CHAPTER 21

ATSUNAI ("BE STRONG")
Inuit women's leadership in Labrador

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Leadership in Labrador Inuit society has been the focus of much research over the past two centuries. Missionaries and scholars have discussed the role of individual male leaders, *katimât* (men's meetings), and *angakkuit* (shamans) – mostly male – in pre-settlement camps (Kleivan 1966; Taylor 1968, 1974). In studies on Moravian Inuit society, they have examined the function of Inuit chapel servants, elected *AngajokKauKatiget* councils ("men meeting together"), and the male church elders of the Moravian Church (Brice-Bennett 1981; Evans 2013; Jenness 1967; Kleivan 1966; Peacock 1963). More recently, academics have explored the dynamics of modern government, from the community councils founded in the 1970s to the Nunatsiavut Government established in 2005 (Brantenberg 1977; Procter 2012; Procter and Chaulk 2013). Although these modern institutions are not explicitly gendered, since the 1970s, most of the elected Inuit officials in northern Labrador have been male. The leadership of Inuit men has been well established and well examined. The role that Inuit women play as leaders, on the other hand, has not garnered the same attention.

This chapter aims to contribute to this conversation by exploring Inuit women's leadership in Labrador, as described by Inuit. By listening to a collection of tributes made by Nunatsiavummiut about inspirational women in their lives, we examine how Inuit understand and value the role of female leaders in Labrador Inuit society today. As we shall see, this collective narrative depicts a distinct style of leadership that differs fundamentally from both the historical descriptions of Inuit leaders and mainstream society's individualized and institutional ideal.

DAUGHTERS OF MIKAK: CELEBRATING INUIT WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN LABRADOR

In 2014, women in Nunatsiavut proposed a project to document the leadership roles of Inuit women in Labrador. Charlotte Wolfrey of Rigolet, among others, noted that while many women have had a tremendous impact, most had not been publicly acknowledged. Charlotte worked with Andrea Procter to organize the Daughters of Mikak[1] project through the SSHRC-funded research partnership, *Tradition and Transition Among the Labrador Inuit*. They created an advisory group of women

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that included us (Beverly Hunter, Peggy Andersen, and Tracy Ann Evans-Rice), and over the course of a year, we encouraged people throughout Labrador to record digital stories about inspirational Inuit women in their lives. People were free to decide whom to celebrate, as well as to decide on the content of their stories. We recorded their tribute, and then we made digital stories by combining the audio with photographs. Much of coastal Labrador had slow internet at the time, so the relatively small digital files made the stories accessible online. The digital stories are posted on the Daughters of Mikak Facebook site and have enjoyed many thousands of views and shares.[2]

The 44 digital stories that were created are each unique, but together, they provide a strikingly coherent portrait of a distinct type of leadership. While a few of the women featured are prominent figures in Labrador who have worked in the political or public sphere, many more are women whose names may not be recognizable to those outside their own communities. They represent all ages and professions, but all of them have impacted those around them significantly.

By listening to the stories, we are able to examine how people in Labrador see Inuit women's leadership. The narrators of these digital stories made conscious decisions about which characteristics and experiences to bring to the foreground when celebrating these inspirational women. So what have they chosen to highlight? As tributes, the stories focus on the admirable and the ideal, but they nonetheless present a full and complex description of leadership. In this chapter, we analyze the narratives thematically by examining the content for common themes (Riessman 2008). We have tried to include almost complete transcripts of the stories, in order to appreciate the full storyline of the narrative. We have also tried to incorporate as many stories as possible to build a comprehensive picture of Inuit women's leadership, as understood and as celebrated by Labrador Inuit themselves/ourselves.

