

**Lynette Hunter**

*Equality and Difference,  
Storytelling in Nunavut, 2001*

**Abstract**

*For centuries, the Inuit of Nunavut have used stories for discussing and effecting social change, yet Hansard records indicate virtually no storytelling takes place during government sessions. This admittedly partial study, based on interviews largely with women from Panniqtuuq and on some associated texts, asks why this should be so. The analysis works from the approaches of situated knowledge and textuality, finding in the interviews engaged understanding of the rhetoric of tacit and traditional knowledge. It argues that these perspectives shed light on the shortcomings of liberal humanist debate and suggest new strategies for democratic humanism in Nunavut and elsewhere.*

**Résumé**

*Au fil des siècles, les Inuit du Nunavut se sont servi des contes pour discuter du changement social et pour le mener à bien. Et pourtant, le compte rendu officiel des débats (hansard) révèle que pratiquement personne ne se met à raconter des histoires lors des séances de la Chambre. La présente étude, quoique partielle, il faut l'admettre, et fondée sur des entrevues menées pour la plupart auprès des femmes provenant de Panniqtuuq et sur quelques textes s'y rapportant, remet en question cette façon de faire. L'analyse, qui se fonde sur les méthodes du savoir localisé et de la textualité, décele dans ces entrevues une compréhension engagée de la rhétorique du savoir tant tacite que traditionnel. Elle soutient que ces perspectives mettent au jour les défaillances du discours libéral humaniste et nous propose de nouvelles stratégies visant à promouvoir l'humanisme démocratique au Nunavut et ailleurs.*

The central question to be addressed here is concerned with the democratic rhetoric that is emerging in the communities from which the newly constituted government of Nunavut in the eastern arctic of Canada has emerged. In the spring of 1999, after years of negotiation, the territory of Nunavut came into being with Iqaluit as its capital city on Baffin Island. Listening to one group of Inuit elders of the eastern Arctic during the summer of 2000, it was clear that stories and storytelling were fundamental to social understanding and social change (Kulchyski 1999). Yet although this was firmly conveyed by many individuals who were interviewed for this essay, if one looks at the Hansard reports from the first eighteen months of meetings of the Nunavut government, there are hardly any stories. Why?

The current exploration is based on a series of live interviews with several storytellers primarily in or from Panniqtuuq, a traditional community on the southern edge of the northeastern arm of Baffin Island, and on reported interviews with a number of elders from Panniqtuuq and other communities. The study adds to growing Western understanding of storytelling rhetoric, and looks at the position of the teller and the listener, the kinds of stories told by the women in this community, their analysis of the differences between the oral and the written and the attitude to and potential for using stories for social and political change.

### **Reasons for this Inquiry**

The experiences of communities new to Western democracy underline the fact that most Western nation-states are based on liberal humanism, a humanism that privileges certain people in many ways, not the least in the field of rhetoric and communication in the public sphere. As a result of practical issues such as education and social training, strategies of debate, syllogistic argument and rationalist epistemology have come to be a sign of a privileged rhetoric that excludes many modes of communication central to these new communities (Pateman 1979, 1995; Hunter 2001). That exclusion highlights another issue: that a large proportion of people in communities and countries enfranchised in the early twentieth century have been disadvantaged in similar ways. Engaging with the ideas of some elders in 2000, just after Nunavut had acquired its status as a territory, brings into sharp relief some of the implications of the rhetoric of liberal government. This essay is part of a series in which I explore elements that may open out a democratic humanism encouraging different modes of communication in the public sphere, and a greater variety of ways of knowing and persuading.

In a democratic humanism the point is that not everyone will agree; interests will diverge far more widely than in liberal humanist institutions run by people from relatively similar backgrounds and with relatively similar preoccupations. Democratic humanism therefore raises issues about the kinds of persuasion appropriate to make decisions and take action. To a considerable extent these issues overlap with those of deliberative democracy as defined by Seyla Benhabib (1996) from Jurgen Habermas and those being discussed in the name of a multi-layered citizenship by Canadian scholars such as Smaro Kamboureli (1996) and Diana Brydon (2005). The wider participation in democracy that lies at the heart of democratic humanism makes it necessary for more people to learn appropriate strategies for contributing to political organization and action. But it also requires institutions that have worked in roughly the same way for the entire extent of the “modern” period in the Western world (in other words from the seventeenth century until now in countries of course “southern” to Nunavut), to learn how to engage with strategies outside the historically conventional. As Habermas and Benhabib point out, it is impractical to suggest that new modes of democracy will arise independent

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of the tactics of social contract liberalism; hence, deliberative democracy and, I would argue, democratic humanism and multilayered citizenship, will need to devise strategies that productively change current practices. If democratic humanism, which is the implicit objective of giving people the vote in the twentieth century, is to replace liberal humanism, an understanding of the broad changes that will have to take place gives material definition to the word “postmodern,” although one could wish for a less contested word.

I have argued elsewhere that rhetorical strategies such as narrative (Code 1995, 155; Young 1997, 60–74), dialogue (Cohen 1990, 89), expression (Lovibond 1983) and articulation<sup>1</sup> have been posited by recent political theorists as possible alternatives to the agonistic structures of debate and argumentation that currently dominate national politics. But much of the political discussion about these strategies is divided between those who claim that a particular rhetorical strategy will in itself be appropriate — people just have to learn it and they will be able to participate in a way that will resist co-optation to liberal corporate standards (Walker 1998, 66) — and those who claim that these alternative strategies are inadequate to the work that needs to be done (Benhabib 1996). However, a rhetorician would immediately reply that no strategy can be guaranteed in itself. The whole point of rhetoric is that it allows one to take context into account. Hence, in some instances narrative will be authoritative (for example, “master narratives” or “grand narratives” [Lyotard 1979]) and in others it will be engaging. Just so, in some instances debate will be reductive and in others it will open negotiation. The rhetorical strategies of liberal humanism are not in themselves the problem, but it just happens, at this particular moment in history, that the rhetorical strategy of debate is part of the dominant power structure and can literally “take liberties” with its persuasive power. However, it should be noted that recent studies in political rhetoric have rarely paid attention to the potential for public intervention through storytelling, whether it be extended narrative, tale, anecdote or aphorism. Part of this paper is an exploration of the pragmatics of storytelling rhetoric, in the particular context of Panniqtuuq, Nunavut, with regard to social change.

Much of the work for the validation of alternative rhetorics within Western/southern institutional structures has taken place in social studies of science and technology and in feminist theory. Drawing in particular from Wittgenstein’s theories of language and from Bakhtin and Lukács for an understanding of alternative political engagement through communication, many of these thinkers positioned themselves within the sophisticated discussions that emerged in the late 1980s and the 1990s around the concept of “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988; Harding 1991). In a parallel move, postcolonial theorists (Hardt and Negri 2000; Mohanty 2003; Spivak 1999) have been examining the impact of globalization on liberal democracy; as Diana Brydon (2005) has noted,

Canadian writers such as Caroline Andrew (2005) have developed the concept of specific conditions, struggles and actors rather than pre-established orders or institutional ideologies.

Situated knowledge, which emphasizes the partial and specific nature of our experience, and situated textuality (Hunter 1999), which communicates this kind of knowing, has elaborated from naïve versions of authenticity, through relativist accounts of laboratory work (Latour and Woolgar 1979), to a material philosophical approach that attempts to deal with partial knowledge in various ways (for example, “strong objectivity,” [Harding 1991]). It is worth pointing out that it is only tangential to the concept of “situated = local or contextual” in which the word is used in fields from literacy to robotics. The slightly older version of “situated” used here, and perhaps another word such as “partial” would be more helpful to the area as a whole, and is concerned with a rigorous epistemology and rhetoric that is intertwined not only with politics and ethics but also morality. In none of these large philosophical areas does it underwrite a generalist perspective. Recent developments have moved to set aside the twinned concept of the universal/relative to focus on the way that situated knowledge can provide common grounds for decision and action, at the same time that the situated can enable diverse and diverging approaches to understand and value the differences among people.

