I asked her.

“Leading a path? How? I don’t see myself as leading along some paths. All I have to say is that when one has to go through ‘heavies’ in life there is praying, in believing in praying. That’s all, praying and being grateful. Those are the ones that I used. I know for a fact that when people around me are tired of me, He will be there helping me. That’s how I evaluate things. At one point I totally lost trust, I did not trust anyone; that is another factor one needs to overcome. I am very grateful that I have passed that stage, I do have people around that I can trust, and I am grateful for that. It was not at all pleasant to go through that. It was as if people would look at me, and I felt that I was an enormous person, I had become much larger than the average person, and that was not pleasant. I must have been really exhausted back then, after all I went through; such extremes, and these surely played a role.”

“Could you talk about the reactions of people around you, toward you, particularly right after the extreme events?” I asked her.

“Shortly after my children’s deaths, I was working, and at one point I realized that all my co-workers were turning their backs to me. I had no idea why, but I had certainly noticed their behaviour. I talked to them, and I did not receive any particular response. This was not pleasant, and at one point this person said that she had made a complaint to the police. I had been in Nuuk, and when I arrived back, I was hurting... I arrived from Nuuk around midnight. My grandchildren were really small then, and I had been visiting one of them in Nuuk, and my son said, ‘Anaak, take the bus and I’ll meet you.’
“They had asked me to sleep over, but I had decided against it, I did not feel settled and preferred to stay at home. So, it was past midnight when I got home, and I had no plans of leaving. Shortly afterwards the telephone rang, ‘Where have you been? We have been waiting for you!’”

“Who?”

“You are wanted.”

“I am at home now.”

“You better hurry up. You are wanted and you better rush here.’

“And I said, ‘The bus has already turned around, and unless I rush to catch it, I would have to walk back to town.’

“You better try to catch the bus.’

“As I entered the room [of the house that had called me], here is this couple and their son. I was accused of having an affair and that I better admit to it! ‘Me, I am not having one bit of an affair. I say hello to him as I meet him, and when I enter your house, I pay him respect, just like you coming to my house and pay me respect.’ Here, she started whispering that what I was saying had no truth, her lips were just going, that I was in denial and on and on. Finally I said, “Let him [the husband] prove it.”

“He goes, ‘She is telling the truth,’ and then, ‘My wife just does not believe me.’ So, he did say that his wife did not want to believe him. I really thought that she must have comprehended the whole thing, but later on she introduced the whole thing in the workplace, spreading the rumour that I was having an affair with her husband. I really did think that we had finished the whole episode. I think that one of the co-workers started feeling sorry for me and told me that the police were arriving! In our workplace! Indeed, a complaint was made about me having an affair.”

This was not the only incident of this kind that the interviewee had experienced. She went on to tell me about another time when a jealous neighbour had entered her house and made a mess in the house, spreading the bedding everywhere, breaking furniture, throwing around potted plants. Her youngest son had witnessed the persecution and she herself found her son [hiding] behind the door. She went on, “I was very happy that I was not alone to see the result. That is how she treated me. I know that my retelling of the event was not orderly since some of the story I forgot and some of it I remembered, but I never forgot how she treated me, and that is how she directed her behaviour. She’s even like that today, she does not want to face me, and she’s still accusing me of having an affair with her husband. I say, ‘It is up to her, what we can do?’ I have been telling my children that she is a sick person, that she has a real ailment in her mind. She must have been some sick person back then.”

“My youngest son has been very angry about this neighbour and has been uttering strong threats. I have been telling him to cool it, but I have been nearly crying.
I don’t want to be pitied or defended. Let me go through what I have to go through. They have wanted her to be punished for what she has done, but I have insisted that such treatment not be done to her. I have been warning my son that his anger could lead to murder: ‘I must be really bad to be jailed for murder!’ I have been telling him. I have seen what he looked like defending his own mother, and his actions would not have been too slight. And I have been saying, ‘Thank goodness, all people do ultimately die.’ My older son who passed away would have had great reactions also if only he knew what kind of treatment I have been receiving. But so far I have been saying, ‘The words are beheld by those who expressed them; their behaviour, the same. They are responsible for their own words and behaviours.’ I am not saying these to be a goody-goody. Naturally, one feels really weak at the beginning, and it is not pleasant to go through such an experience. It would have been very different if I did indeed have an affair with the husband…. It was so hurtful to be treated that way. No fun at all. I don’t really know if she is over it at all. I hope the best for her; it must be awful to have an ailment like that. I feel compassion for her, and feel pity for her.”

“That particular world that she is in must be really awful,” I agreed.