We will start with three stories. The first is told by Charlotte Wolfrey of Rigolet:

> I wanted to write a piece on a lady that had a great influence on my life as a child growing up in Rigolet. I want to honour a woman who is now deceased who deserves a part of her story to be told.
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> Her name is Eva Palliser, an Inuk lady who lived all of her life practicing her culture, traditions and lifestyle. In addition to raising her children, I had the privilege of tagging along on many of their going out on the land expeditions. I remember being able to go with them for sometimes weeks at a time to hunt seals in the spring, to hunt ducks and geese in the fall.
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> … I was as free as a bird when I was with Eva and her family, I can't remember having to help with chores, I could play as long as I wanted, I learned to do things by watching. We would just watch her cleaning seal skins, preparing meat for supper, picking ducks, cleaning and drying fish. She was in her element, never complaining, always grateful and to me, it seemed that her husband and children and their wellbeing was all that mattered. And I guess some little girl who wanted to tag along and be a part of their lives.
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> One thing funny that I would like to share is this, like I said I used to speak Inuktitut when I was small and especially when I was with Eva and her family.

> It was in the spring of the year and we were over to a place called Kanijuk. We were all in tent in the evening and a big mosquito was buzzing around. I yelled "*tika, tika*" and I realized I never knew what a mosquito was in Inuktitut so I said "nipperee!" Everyone laughed hard and from then on we all called mosquitoes "nipperee."
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> … She was kind, she was patient, she was strong, and with all those big traits she stood a mere four foot ten if she stood that tall. This was a woman who had her own family, who had very little earthly possessions and absolutely no money (like everyone else at the time) yet she still made room for me in her boat, in her tent, in her life in every way. Nakummek Eva, *nulligivagit* or in Rigolet style, *nugligivagiit*.

The second story is from Sandra Dicker of Nain:

> When I was growing up, the most important Inuit woman in my life was my mom. Her name is Jessie Wyatt. She was born in Hebron and she had three daughters. She had a lot of patience … She's very kind, she taught us how to be good members in the community. She was a teacher. She got her degree in education. She taught in Inuktitut.
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> … She helped in our community by always being there to help others. If there was a tragedy, she always made sure she had time for those families who were suffering … I remember her always bringing leftovers to our neighbours, little small gestures she always did what she could to help other people. She has influenced my life in instilling qualities in me as a parent, like to be a good mom. She taught me that family is always first, so … to be kind to people, to take care of people that you love, and to help others who aren't so fortunate, and to just always make sure that your children know they are very loved by you.

The third story is from Nancy Ikkusek of Nain, who talked about her mother, Jenny Ikkusek:

> My mother was the most important. I found her really special. She was always kind, and she always shared whatever she wanted to with other people that were hungry, or needed help. She would always share whatever she had with other people, and she cared about people. She always sewed, she knew how to sew. Before Christmas, she would always make our sealskin boots – a lot of time they were white-bottomed boots – and she would make our clothes with a sewing machine. She would make our dresses and our coats.
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> She was important to me because she taught me right from wrong, and she said, she always used to say, would you like to be treated like that? And she would say it in Inuktitut, and that would make me think that if I did something bad, I wouldn't want someone to do that to me.
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> I found she helped the community because she always helped people and she always tried to be there for everyone, and she cared what happened to the other person …. She improved my life because I tried to do what she used to do in all – I try to share what I can with low-income families, and I try to listen or see who's hurting because that's what she would do.

These three stories share some common themes about the women's traits: their generosity to others, their ability to connect people in their community, and their patience. The women all have a strong awareness of how those around them are doing, and a quick willingness to care for others when needed. In being acutely aware of others, they situate themselves in a social web of mutual responsibility towards family, neighbors, and community. They also influence others by modeling caring and moral behavior.