To understand the working of situated knowledge it can be helpful to think about the structures of tacit knowledge (Janik 1987), which have much in common with those of traditional knowledge as it has been articulated within Aboriginal communities around the world (for example, Council of Yukon First Nations 2000). Indeed, in work on embodied knowing, the term “situated learning” has been developed to describe the pedagogy of tacit knowledge (Lave and Wenger 1991). Tacit knowledge, like traditional knowledge, is not articulated fully in rationalist language in the way that Western educational structures normally function. This is one reason why studies of science often miss their mark when they focus on the language of science. As important as that is, science is also engaged with practices that usually go un verbalized. Because they are un verbalized they are often ignored or misunderstood and undervalued. Scientific knowledge is not only partial because it cannot be total (the usual argument that leads to relativism), but partial because we are not even aware of many of the components of its knowledge. It is similar with traditional knowledge, much of which is un verbalized, including, as this essay explores, the rhetorical knowledge about stories, telling and listening, as well as the rhetoric of the stories themselves.

I would like to suggest that Inuk storytelling could be used within the larger political structures of Nunavut. It is present throughout the culture and society, although apparently less practised than it used to be despite a recent resurgence in interest among younger Inuit. If it were to become part

of the discourse of politics it might offer a bridge between the diversity of the local and the generalizations of national ideology. Nunavut has a number of specific local elements in place: the fact that Members of the Territorial Assembly (MTAs) come from each of the communities, that the government visits different communities en masse from time to time, that there is a perception that the MTAs are recognized on a personal level. The first Rankin Inlet meeting on 17 February 2000 indicates that these presuppositions were in place during the first year of government at least (Hansard 2000, 389–408). In this context there may still be room for effective storytelling and for the inclusion of “traditional knowledge” in social change.

My own research was initially focused on women’s storytelling and how it contributed to social change, and the partiality of this work is sustained largely by that intention. However, I did not find the gendered framework of my initial approach in the accounts by the elders, although I did learn about other perceptions on gender that were vitally important to understanding the situatedness of the stories to which I was listening. Similarly, I did not find my approach to stories and storytelling directly in the guidance I was given, but refracted into unexpected paths through the particularities of the situations of the people speaking. What is interesting about situated knowledge is that the burden of knowledge does not lie with the teller, as in the classic formula of “if p then q,” but in its textuality. Situated knowledge involves the speaker/writer with their audience/reader in the process of engaging with what is said or has been written. That textual engagement may result in the teller and the listener forming different concepts of what the “knowledge” in question is. The information may be the same, but the knowledge can be different. Indeed, what marks out this kind of rhetorical inquiry from ethnology or anthropology is that the listener, in this case me, never understands the teller’s knowledge, only knows that it is different from my own.

### **Rhetoric and Storytelling in Nunavut**

This essay offers a partial perspective on the rhetoric of storytelling and its social uses, from information given by some elders in Panniqtuuq, Iqaluit, Iglulik and Mittimalik and with comments by younger people from Panniqtuuq now living in Iqaluit and elsewhere. I visited Panniqtuuq and Iqaluit in 1998 and returned in 2000 to the territory of Nunavut. On my return visit, in Panniqtuuq I interviewed<sup>2</sup> the elders Elisapee Ishulutuk (EI), Martha Kanayuk (MK) and Evie Aniniliak (EA), through the translator Lizzie Karpik.<sup>3</sup> In Iqaluit I interviewed among others Meeka Kilabuk, a political activist who at the time ran a program for people with varying abilities, and Meeka Mike, who then worked in a hunting and fishing tourist business.<sup>4</sup> This essay also draws on interviews with Saullu Nakasuk (SN) (Panniqtuuq), Hervé Paniaq (HP) (Iglulik), Elisapee Ootoova (EO) (Mittimalik) and Pauloosie Angmaalik (PA) (Panniqtuuq), recorded in

1996 from sessions at Arctic College and published as *Interviewing Inuit Elders: Introduction (Interviewing)*.

Storytellers in Panniqtuuq learn to tell stories by listening, by observation, and other processes of tacit knowledge and situated learning. In effect, most craft work in cultures around the world is learned tacitly: for example, metalwork, cooking, sewing, and among Inuk crafts also hunting, building and, it appears, storytelling. But tacit knowledge poses the difficult question: why is it tacit and unspoken? Is it because it cannot be explained? or simply because no one has spoken about it yet? Is it silent because it is a trade secret? or just because its knowledge is taken for granted as true or obvious or conventional? Or is it tacit for reasons that people in a Western/southern culture that values verbal articulation over others do not recognize?

In effect, tacit knowledge may be all of these things. From the interviews it became clearer that the acquisition of knowledge about storytelling is tacit partly because it is being learned by an individual in a situated manner. Evie Aniniliak commented, “We were never taught how to do stories”; they learned by hearing others do them (6)<sup>5</sup> and making them their own.<sup>6</sup> Elisapee Ootoova offers another perspective on this kind of learning with regard to sewing:

We were not told directly to learn how to sew ... I think we started working with scraps. I am sure our mothers didn't have the time just to teach us as they were constantly busy. I am sure we practised sewing, even though our work probably wasn't noticed at first, and we were really keen on finishing it. And when you thought you had done the perfect job and showed it off, you were told that you had made the seam too high. (19)

She goes on to note that this lack of positive support is not necessarily the best way to learn. But for some knowledge it may be that trying it for oneself is one of the main ways to train, although such training requires a close and attentive group of people around one. It may be significant that Evie could remember that camps (smaller groups on the land often camping in traditional camping places, at some distance from larger communities such as Panniqtuuq) had particular people who were storytellers—her grandmother in her case (2)—but that she did not recognize someone with this special job in Panniqtuuq itself.

Elisapee Ishulutuk backed up this sense of camps having particular and local tellers when she noted that all storytellers have different ways of telling “[b]ecause they lived in different camps and they had different ways of lifestyle” (3). Nowadays, she commented, there are fewer stories told because people are “faraway” (1), and it’s only when they can get together that they do stories “all the time.” Martha Kanayuk remarked that she tells stories mainly when she gets together with other elders, although she uses

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stories with children a lot (2). This sense of storytelling often being the heart of a social occasion was reiterated by Evie when she said that no one has to “make an effort” (4) to tell stories, but that people just do it all the time when they are visiting.

Like Martha, Evie Aniniliak often tells stories to children and grandchildren (2), but she was concerned that children in school have stopped listening because they are always in groups that are too large to encourage attentiveness. From the start, storytelling is intricately bound to listening. Elisapee Ishulutuk remembered that as children they would listen with respect; they were always told to listen and obey. Nowadays, “[t]heir life is so distracted” (5) that she has to remind them to listen before they “do” something. This kind of comment probably has resonance with many Euro-American readers who live around children, but “listening” seems here to be intended as a more specific skill rather than as a blanket word for obedience.<sup>7</sup> Elisapee Ootoova states, “I was an expert listener” (20) as she recalls listening to conversations when she should not have been. In effect, the action was a way of defining herself:

I was the type of person that didn't heed what I was told. We were often reminded that we weren't supposed to listen to conversations, but I was an expert listener. I'd pretend I wasn't listening to anything and here I was listening. (20)

Hervé Paniaq attributed his knowledge to his “naivety” or disingenuousness:

[W]e would be told not to listen to people talking ... While they were talking, I would play with my seal-bone dogteam on the floor. At the same time I would be listening to the people telling stories. When they realized that I was listening, I would be told, “Go play outside.” I knew I would be told that whenever I felt like listening ... It was only because I was so naive that I gained some information. I mainly listened and I learned a bit from there. (47–8)

The stress on listening attentively is also part of learning how to tell stories (see Cruikshank 1990, chap. 7). Martha Kanayuk suggests that listening is a learned activity; she says that she “understood more over the years, after [she] had heard so many stories that [she] had learned a lot from them. That they are real. It took years to understand them” (2). As a child she would listen to stories and believe them, never disagree: “A long time ago we used to believe what the elders said” (2) (see Annie Ned, Cruikshank 1990, 318). Within the immediate, relatively intimate context of a camp, the supportive social interactions needed for this kind of reinforcement would be present. This kind of unquestioning belief in which children often get caught up is different from the belief that results from knowledge that is informed by experience, what we sometimes call wisdom. Yet it is possible that the presence of the former is one strategy for putting in place the conditions for the latter.