“Her world is indeed something that she has spread around to many, many people. A friend has been telling me, ‘Leave her alone, she is not your friend. She is a bad person.’ I never accepted that, and thought to myself, ‘Even if she is a bad person, she must in her loneliness need a friend.’ But I don’t know much about matters like that.”

I continued asking her questions. “Losing a husband, and losing two children at once, what kind of aid did you receive from people around you?”

“I did not receive any aid from other people. I did it all by myself; all by myself. It’s not like what is offered today. Of course, one noticed people who wanted to help, naturally. They did that by greeting in kindness. Those [greetings] are very pleasing in difficult times. But otherwise, I have been dealing with the difficulties on my own, and I make it through on my own. I am grateful for that. I am very grateful that my life has not turned to the worse.”

Incredulous at her response, I asked her, “What did you expect of other people around you during those times?”

“I have always said that it was a good thing that I am stupid, I don’t even know how to think of any expectations. So in regard to these, these are my sayings. All the bad things just went by me. If I had been a bit brighter I would have seen these as negative but they eluded me.”

“[Earlier], you and I were talking about an example of a young widow and her feelings about men around her. Do you have anything to offer in that regard?” I asked.
“You better believe it. I can honestly say that many people imagine that we become just ‘yea-sayers.’ I am not trying to be good, but these are areas to be cautious in. It’s not good that some people think that just because one is single one is to receive anyone. As if! I have taken great caution in that regard. Some people can be really mean. ‘I’m coming… I am coming’ [they say], ‘and if you lock your door, I’ll enter through the window.’ Such kinds of calls are no fun at all. Ever since the incident with the neighbour my telephone number has been anonymous.”

Dumbfounded I asked: “The kinds of call that you received, were they strictly from men?”

“Some men have been making calls like that; it is frightening. They don’t even say who they are. That’s not nice when it becomes a ‘custom.’ I have thought that one should be able to see the number of the dialler. That way one would be able to find out the caller. Men were easy to get — [she laughs] — if they are good [she laughs again]. It would have been easy if one were really fond of men. But I wanted to be on my own, since I have lived a challenging life. Of course as a woman… you know, and we had practised it as a couple. You miss it at times, and long to do it again. But when one thinks about it thoroughly, it doesn’t matter. It’s not really essential in one’s life, really” [she laughs].

“How about in terms of feelings?” I asked.

“As far as the feelings are concerned I have been handling the children’s… ever since their father’s death… the two youngest ones, my daughter and my son, the youngest one, I have been looking after them since their father’s death as if I had to save their lives, and have totally forgotten about myself. Ten years went, right, and one time I realized my own existence and asked myself, why I am living like this? It’s as if my life has no salt. It was very bland. It needed a bit of salt. … That’s how disengaged I was toward men. Then I turned toward myself, of course I have to be loved… I felt… and I thought, ‘Of course when I love my children, I shouldn’t pour all the love to them alone’… I needed to be loved, I felt the need. I started seeing one of those who had been around. And later on I discovered that he was no good either! It was so awful! I started trusting him, but realized that he was not trustworthy at all. He was more motivated by becoming the owner of the house, and tried to take away my house from me. That was really shameful, and I said, “He is not interested in me. He is more interested in owning the house!”

She continued, “I was dumbfounded, I have been paying [the] mortgage for so many years on my own, and here he talks about putting his name onto the pieces of paper. He wanted to renovate the house and put his name onto the house. Stupid, idiotic… as if I have lost my mind in lusty moments! ‘Get out of the house, right now, here is the door!’ There he was just outside the house when I thought he was long gone home. And out of nowhere, I told him, ‘Goddamn it. Why are you staying around?”
If you are not going home, enter the house, you fool!’ [She laughs.] These words are just so bad, one would have thought that he would flee, but he entered. I was just so upset and my thoughts were not kind at all. I was so upset that my breathing was affected.”

“You asked me to enter the house, and I expected to be treated with some respect.’ He had expected me to greet him. [She laughs.] He apparently really appreciated our conversations. And I said, ‘Did not you and your wife ever talk? How could you have been a couple?’ I said this so directly. ‘How were you a couple? You must have had no problems between you.’”

“That is not true at all. We had problems....”

“That must have been so. You weren’t able to talk one another.’ He was trying so hard, and went on....”

“It must have been difficult...” I said.

“No kidding,” she concurred.

“It must be difficult to become a couple in a ripe age?” I asked.

“Yes, indeed he misunderstood so grossly. One time he came in and he was really tired and said, ‘I am exhausted. Can I go in there and lie down?’ He asked about my bed. ‘Go ahead,’ I said. My son and I were watching TV. He had expectations of me coming in next to him! I did not even realize it. I did not look for any significance in his behaviour. I did not realize that he wanted to do it! He wanted me to follow suit! And here we [she and her son] were watching TV. ... Really, I have had such extreme experiences in life, and I am not about to experience more... so, that was the end of it.”