These social traits have a long history in Labrador. Moravian missionaries, who had arrived in the region in the 1770s, were constantly frustrated by the Inuit insistence on sharing food, materials, and labor with each other, and felt that such widespread generosity conflicted with their attempts to instill Protestant ethics of industry, providence, and frugality (Brice-Bennett 1990). The anthropological literature about Inuit society likewise echoes the importance of sharing and generosity as fundamental practices across Inuit Nunangat (Bodenhorn 2000; Wenzel 2000). Inuit women, as the ones who often are in charge of preparing and sharing food, actively create and strengthen social networks of interdependence (Bodenhorn 1990). These social networks connect almost everyone in Inuit communities through relationships based on kinship, fostering, friendship, Moravian church institutions, and "fictive kinship" such as namesakes, ritual sponsors, and midwives (Bennett and Rowley 2004; Damas 2002; Guemple 1988; Maggo 1999). In being sensitive to the needs of others within these social networks and spontaneously offering help, the women in the Daughters of Mikak stories demonstrate two closely connected core Inuit values: *nalli* (*nagli*, *naklik*) and *isuma* (*ihuma*). Jean Briggs' (1970) work on Inuit socialization has defined *nalli* (or love, nurturance) as the motivation for taking care of the ill, helping others, or adopting orphans, for instance. *Isuma* (or the ability to reason) is the defining feature of adultness (Briggs 1970). When a person has developed *isuma*, he or she acts with self-restraint and thoughtfulness. "Well-socialized persons were keenly aware of others," as Wim Rasing (1994, 113) notes in his work with Inuit in Igloolik.

Many other stories echo these themes, including Caroline Nochasak's tribute to her grandmother, Sarah Nochasak:

> She's always willing to help, no matter what. My *anânsiak* Sarah always had room in her home for family members and children, and loved them as her own, including me … Being able to love everyone, no matter what, and being willing to help people just like that.

Miriam Brown also tried to help people in her community by acting as a foster parent and by being involved in many initiatives:

> She was instrumental in so many things, with the women's group, helping getting the daycare started … She was an *Illusivut* [Inuit lifeskills program] teacher for the school, she was a midwife, she was involved with our Nain choir. Everything she did in life was an achievement, and she excelled at whatever it was she did.
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> She was not educated and she didn't mind saying that, but she never let that get in the way. She always pushed herself to do things that other people were afraid to do. She was a humble woman, and when you look at it now, everything

was kind of quiet, like whenever there was stuff that was happening that she should be recognized for, it just passed. She was happy to just let it pass, no matter how big an achievement or hard work she did …

She was a foster parent, traditionally. Back in the day, there was a lot of people who, some of them had families who were too big, and so a lot of families couldn't take care of each other, so some of them would just go to live with other people in the community. There was a lot of people who would do this – it was a way of life. And so there was some people, and they'd go and live with *Anânsiak*. I didn't know that they lived with her, because a lot of the time, this happened before my time, cause they're all older people, and they'd be on the road – "Hey, mom," "Hi, mom!" And to auntie, "Hi, sis!" [I would ask,] "Is that our family??" "No. They went to live with mom years ago." And I'd be like, "Gee, there's a whole other side to *Anânsiak's* life that I didn't know about!" She took a lot of people in. A lot of times, it was because of hard times, and families help each other out in times of need. So she was really good that way.

Fran Williams recalled how her grandmother, Kitora Boase (see Figure 21.1), took care of her and taught her similar values:

My grandparents had a lot of influence on me. They taught me patience, to love the land, to be good to other people. They used to *KaKak*[3] me all the time. She always used to make my tea in the morning although I was old enough to make it myself.

Similarly, Gwen Watts admired how her mother, Beatrice Watts, always tried to support people:

Figure 21.1 Kitora Boase, Hopedale. Photo used with permission of Nigel Markham.

> What I noticed about Mom was that she always had a kind word and the time to chat with people. She was the type of person who lifted people up. She didn't put people down, she didn't go around gossiping or saying mean things. She always saw the good in people. She always wanted to be there for people … She was really always aware of other people … She focused on the good in people, and brought out the best in people … When I think of my mother, I remember the love.

The women's commitment to their community is unmistakable. They are admired for their willingness to become involved, to help, and to develop positive relationships with the people around them. As Joe Dicker and Mary Adelaide say about their mother, Mary Dicker: "Most of all, I think, it was her involvement in the community." Jessie Wyatt taught her family "how to be good community members," and Fran Williams observed that people see being a community member as an important type of leadership:

> Mrs. [Sybilla Pamak] Nitsman I admired too, because she was really good at crafts, and she was a good community person, everybody looked up to her. She was really involved in the church. Those days it was so much being involved in the church, either through community elders, or in the choir. Not so much being a leader. But being a community member, involved in those types of things.