More than this, what is being described is a particular rhetorical stance at work. The listening is part of the telling, and the retelling and interpretation become new stories. Listening becomes a public act, a display of personal responsibility and difference within a specific context of common ground. Hence the current telling of stories mainly to children whose parameters can be defined for them more easily than, say, modern teenagers who have alternative tellings on television or video that disrupt those common grounds. Hence the telling of stories when visiting people who are like oneself, because common ground is recognized. Part of the recognized common ground that encourages storytelling is the expectation that storytelling will happen. As Evie replied when asked if she would tell stories to Qallunaats [southerners, white people], "We don't. ... They usually have questions for you" (6). In other words, stories are not an appropriate way of answering questions. But if common ground is the main reason the listener listens in the first place, as Elisapee Ishulutuk notes, differences are the main point; "it's really interesting when they are having stories [from different camps] ... Hearing stories like that, it becomes very interesting" (3).

The oral, and orature, within this community is more overtly public and social than the present day Euro-American rhetoric of reading and writing: for example, we no longer read aloud as a matter of habit as readers would have done five or six hundred years ago. If listening is public, so is telling, and there is a primary need to know about the speaker. Their very physical presence is important (EA 7). A listener will want to know about the teller's upbringing and parentage, their camp, their community. The elders I interviewed told about their background in the initial stages of the interviews, or in one case at a public meeting that occurred before the interview. Such locating devices are important because the teller takes responsibility for their text to the extent that if someone acts on their words, the teller must have spoken from experience, or else what the listener then does with the story may be based on things that haven't happened and may lead them into danger. If they are faced with danger or dilemma or disaster as a result of a story based on experience, then at least the teller has been responsible about the telling.

The element of "speaking from experience" is central. In interview, the speakers would politely decline to answer a question if they felt they had not got the experience, saying, for example, "I can't really say much about that by myself" (MK6), or "She says she has not got much information on that" (EI7), or simply "I don't know" (EI6).<sup>8</sup> The centrality of experience has also been noted by others. For example, the opening to *Interviewing* quotes Saullu Nakasuk saying, "I'm only telling you about what I've experienced" (5); or Pauloosie Angmaalik:



I have already stated that I can say that I don't know anything about it if I have only heard about it just once. If at a later time someone were to tell about it like it really is, and though I did not intentionally lie, I would be like someone who had lied. (6)

Experience shapes the parameters of partiality so it is not arbitrary. Nor is such knowledge relative, because experience helps the listener to identify specific common ground and difference. In universal/relative frameworks difference is something to "get over," to finally understand and find the piece of the jigsaw that makes knowledge universal rather than relative. But the opening to *Interviewing* also states that in Inuk knowledge there is no "generalized" knowledge or authority (9). In effect, the comments describe the possibility for a situated knowledge in which one recognizes the presence of difference that reminds one of the partiality of all knowledge. Yet the comments also make the significant addition often lacking in accounts of situated knowledge in the sciences, that Inuk traditional knowledge is not fixed, because "[a] balance of experience and innovation is central to the production and transmission of knowledge" (6). This flexibility and openness to change and modification seems to me a strategy made necessary primarily by attentive listening and its process of re-situating.

### *Acts of Telling and Listening*

It is not only experience that is individual but also and necessarily the style in which the stories are told and the form in which they are told. Each of the three elders I interviewed in Panniqtuuq has a markedly different style. Elisapee Ishulutuk sits with upper body bent forward from the waist, throwing her energy out toward the listener. Her face remains stable with eyes piercing toward the listener, except for radical changes into *eee* [yes] with eyebrows lifted and a grin, or *akha* [no] with the mouth turned downward in a grimace.<sup>9</sup> The hands remain clasped on her knees: she said that when someone "starts using his arms or part of their body," she makes "a comment: 'Are you turning into a Qallunaat?!' because they use their arms all the time" (4). In contrast Martha Kanayuk sits slightly tense with her arm flung along the back edge of the chesterfield. Although punctuated with laughter, her voice moves like a river with her eyes turned inward as if she is seeing the stories she tells. The intensity of that vision seems at times to overtake her, once to the point where she faltered into "not being able to say any more about that." Again quite differently, Evie Aniniliak sits quietly in focus, hands clasped lightly in her lap, with a diffident air of bewilderment about her as she firmly delineates life in the present, in the past, in tension and in hopes. Unlike the recounting of shaman performances, these tellers have subtle performative stances that they have presumably developed through many years of practice. And I was aware that the performative effects were probably affected by my own intrusive presence, as would be appropriate for a context-bound rhetoric. Elisapee Ishulutuk said at one point that some people like telling stories "slowly,

because they enjoy doing that together" (4), and it was notable that while most of the interview consisted of her answering questions at shotgun speed, her parting gift was a story told very slowly.

I have made no detailed study of the rhetorical devices of verbal or physical communication mainly because I was working with a translator, and the complexities of the situation were multiplied. But also, despite questioning, very little was said about style, which is not surprising for a knowledge acquired tacitly. In what follows I would like to elaborate instead on the forms of storytelling that were discussed in detail, for much was said about the different reasons why stories were told, and the different kinds of stories that resulted.<sup>10</sup> The word "story" covered a range of different verbal genres from myth to tale to anecdote, and, as this essay explores in part four, aphorism and word, the one-word story becoming a central device. The term is used here in the conventional literary sense of a verbal artefact with narrative elements that are articulated through many quite different techniques.

All the elders stated that stories would be used to give strong direction but not to command because stories tell people about "what expectations are" (EA 2). In rhetorical terms they are demonstrative rather than epideictic (about praise or blame) or judicial (about right and wrong). They are there to guide the listener into appropriate behaviour, which means that the listener must take the story and apply it in their own life; they cannot be told "what to do" because the teller can't make decisions about the specifics in the listener's life. At the same time, the guidance is firm. Elisapee Ishulutuk says:

They use stories ... to tell other people, "This is the way you should be doing it." Sometimes you have to tell the family ... "No, you don't do that, because this is the reason." You know? They always have reasons behind and they have stories with it. (2)

So stories are "reasons." Martha emphasized this sense, saying:

You tell them why you want them to listen and to obey. You have to be quite open with them to do that. But often we have to remind them, through stories, "This is why we are telling you" and have a story with it. (2)

She continued with a practical example:

Often the women stay with their mother[s] to teach them how to make clothing, how to support their family, making food, how to have a family. ... This is ... what the elders would explain, "This is why we are doing [stories]. Because you will have a family later, and you will know what to do. We'll show you how to do it. You will observe, and when you are observing you have to listen from your observations." (3)

Note the confluence of listening and observing as the main ways of learning. If observation is the most important element in learning through tacit knowledge and the central element involved in learning to tell stories, listening becomes the parallel skill needed for learning through storytelling. The knowledge, the reasons and explanations conveyed by stories, do not command or order. Their effect depends on the listener's skills of observation. Obedience is not "blind obedience," although stories could be used authoritatively, as the comment "If she listened, then she wasn't abused" (EO 25) indicates.

The kinds of stories that explain or guide rather than command are various. Evie Aniniliak noted, "The stories I use are, some, traditional, but I often add something else to make them more attractive" (2). For many other tellers, stories are contemporary, about today. From listening, it was apparent to me that there were different kinds of stories these tellers were willing to tell me and a more general public: those told from memory about "a long time ago," those with practical information about life today and also stories of animals and myths or beliefs. As Evie explains, you have to have the memory but also the "telling form" (1). In response to questioning it seems that the telling form could be from day-to-day life in the present or the past, or "made up" and fictional.