“Some of the advances that I had were from married men. Such things are very nearby. If one is not careful the descent can be indeed drastic. One really has to be careful. People are really strange, and are beyond any normal expectations. Just unreal... you know. Just testing, trying...”

“Beyond your own expectations?” I asked.

“Absolutely beyond one’s own expectations. I don’t find the president’s [US President Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinski was on the news] extramarital affair funny. He is not the only male to do this; there are so many, many, many men who have done the same. He is indeed representing so many men around the world. Poor guy, he shut up so many men. [She laughs.] I have found myself saying that.”

We went back to the question of when her feelings returned after her husband’s and her two children’s deaths. “I guess that many have expected me to want to remarry, particularly men, and that I just wandered around looking for someone. Wrong! [She laughs.] My daughter at the beginning... you know, the children who were staying with me at the time did not part with me at all, and I felt it. Even [during] our walks if men passed and I happened to say hello to men, my daughter would ask,
‘Why did you say hello to him? Why did you greet him?’ They ‘treasured’ me, and that was also a great challenge. I know that they felt that I was their single parent. You must have surely gone through the same thing with your own mother!” [My father died when I was thirteen.]

I pursued the question provided to me by Mimi. “What would be your message overall?”

“To the young ones, this is what I would want to say: what is bad, what is good? If they understand without any help from others the process of choosing, surely that would be the way? They have to understand on their own what is bad, what is good. How would I go about finding the best way to live a good life? I wonder if I should just drink, I wonder if I should continue to smoke. To do drugs? Or I wonder if I am better off without these things? Like that, right? Many youngsters are really talented in terms of book learning, and many are really bright. If they did without it [alcohol, cigarettes, drugs] they would achieve great things. Some. They would have to organize for themselves what is the process. If I were to make an example of myself: I went through the process of prayer. The fallings I used as my way of getting up. Oh, yes, I fall deep, and my self-esteem falls way down. I don’t make myself self-important. I see myself as being the weakest of the weakest. If they see it like that the young ones can make their own decisions to lead their own lives. They can decide to follow their feelings, the ones that they have found and chosen. I am not good at words and they would be hard to understand, but the rest surely is understandable. I am sure that you have understood.”

“Each person in his or her own right. This is very much put to use.”

We ended this incredible interview with her wishing me good luck with the study. Later on, she requested a copy of the interview on tape. She wanted her children to have a chance to listen to her in the future. She felt that her children might be able to understand so many questions that would perhaps go unanswered otherwise, questions that they may have in the future.
Dr. Karla Jessen Williamson is Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations, University of Saskatchewan, Canada. Born in Appamiut near Maniitsoq, Greenland, she is a fluent speaker of: Kalaallisut, Danish, and English, having received her primary education in Greenland, and completed her high school in Denmark.

Upon moving to Canada, she transferred her studies from Ilmiinarfissuaq (Greenland Teacher Training) to the University of Saskatchewan's Indian Teacher Education Program. She obtained her Bachelor's and Master's Degrees from that university. Her Master’s thesis dealt with Inuit childrearing practices and the Inuit relationship to the land in Pangnirtung, Nunavut.
For her doctoral studies at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, Dr. Jessen Williamson analyzed Inuit gender relations in a post-colonial Greenland community, introducing a kalaallit epistemological model.

Karla has published a number of articles and chapters in books and edited *The Journal of Indigenous Studies*. She was the first female Executive Director of the Arctic Institute of North America at the University of Calgary and was Senior Researcher for Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national organization for the Inuit in Canada.

She is a member of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and a member of the Board of Governors of Ilisimatusarfik/ University of Greenland. She serves on adjudication committees of various Canadian granting councils, including on the National Steering Committee for International Polar Year in Canada.

Karla is first and foremost the proud mother of two children, Laakkuluk and Nanoq. She is thrilled to be an ‘aanaa’ (grandmother) to two grandchildren, Akutaq and Igimaq. Both are growing up in an Inuktitut-speaking environment in Iqaluit. She is married to Dr. Robert Williamson, a well respected anthropologist who speaks the Canadian Inuktitut fluently.

Karla is co-investigator for the Roots of Resilience study carried out through the Mental Health Research Unit at McGill University. Her teaching responsibilities at the University of Saskatchewan include antiracist education, and resilience and education. She formed a professional group “Beadwork” at the University of Saskatchewan’s College of Education and is a member of the University of Saskatchewan Aboriginal Engagement Group. She is a philosopher, a strong supporter of the use of indigenous languages, rights, knowledges, art, belief systems, and space. She writes poetry and is well respected for her strong feelings for life in the Arctic.