All the elders seem to agree that stories among adults are often about practical information: boats and clothing (EI 3), care of the sick (EO 22, SK 72ff), food (EA5), dogs (PA 115ff). Some of these were more or less explicit while others were indirect. For example, Saullu described the reason for not waiting too long to find a husband: because a woman's pelvic bones would become more rigid and a baby would have more difficulty being delivered. This preceded a technical description of how to use an *asimautta* by putting it "on the female's lower back and [kneeling] on it applying pressure until the bone separated" (80). One could read the juxtaposition of these two stories in several ways, including as a warning. Evie described how she would tell stories about the right kind of food to eat to her children and grandchildren, and discussed the impact of a local "QuickStop"<sup>11</sup> on the patterns of eating among younger people in particular (5). But the story was not so much about the way the QuickStop food might not be good for you but about the fact that you had to pay for it. This story turned into one about maintaining hunting skills since most people in the community still depend for food on hunting.

A story told by Elisapee Ishulutuk began as one about fashion and turned into one about how to keep clean clothes even without soap; on another level it was about social dignity:

A long time ago, they never used to have soap, like bar soaps, [and] they wore this seal skin clothing all the time. They'd have baby seal skin, white clothing, so she remembers all through that time she'd

been wearing the same clothing and it would get really really dirty, like her kamiks, and she remember trying to take dirt out because it didn't even look white any more.

When they took some dirt out, she'd take some piece out of clothing, she'd make it into a ball and take a hair of her head and make it into a ball and start making [strokes down the clothing]. It was so dirty that they had to scrape it up with an ulu and stuff.

When we didn't have any more soap, we'd use eggs for soap. The whole egg. Whenever we had to come and we'd use soap and we didn't have any more, ... we'd use eggs and start washing the seal skin, because we didn't want it becoming really really dirty so we had to use eggs. (8)

Although ostensibly about cleaning clothes, the story also works to raise a number of different issues, not the least to instruct a southerner, me, in resourcefulness.

At times, apparently direct stories may become even more elusive. Martha Kanayuk remembered considerable detail of how her early employment at the nursing station in Panniqtuuq in the 1940s trained her to help others when she was in the camps. She told several stories about her experiences, including those as a person responsible for preparing the dead for burial, which had nothing directly to do with her medical expertise but was because on the death of a child early in her life she had laid the body out, and from that time had been asked to do so for others. But the two areas of responsibility came close to each other, and as she proceeded with her memories it was as if the stories of the ill became overwhelmed with the fact of death; the past became the source of an inexorable presence.

Conveying practical information through stories can be more effective than simply stating or describing factual material, because contexts are usually incorporated into the telling. In response to a question, Evie also confirmed that stories would be used when it is difficult to say exactly what we mean (2). Hervé Paniaq told a story to his interviewers about the "undisclosed," about what happens when there is something that has been done and then hidden that affects the whole community, perhaps by bringing bad luck on it (HP 58). This story involved a shaman identifying the person who had kept an action secret and persuading them to disclose what they had done, after which the community was restored. Hovering on the edge of a realistic story, the tale had elements in common with the more mythical stories of figures such as Sedna, whose hair must be combed to release the sea animals and relieve famine (Petroni 1988, 42; Alexina Kublu qtd. in Kulchyski 1999, 153–61).

Delicately poised between the practical and mythical was a story told by Elisapee Ishulutuk about a woman who would not marry the husbands her parents brought to her: this is a common opening to several Inuk stories.

Ishulutuk was speaking to a group of students in Panniqtuuq on a summer course.<sup>12</sup> She had generously invited questions about her life, and had answered many on marriage customs and who picked her husband for her, and whether she liked him or not. In the course of these questions she made it clear that she had not wanted to marry the man her parents chose for her. Why? "He had a short neck." But gradually she explained how she came to care for him, especially after her parents died, when he became her good friend. Elisapee's story of the woman who would not marry took on elements from her own life story, which coloured the telling and changed the listening process. In the story, the woman finally goes out to sit among the rocks and as husband after husband is rejected, she slowly begins to turn into a rock. And do you know why she turned into a rock? Because Nunavut is covered in rocks, and this way she had lots of friends.<sup>13</sup>

There are also many instances in which stories are told about events that are difficult to repeat or discuss, not necessarily because the teller doesn't understand, but because of anxiety about whether the listener will be able to do so. Hervé Paniaq told of an ancestor who had had to eat the flesh of other humans in order to stay alive. Elisapee Ootoova then took over and elaborated:

We can state that we will never eat a fellow human being, but we do not know what our future holds. If it were our only chance for survival, we just might end up doing that too. She [Paniaq's ancestor] went through an experience which she had to go through. Amazingly, she was discovered and she pulled through it and had a chance to bear children again. If she didn't do what she had to do, there's no way we would be around today. We can see life meant a lot to this person. A lot of us today want to kill ourselves, hang ourselves because we can't deal with life's problems anymore. Imagine what she went through. . . . If she had just given up on life, we wouldn't be around today. (57)

Paniaq's story was part of the context for a larger discussion of the reasons for conversion to Christianity, yet Ootoova's interpretative re-telling moved the story into one about not judging people's actions without appreciating the demands their life is putting upon them. Many stories are of this philosophical type, allowing for discussion of ideas and feelings difficult to articulate (see Kitimeot 1999).

But the largest group of stories requiring contextual material is probably that of "a long time ago." There are many stories about traditional lifestyles and traditional knowledge, and these would simply not be as effective without the surrounding material. For example, Pauloosie Angmaalik was asked by an interviewer, "If you were out hunting and you were attacked by a bear, what would you do?" His immediate answer was, "When hunting wasn't regulated, animals tended to come around if you were a hunter, probably based on how willing you were to catch game" (121), but now you

have to chase them away. He then expanded on this observation with a story about a bear that had come to his camp and which he had seen pulling at the starter of an outboard motor: "My belief that polar bears have the capability to think like humans became stronger after I saw for myself how the bear pulled and released the starter repeatedly" (121). After this he and his friends chased the bear away by firing shots toward it, not to kill but to scare. The interview developed into a discussion about respecting animals; the basis of this respect is the commonality between them and humankind. But the story also underlines a number of different points including the fact that prior to Western equipment such as motor boats and guns, animals and humans had a different relationship. One has to get a lot closer to an animal to kill it if one is carrying a knife rather than a gun.

If the point of telling a story is not to command or prove, then, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the audience, the point is to offer guidance. Because there is no generalized knowledge, no "authority" except the contexts of the speaker and listener, the interpretations are specific to each listener, based on both common ground and difference. This particular way of listening is related directly to the rhetorical concept of "stance." Differentiated here from the ethos of the speaker alone, stance recognizes the listener's joint responsibility with the teller for interpretation and emphasizes the importance of learning how to listen over many years, although it also allows for the possibility that the listener may not take up this responsibility.<sup>14</sup> Through rhetorical studies and literary criticism in Euro-American academic institutions, this activity has been recognized as central to the reading and writing of poetry, yet only peripherally in the textuality of prose. The concept has only enjoyed wide discussion in recent times in the context of theories trying to work out how to engage a broader public into taking up access to cultural power. The rest of this essay is concerned with exploring how the stories might interconnect not only with cultural but also with social and political power.

### **Contexts: Gender, Media and Education**

As noted above, the initial focus for my research was a gendered concept of how stories engaged with social change. I was committed to exploring a rhetoric of storytelling by women, and to searching for what women's voices had to say within different public spaces. Methodologically, this entailed listening to men's voices, and I was also interested in how these tellers responded to any differences between their stories and those of the men around them. The discussions about gender provided detailed information about the situated contexts of storytelling. Just so, the discussions of the differences between written and oral media, primarily in the context of biblical stories, and the descriptions of different experiences with southern education systems offered material that located the storytelling in specific conditions and on particular ground.

Whenever I raised the topic of gender I came directly in contact with the element of “immediate experience.” For example, when I asked Martha Kanayuk if men told stories more than women, she said abruptly, “I don’t know about that” (3), and went on to talk about what she did know: that men and women often tell stories together. Yet she added that when women are together the stories are more fun, “like you are open to stories more” (3) than when men are there. She said she spoke more in groups of only women, and felt that there was more variety in the stories on these occasions, noting that there were also times that would be private to a women’s group. Kanayuk added that her husband must have told stories to her son when they went hunting, otherwise how could her son have learned how to hunt?

Elisapee Ishulutuk reiterated some of these comments, noting that because men went hunting alone they were less often together in the group setting conducive to telling stories (3). Probably because they had more opportunity, women told more stories around things they were doing such as making clothing and tents, preparing sealskins, cooking, but Elisapee missed not having the campfire and sitting around telling stories (4). However she insisted that men do tell stories, even between “one man and one woman” (3), which are often about clothing, boats, and “a long time ago” (3). Each elder raised subtle points about the way that men and women may have broadly differing responsibilities, such as hunting and sewing respectively, but that they frequently did the work of the “other” gender, depending on circumstances. If a girl ended up going out with her father to hunt because there was no one to look after her at home, then she acquired hunting skills usually learned by boys.

Evie Aniniliak said less on this issue but did comment that women tend to use stories more, and that it is “very effective” (4); she did not know why, “but it happens.” Evie’s comment stemmed from a remark I had made that I thought Mary Thomas, the only woman MTA in the Nunavut government in 2000, told more stories in the televised sessions than the other MTAs. Evie agreed and went on to suggest that television as a medium was a mixed blessing: negative because children imitate inappropriate behaviour (3), but also interesting because some television does what stories do (6) and makes expectations clear. But the fundamentally worrying aspect of television was that it kept the children from playing outside, implicitly from playing with each other (3).

This social placing of a medium was also apparent in the elders’ comments on writing, which opened out a sophisticated commentary on rhetorical stance. Most of the elders with whose words I am engaging could write from a very early age. People could remember that letters were exchanged by dog-team carriers in the 1930s and ’40s (interview in the Elders’ Room at the Angmarlik Centre, Hunter 2000), after all, there were no telephones. Saullu Nakasuk recalls teaching herself to read Inuktituk syllabics by working out the graphic form of people’s names, which she

knew aurally, from the addresses on the letters they received. She also recalled that her grandmother could read the Roman alphabet (Nunavut Arctic College et al. 1999, 66–67).

Writing is not alien to the cultural life of Panniqtuuq. It has been substantially present since the days of the whalers in the nineteenth century, and the fortunes of literacy until the 1930s may well have followed commercial contact. The written today exists alongside the oral and they have their different work and appropriateness. The complexity of the two media may be approached by thinking of the place of the Bible, a written text, in the cultural and social life of Nunavut. The elders giving interviews were part of the generation converted to Christianity during the 1930s, when many of them were in their teens and Christian missionaries were teaching them to read and write. One extensive example comes from the interview with Elisapee Ootoova in *Interviewing*, and her account of reading the Bible.

Early in the interview Ootoova says that although she read the Bible it was not until she became an adult that she understood Christianity. “Only today ...” (31) did she think she was beginning to understand. At first, Christianity was just a few “requirements” (32) about, for example, not working or hunting on Sundays, but there was nothing about not judging others, about learning to like them. She let go of the old rules, fulfilled the “requirements,” but it took a long time to learn the “new rules,” to “love one another” (32). She could see now that this was partly an inflicted problem because of the differences between the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, which were both proselytizing in the North. The conflict between differently converted communities destroyed the old Inuit rule to “help each other” (32). But at the time she thought hers was “the perfect religion.”

As they learned more about Christianity, their process of learning meant they “reminded each other” of Christian precepts, referred to “verses written in the Bible when they approached each other” (37). And they started adapting to the commandments in the Bible either openly or secretly: “The way I see it, people started becoming nicer people” (37). Even the shamans were grateful because:

They did not have to seek answers any more. They didn't have to wait for the possible revenge someone might be plotting against them. They could just discuss problems with the person they were angry at and they found it a lot less stressful. (56)

But this process took time; “It seemed as if the perfect people were more imperfect than the so-called imperfect people” (37). Just “following the rules” is inappropriate interpretation in storytelling, and Ootoova took that advice in terms of not only the “old rules” of traditional knowledge but also the “new rules” of the Bible.



Interestingly, this is in direct contrast with another interviewee, Meeka Mike, a 34-year-old in 2000, from Panniqtuuq and living in Iqaluit. She read the Bible as highly directive and hence different from the traditional stories and spoke at length of this:

The Bible, for me, says “This is bad. Don’t do this. Don’t do that.” It’s very incriminating and it’s so general, directive, that it gives ... no room for interpretation. But also it gives fear, for the young minds, who ... don’t have the experience yet. ... That’s the difference between the Bible and the storytelling. They have the same purpose, same cause, just different method. ... The storytellings can be just as judgmental but at least it gives that person “Let me think about it. I can become capable of doing it my way, even if it takes me longer to learn.” (10)

Part of Meeka Mike’s judgment arises from the perceived differences between the written form of the Bible and the oral form of storytelling, and the judgement she makes is similar to Western/southern distinctions between the two that have informed critical debate for many years. Yet among the elders I found complex responses to the two media that stressed rather different points. Elisapee Ishulutuk felt that stories should be written down because this would help out people learning the written language (2-3). Stories could be both oral and written. But Evie Aniniliak worried that if written in Inuktitut no one would read the stories (7). She also worried that reading was a different kind of activity to listening, implicitly not as social in a culture where reading is usually a private activity, even though she understood the importance of writing stories down to give “the information” (7).

Another interviewee from Panniqtuuq, now living in Iqaluit, was the social activist Meeka Kilabuk. She agreed with the anxiety about writing everything down, but said that if you write things down you release your mind for other things (2). Evie had a contrasting attitude: that because the elders had memory, they “had knowledge” (1), and because they kept it without writing down, they had it always ready for use with other people. Subtly differing, Meeka Mike said that you don’t actually need to *tell* the stories when you are older; if you have had them told to you when young, then what they have taught is “ingrained”; “[i]t’s in their heart[s]” (4). It is difficult to say whether the differences of approach are an effect of Meeka Kilabuk and Meeka Mike having had a Western-styled education. The former attended the Churchill residential school and the latter was brought up in a local, government-funded school. This background would probably develop an appreciation of aspects of the written not of so much concern to people brought up before Western schooling. But it may be that the younger interviewees simply speak their opinions in a different language.

To understand some of these differences in attitude it might help if I recount Meeka Mike’s suggestion that people from her family involved in

social change, as she saw it, were from three or possibly four “eras.” The first era is that of people forcibly removed to residential schools in the 50s and 60s, who were told that their culture was “bad.” The people of this era “were really affected bad mentally, emotionally” (11). Her second era siblings in the later 1960s and 70s were “put into school with [their] parents’ approval or consultation” (11), yet “a lot of them, I think, found it difficult, even with their own personal identity. . . . So, their way of getting back was to negotiate and help out with the land claims and government” (11). The third era of the 1980s, her own, she thought of as “more open. We got to know more of both sides, that it’s kind of, in a way, equal” (11). Her daughter, the possible fourth era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, was “just living and seeing. They’re not too preoccupied with where they want to belong” (11).

Meeka Kilabuk, who turned out to be an aunt of Meeka Mike, falls within the activist characterization of the second era, people who understand how to construct access to political power. Meeka Mike used her own work—at that time she was a businesswoman—to inform her definition of the third era, and her comments below on the way MTAs engage with their communities indicate a confidence in her own access. These categories are only from one person, of a certain age, and one family, yet they indicate profound differences in attitude to political power, differences that probably affect the way that the interviewees think about the use of stories for social change. It is significant that from within her familial framework, Meeka Mike did not perceive the elders, whose education took place in the 1930s to 1940s, as greatly involved in current political change, although they must have been central to the long process of negotiation over the land claims and the formation of the government.

However, the elders have detailed knowledge of the activity of being an audience and the social implications of both listening and reading, and of the moral and ethical impact of both media. Their reflective awareness of the way that their skills in reading the Bible had developed led them to describe appropriate reading in the same way as appropriate listening: that you cannot be told by either the written or oral text “what to do,” and with both media you have to take the story told into your own life and engage with it in your own context. In my experience, this understanding is unusual in comparison to the limited understanding about reading and writing in particular held by many people with a standard Western education, because we have been trained to think of them as primarily private activities, and we get very little if any formal training in oral telling and listening.

The more significant rhetorical difference between the oral and the written may not, in the context of Inuk stories, be the reading or listening so much as the telling. The importance of understanding the position and background of the teller of the oral story had been reinforced by the reactions to my queries about the possible effects of gender on stories. Hence, the absence of the physical presence of the writer when reading

raises pertinent questions of experience and trust, underlined by Meeka Mike's concern with the Bible's apparent claim on authority and truth. When an elder with extensive experience recounted her shift from automatic obedience to the listening strategies that required her to make the stories her own, the Bible's stories came to be told from immediate spiritual experience that constructed a context of responsibility and respect.<sup>16</sup>

To read the Bible as if it claims truth constitutes an experience of difference between the reader and writer as one in which, because the teller cannot be present, the reader has to accept what they say without knowing if they can trust the teller. "Difference" in this kind of reading becomes generalizing: one can only understand the Bible by doing what the teller says, becoming what they want, accepting their version of the truth.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, to read the Bible as a source of traditional knowledge, or reading as listening, clarifies a crucial element of the rhetoric of situated textuality because it constitutes an experience of difference in which the reader acknowledges that they cannot know the teller but accepts responsibility for being part of the constitution of difference. Furthermore, because they are involved in making the differences that cannot be fully understood or known, they can value those differences to the extent of recognizing their part in them. Difference is not there because we all differ relatively from some kind of universal truth but instead because we recognize that we are necessarily partial. We will never fully understand other people, or in this case, the Bible, and this is not a negative factor. Rather, we can enjoy and use our limitations better to communicate with others.

### *The Rhetoric of Stories within Issues of Social Change*

These background issues of gender, education and the media were important for my research because they provided some of the specific and particular material needed for an understanding of the situated rhetoric of the stories. I was keen to explore the hypothesis that storytelling could open doors to the concerns of enfranchised but otherwise marginalized citizens. All the interviews I conducted converged on this idea, yet here I found a widening diversity of views especially between the elders and the younger generations. Although some of this diversity may have resulted from differences in the way the generations expressed themselves, the changes at which those differences hinted were both hopeful and problematic. I offer the following analysis with all respect, as part of my own listening and learning. I stand to be guided in other directions.

In terms of any action for social change, the elders made a distinction between what they do as a community of elders, what the hamlet or the community of Panniqtuuq does and what the Nunavut government does. For example, Elisapee Ishulutuk felt that the elders were not as informed as they might be of things happening in the hamlet, so there was less opportunity and less initiative to get involved with social change in the

community. She described how some convenient and pleasant housing had been built, and she was “surprised” (6) that she was offered one of the houses to live in. She was grateful for the housing but not informed. As a result of the lack of information she said she often felt useless and did not know where to go or whom to contact. At community meetings she had made suggestions, but was told [and implicitly overruled with], “[I]t’s taught in that meeting how important it [the current action] is to this community” (6). In other words, there is little engaged discussion but more persuasive effort for previous decisions. Most important, she said, “By myself, I don’t think I will make much difference. If I had more people involved, more elders in there, I think, would have more sayings [i.e., tellings]” (6).

Although Elisapee Ishulutuk had said that the elders told stories about everything to each other, even garbage disposal (1), she was not sure, when asked, if storytelling would help in the hamlet meetings, although she implied that it might if there were other elders there (7). I asked if she knew why there was not much storytelling during the televised Nunavut government sessions, and she answered that the MTAs were “working really hard on what the Nunavut government should be” (2). In other words, storytelling takes too long. At the same time she said that sometimes she would shout at the television, “Why don’t you do our stories?” (2). This response recognized that Western/southern rhetorical practices in government are not conducive either to the situated textuality of stories or to the length of time that such communication makes necessary. At the same time it also recognized that the length of stories may be offset by their more effective impact, and that they knit together the present with the past to generate resolutions that are practical in the long term because they involve the history of traditions that are woven into society.

When Evie Aniniliak was asked the same question she said that she thought in some cases it would help to tell stories because the government was supposed to be in accordance with the “Inuit lifestyle,” so in some cases stories would be more effective (4). She also noted that while the government was “trying,” she did not see its work reaching the communities at the present (3). She reiterated that when talking with other elders stories were often used, but that they did not bring this kind of telling to the committees that change things in the community. The reason they do not is that when they “voice themselves,” younger people are disrespectful and their words are not effective (3). When they “try and voice” it is not listened to. On the other hand she did not think this was to do with the form of the telling: even if they did not use stories, the young would be disrespectful and tell them that it was “a long time ago.”

In my opinion, one of the primary reasons this occurs is that Western/southern styles of communication in government are skewed toward strategies that offer information and focus on rights and wrongs.

The debate structure of most levels of government is embarrassed by story and while it enjoys anecdote, it rarely acts upon it. So-called ad hominem arguments are dismissed because they are read either as trivial attempts to universalize or as reflections on the relative state of the individual rather than offering a basis for people to take them into their own lives and think about the implications. This latter process would be considered altogether too personal for members of parliament who, in Western liberal democratic governments, are almost all “representatives.” Given that it could be argued that an MTA is not a representative but an advocate in the sense used by Nira Yuval-Davis (1997, chap. 6), alternative rhetorics for social and political communication may be more appropriate in the Nunavut government.<sup>18</sup>

Part of the disinclination of the elders to involve themselves in local social change by the Elders to whom I spoke, stems from the experience of being ignored or disrespected. At the same time they recognize that the stories that carry traditional knowledge in which they are rich are considered inappropriate for contemporary politics, even though they can see the need for them. One of the central elements is time: the elders understood that the Nunavut government was under pressure and that time is scarce. And the one thing stories take is time. When asked to tell a story, one of the elders interviewed in Iqaluit, Hervé Paniaq, replied, “If we start storytelling now, the day is going to be too short” (53), but he went on to tell a story presumably because it was the most appropriate way of telling what he needed to say.

Meeka Kilabuk commented that there was no point telling stories as such in government because you need to get things done. Also, pertinently, different communities need different approaches: what works in one place may not be appropriate for another. Ms. Kilabuk has very wide experience in organizing and northern politics, having been the only female founder of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada in 1971. At the time of interview she was in charge of the Nunavut Council for People with Disabilities. Her sensitivity to the different needs of the various communities stems from a commitment to working with what she called “good socialism.” She suggested that if you work for the communities, not for yourself, you fuse the personal with the political, and you necessarily see and value the differences that are there.

Nevertheless, despite the articulate analysis, Ms. Kilabuk’s discussion of the issues moved step-by-step to demonstration and guidance. I was being told a story and I have to confess that I did not recognize this at the time. The discussion was slowly turned to the way Inuit communicate, and she noted that if you have something specific to say, people like you to get to the point, while stories “take you round the bush.” The oral culture also has an effect on this kind of discourse: people used to the oral medium have good memories and can listen well; they “pay attention,” while Qallunaat do not understand this: they need things repeated.

She then proceeded to tell the story, presumably deducing correctly that I would not be able to begin to “understand” by way of a more direct approach. Meeka Kilabuk wants to write a book about the beluga whale and is on the South-East Baffin committee on animal rights and fur issues. The committee, which combines science with traditional knowledge, had a meeting to which the fisheries department came with one page of scientific information and the Inuit came back with many pages on different kinds of hunting. Hunting is not “understood” in the south, and the Inuk members were trying to explain it to prove their credibility when they made statements based on it. In other words they were providing a story in order to demonstrate the appropriate context to people who did not understand, just as Meeka Kilabuk was providing me with a story to help me understand which stories may or may not be appropriate in government.

I would say that the demonstration taught me these things: that we cannot be confident that people will know about the appropriate context; that a surprising number of people do not even know that it is appropriateness rather than fact-finding that is important for any given context; that when many communities come together in the extraordinary entity that is Nunavut, they feel common cause; yet, as the elders indicated, their strength comes also from their ability to value difference, and difference is effectively negotiated through time and interactive engagement, which speed and directness may jeopardize. All these elements were part of the storytelling to which I listened, and all contributed to the critical view offered by Kilabuk, that although storytelling wouldn't work in the current government structure, it is a vital communication strategy for Nunavut today.

The youngest interviewee, Meeka Mike, also stated that you don't tell stories when the matter is something serious like government. It is not that the stories are not serious, but they are serious “in a light way.” Just as Meeka Kilabuk began by analyzing the absence or presence of story in a discursive style common to Western politics, Meeka Mike's vocabulary for describing the value of stories was revealing of a wider, psychologized, context. As previously noted, she argues that the stories are “ingrained” in your heart; when it comes to serious things, you practise what you have learned from the stories but do not say them out loud (4). The advice or the moral of the story becomes experience that is part of your body (5). Once in your head, “when it comes to real life,” you could think about the story and apply it but would not necessarily say it or tell it yourself.

Yet she, with growing although still small numbers of others, is trying to understand and preserve the storytelling traditions. She found herself telling her daughter many stories, some traditional, some made up. And just like the elders' stories, these could be legends, actual truths or happenings (4). Some were “to be advised, but also [some were] lessons learned from those stories” (4). Meeka Mike told me several examples. One story is

traditional, about the sea-pigeon, which uses its own “poo” to keep itself warm in the winter (4): a story about the adaptations needed to survive. Another story was about a little bird, a husband and the nest: the little bird crash-lands “and the husband starts crying, and hurting to the point all the kids are crying ... The funny part is that it crash-lands! But if you crash-land, you’ll get a lot of yelling and screaming and have an effect on the younger ones” (1). A third story she had made up herself. It was about her daughter and how there was a ladder ready for her, “[s]tep by step [she told her daughter], but you like to go this way,” to rush and to go around (2). There are also stories to “make you think on how sometimes things can come back around. ... It can help you plan ahead or, mostly to be nice to other people” (3).

At the same time, stories will have a different impact depending on the upbringing of the tellers and listeners (9); you cannot generalize. The important thing is that “the stories give the person or child a chance to think about what’s in the story,” so they become investigative and creative (9). The listener has to figure it out for him or herself (9), and the teller has to let the listener pick up whatever they can from the story. The story has to make available something that the listener can turn into their own experience and “take ownership” of (10). This process is the same for adults as it is for children, and Meeka Mike spoke of the healing power of stories to bring together separated generations, especially the generations that were sent to residential schools from the 1950s to 1970s (10–11). In her perception the stories are told when people are “well, and in tune, and not destructive” (14).

When I asked about the possible gendered division of storytelling and social change, Meeka Mike reiterated the perceptions of the elders: men do tell stories, “even the same stories,” but with a different approach and a different application, for example, to hunting (7). As a businesswoman taking tourists hunting and fishing, Ms. Mike said she spends a lot of time with men and learns so much even from one little story because “the words are so specific and have very good meaning ... [so] you bring out all kinds of subjects out of it” (12). She pointed out that while many children nowadays spend a lot of time with their mothers and do probably get more stories from them (7), it depends on the parents. She, for example, spent a lot of time with her father, who taught her hunting and told her stories (13).

She firmly argued that you cannot separate the social changes effected by men and women because those changes will involve everybody. But women do get together over sewing, cleaning skins, helping each other out. When they talk among themselves you can “note how a way creates a trend and the way it goes to the political level” (8), but not through lobbying. If there is a unity or consensus the politician comes to understand it because political leaders are in the community and in a small community you know who is trustworthy or not, who is knowledgeable (8). If they are, they get

elected. In the new Nunavut government, MTAs have to spend more time away *from* the community but they are least from the community. Ms. Mike suggested that the personal invocations I had frequently found in Hansard, especially in the comments that emerge in “Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery” such as “I would like to thank so and so’s sister . . .,” subtly indicate that you have first-hand experience. Therefore it is still important to indicate as an MTA who you are, what your context is and that you have experience. If this parallels a feature of the storyteller, more difficult for me is how the “listener,” the individual in a much larger public, responds. After all, government decisions are not stories. They do not leave things up to you.

### *One-word Stories*

That subtle recognition of “experience” was analogous to a number of comments made by both Meeka Kilabuk and Meeka Mike. When the latter was speaking of learning from hunter’s stories, she told of one story from North Baffin, with a particular word for a kind of “coldness” specific to Iglulik. The word had gone out of use, so we can only guess at its precise meaning, but it indicated a situated context that made sense of the story (14). Meeka Kilabuk pursued her story of the beluga whales to describe how the fisheries’ vocabulary of “stock,” “pod” and “harvest” gave the “wrong words” for the Inuit thinking about hunting whales. For her it was important to use Inuktitut because “it conveys a different way of life, different meanings.” The drafting of the report was partly done in Edmonton where their advisor was, and words became difficult simply because of geographical dislocation. As an example of the specificity of words, she concluded with the following story about *ajurnarmat*:

[S]ay your husband is coming but bad weather stops him: and you are disappointed because your whole heart was set for that day, are you going to cry? make everyone miserable? My mother says “that’s how the cookie crumbles,” it can’t be helped. And this helped with comfort: don’t even be disappointed, spare yourself: *ajurnarmat*.

I was struck by how often my translator Lizzie Karpik would stop to ask an elder the meaning of a word that had been used. This also happens throughout the published Iqaluit interviews in *Interviewing*. Every so often the interviewers, translator and elder would stop to discuss different words, words that were indistinguishable to the questioner but distinct to the elder. For example, Elisapee Ootoova was asked about the distinction between *siqqitiqtuq* (the right path) and *siqqitirniq* (conversion), and whether the former was related to *siqqatiqtuq* (wetting with water). She was insistent on the specific meanings:

EO: if we’re on land, we’re on land. If we go on the shore into the water, I would say *siqqippugut*. When they leave an old way of life that way, it’s *siqqitiqtuq*, going on the right path.



Q: Was that different from *saaqiaqtuq*?

EO: It's not the same word. (56)

Or there was Paniaq's story about "that which remains undisclosed," which is *anngiaqaqtuviniq* (58). Or Ootoova's description of "healing... to get rid of their pain... letting go of their wrong doings," which is *aniattunik* (59).

Meeka Mike, when asked directly about the potential power of stories to offer context in political discussions, said, "We're using words now, Inuit words, in certain strategies that the government publish[es] to be used in the next five years, instead of stories. And that, right away, gives what kind of direction this is going to be" (14). Her example was *Toomeet*, the Inuktitut word for "gathering" that is also the name of the new parliamentary building. She said that people could now relate to the place of government because it was a recognisable word. I suggested that this made words into "one-word stories," and she agreed, saying that there was a word, "scalpin," that described a kind of person who could be understood through a story she had forgotten; she knew what behaviour the word referred to, but did not remember the story. At that point her father entered the house, and she asked him about the story, and translated his words as follows.

Boat, the fish, the char and the scalpin. The scalpin was a man who married a fish and they got told, "You won't be able to get up the river, so don't marry her. You won't be able to follow, even if she becomes your wife. So, don't marry her." So, when the time came to go up the river for the winter, the scalpin couldn't go up, couldn't make it.

And the scalpin's excuse was that he keeps slipping from the, you know, the saliva-like stuff that comes out of the fish, that leaves it on the rock or it scrapes off on the rock? But the terms used were, "I can't get up, because of the mucus of that female. So I can't make it up the rock."

It's a long story, he says. It's a good one, a funny one. (14-15)

The scalpin is a type of fish caught by the Inuit along the shoreline, and is rather slimy with a spiny head. The mucus it slips on may not be hers but his own. There are many ways of listening to this story, as I have found out from the number of people who have offered re-tellings in the course of producing this essay. The point is that if someone is referred to as "scalpin," the word involves them in the story the listener tells to themselves, and from which they arrive at quite particular knowledge about that person. The knowledge may not be what the teller of the original story intended nor accurate with regard to the person called "scalpin," but it informs the world of the listener and provides them with a basis for action.

The process demonstrates the way a rhetorical device can work within the situated textuality of traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge is

recognized by communities as knowledge that people can learn in a situated manner. It may or may not be generated by individuals who have "intention," but it is time, and the way time weaves texts into tradition, that defines its ability to provide a textuality that engages the listener in identifying how they are involved in the constitution of recognized significance and difference, of situated knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

The research I intended to do was concerned with the way women in Nunavut used stories to effect social change. What I learned about was a more specific understanding of the perspective of several women largely from one community, Panniqtuuq, on the work of stories and their relation to social and political change. I was, and am, committed to describing the various textualities that can communicate situated knowledge. What I learned was an enormous amount about the engaged rhetoric of learning tacit knowledge, which offered insights into the rhetorical structures of traditional knowledge. Situated knowledge throws forward the condition of all knowledge (whether or not it is acknowledged), that it is partial and always in the process of change, and constructs social relations on these terms. The stories told by the Inuit recounted here deal with a wide spectrum of knowledge, from information to wisdom to belief. In the first part of this paper I explored the ways in which stories depend on a rhetorical stance that makes evident the particularities for all of these areas, and paid special attention to the experience of the teller and the way the listener makes the story their own. In the latter part of this paper I looked at the way stories were once used for social change, and questioned why they are not more a part of the new political discourse of Nunavut, particularly at government level.

There are few if any stories told in Hansard, probably because they are not a conventional political discourse; there may be a perception that stories would expose the parliament to ridicule. The average MTA may be from the generations sent away for schooling and may not have the ongoing experience of storytelling as a way of knowing. More important, even if there are elements in the MTAs' speeches of an awareness of how to construct the teller, who is the listener? And most fundamental, there is the urgency of time in establishing a functioning government that militates against the time needed for telling stories. The possibility of incorporating a rhetoric of story into public communication is not a matter of empowering people excluded from government. The current work of politicians in Nunavut speaks to inclusive participation. What it could effect, though, is the raising of awareness of issues resistant to the speed and the oppositional structure of debate. It could make possible a more democratic humanism as the basis for social change, so that people could participate on the terms of traditional knowledge as well as of liberal rhetoric.

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At the centre of most of these interviews, despite an awareness of the current inappropriateness of storytelling for Western/southern-style government, is the belief that stories engage an audience, involve them in communal exchange and responsibility that is at the heart of social change woven into engaged ethics. If Nunavut politics and the social change it effects are to avoid becoming directive and authoritative, and to avoid the enclosed or oppositional structures of normative “southern” politics that proceed on self-evident bases, it could think about rhetorical strategies to put into place a teller–listener relationship. As already noted there are Inuk lifestyle elements in government. Several MTAs spoke with approval of the activities of drum dancing and lighting of the *qilliq* incorporated into the first Rankin Inlet session, so there may be room for more. Furthermore, MTAs are not party-based but community-based, hence not automatically oppositional as are the debate-led structures of many Western nation-states. The sessions are televised and perhaps an imaginative use of television-response potential could put into place at least one “listener’s” strategy. Possibly, the government could encourage participation by elders in a parallel structure: there is no “senate,” but all government benefits from experience. If the territory is to remember not only the urgency but also the “other time,” the longer term needed to sustain a modern Inuk lifestyle past the present moment, it could make good use of that experience and of the vibrant cultural practice of storytelling.

Teller and listener have to work initially from common ground. Without some common ground the listener would not bother to listen and certainly could not make a story appropriate to their own life. Nor could they assess the experience of the teller, or value the knowledge they were learning. In rhetorical terms, though, working from common ground can lead to enclosed mindsets; it can be used to reinforce the stereotypical and conventional representation. Furthermore, even when common ground is disagreed upon, it may simply lead to an oppositional response, an agonistic fight that always leaves either the teller or the listener at a disadvantage or wounded. What this exploration of storytelling demonstrated to me was that something else was going on: the teller and listener effectively constitute an event where there is a subtle negotiation between the context of each. They find common ground, but the textuality also points out differences; indeed, it constructs those differences and situates them in different places. Yet because the differences have been constructed in the course of negotiating, each learns why they are there, how they come about, where they stand in relation to the other’s difference; indeed, each makes the difference from the other. It is an engaged rhetorical stance that is neither authoritative nor relativist. The storytelling is embedded in a long-term rhetoric that sustains a community with change through the construction and valuing of differences.

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## Notes

1. Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans W. Moore and P. Cammack (London: Verso, 1985) 113. Mouffe and Laclau use the word “articulation” in a manner different to my own because they locate its work within “discourse,” and seem unconcerned with any activity that occurs outside of hegemony. However, on pages 135–36, they seem to allow for both “antagonism” and “articulation” to occur without hegemony.
2. All interviews were obtained through Nunavut Research Institute Licence 0101900N-A. The page numbers refer to the pages in the transcriptions of the tapes I made. These are available for viewing on application to the interviewee concerned. Part of the research was made possible by a grant from the Canadian Studies Faculty Research Program (UK) and the Canadian Studies Centre at the University of Leeds.
3. These interviews were established through introductions by Peter Kulchyski who was running the Trent University summer school in Panniqtuuq (in its fourth year). The interviews were subject to the regulations of the research licence, and each interview was paid for. The interviewees spoke Inuktitut and translator Lizzie Karpik conducted simultaneous translation between that language and English. Karpik was also paid the suggested rate, and was responsible for translating the finished transcripts and this article back to the interviewees for their critique and comments. The interviews were conducted in the homes of the interviewees at times of their choosing. I explained that I was a researcher from the University of Leeds in England, and that I was interested in hearing their views on if and why they told stories, and whether stories might be effective for social change. The one exception to this process was the collective meeting at the Angmarlik Centre in Panniqtuuq, to which eight elders in the community came. All were paid the suggested rate, and my questioning and the translation followed the main pattern.
4. These interviews were conducted in English without the presence of a translator and were paid for at the advised rate. The interviewees were sent copies of the transcripts and of this article for their critique and comments.
5. Because the interviewees were translated simultaneously, the transcripts sometimes read in the first person and sometimes in the third depending on whether the translator performed direct translations (first person) or reported translations (third person, such as “She says ...”). Quotations remain faithful to the transcripts.
6. See the Cambridge University Press series, *Learning in Doing: Social, Cognitive & Computational Perspectives*, especially books published in the last five years, for other perspectives.
7. Although “obedience” is part of the word, see *Interviewing*, “If she listened, then she wasn’t abused” (25).
8. This experience is recounted independently by several non-Inuit listeners to storytelling, including D. Eber, *When the Whalers Were Up North: Inuit Memories for the Eastern Arctic* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1989) 170–71.
9. Peter Kulchyski identified these as two of the key “Six Gesture” in a lecture of that name given to the Panniqtuuq summer course in 2000.
10. To some extent I have been guided by the four categories opened out by Louise Profeit-Leblanc (2002), here and later in the essay.

11. A Quickstop is a general store, usually with a fast food counter providing conventional/southern fast food.
12. The summer course was organized by Peter Kulchyski of Trent University. It was in its fifth year in 2000, and is currently run by Professor Kulchyski as part of his current work for the University of Manitoba. Students in the course live alongside the community of Panniqtuuq for six weeks, taking courses and working with various members of the community. They also go on a ten-day visit to one of the camps to learn about living with the land.
13. See Jim Cheney, "The Moral Epistemology of Indigenous Stories," *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 7:2, 181–88, for comments on rocks and humans.
14. The delineation runs parallel with a comment from Louise Profeit-Leblanc (2002) on the concept of stories being "responsibly true." Jim Cheney reports a conversation with Profeit-Leblanc during which she uses the term "'t i anc oh' (usually glossed as 'what they say, it's true') and defined as as meaning 'correctly true,' 'responsibly true' (a 'responsible truth'), 'true to what you believe in,' 'what is good for you and the community' and 'rings true for everybody's well-being,' in "Sacred Land," in Jickling 1996.
15. The one formal occasion on which I did so was at the Angmaarlik Centre, and, appropriate to my own gender position, in a mixed group of men and women. I have also included a few of the many oral histories by men that I have read in the discussion above.
16. C. Geddes, in a 1996 panel discussion by Yukon First Nations people on the topic "What is a good way to teach children and young adults to respect the land?" In Jickling 1996, 32–48.
17. For a fuller discussion on the differences in ethical power between the oral and the written see E. Levinas (1961) *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (Duke University Press, 1969), for example, 213.
18. See J. Mansbridge, "Using Power/Fighting Power: The Polity," in S. Benhabib (ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) for pragmatic suggestions on how these have been implemented in other locations.

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