Good community members are much admired. The participants in this project celebrated women who "are always willing to help, no matter what," whether or not this involved a public or political role. A research team led by Kirk Dombrowski recently explored how Inuit in the northern Labrador town of Nain rely on these community leaders to provide assistance. Using social network analysis, the research illustrated how almost everyone in the community was connected through reciprocal sharing networks, and identified key individuals who acted as central sources of food, housing, employment, advice, and other supports (Dombrowski et al. 2013).

LEADERSHIP THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS AND ROLE MODELING

When we were developing the Daughters of Mikak project, the advisory group felt that Inuit women would not feel comfortable talking about themselves, so we decided to ask people to make digital stories about inspirational women instead. Given the importance of humility in Inuit society, people often do not want to appear boastful or pretentious (Briggs 1974; McGrath 1997). Inuit socialization has traditionally focused on learning self-restraint and sensitivity towards others as a way of maintaining group harmony (Briggs 1970; Condon 1992). Boasting about one's accomplishments is seen as immature, as it potentially highlights the relative failure of others and triggers aggression.

This reluctance to call attention to one's successes was extended to others in the Daughters of Mikak tributes. Most narrators did not list the women's personal achievements, perhaps in order not to embarrass them or provoke envy; instead, they described how the women impacted others. Their stories highlight relationships and the positive influence of the women on the narrators and on others. By embodying and displaying good values, the women acted as role models and indirectly

taught others how to behave. Julie Dicker, for instance, outlined the influence that her grandmother, Sue Harris, has had on her by demonstrating impressive mental and physical strength:

> Hi, I'm Julie Dicker, and I'm from Nain, Nunatsiavut. Another inspirational Inuit woman to me would be my Ma, Sue Harris, and she's my mom's mom.
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> When I think of my Ma, I think of her as a pillar of kindness, a pillar of truth, and a pillar of strength, because no matter what happens in her life or in her family's life, it could be a time of celebration, it could be a time of hardships, it could be a time of triumphs, it could be times of tragedy, there could be good times, bad times, ugly times, but no matter what happens, she kind of rides the waves right on through, and comes out standing on top as if nothing happened – it's just like normal.
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> She always keeps herself grounded, and she remains steadfast and true to everything. No matter what happens, she never strays far from her normal. Always very grounded.
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> Being true to herself and to everyone else around her is important. Growing up, say we – or even now, say we do something wrong, or something she knows isn't right. She'd be the first one to tell us that, "Okay, don't do that, that just isn't right. You got to do it the right way."
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> Just an example of how strong she is … [Julie describes how Sue fell and broke her hip but did not get medical help immediately]. And when she [finally] walked in to see the orthopedic specialist, she walked into his office, and he looked at her and he said, "She's walking?!? That woman must be made of nails!" Because all that time, for like a week and a half or two weeks, her hip had been fractured! So my Ma, Sue Harris, is one strong woman who never gives up.

Sue is inspirational because of the strength that she demonstrates in so many ways – in persevering through pain, but also in maintaining equanimity in difficult times, in ensuring that those around her act with integrity, and in being courageous enough to speak up against wrongdoing. These characteristics are reflected in Jean Briggs' research into the central role of *isuma* in Inuit society. As she describes, the ideal person in Inuit society is defined as being protective, helpful, generous, and even-tempered (Briggs 1970, 323). A mature adult should demonstrate rationality, control over impulsive behavior, and an ability to respond to problems calmly. Similarly, Wim Rasing's (1994) research with Iglulingmiut highlights how self-control and equanimity formed the basis of social control.

Despite the value placed on equanimity and self-control, Inuit leaders are not unassertive. Instead, the ability to exercise restraint can result in measured, thoughtful, and candid advice (Bennett and Rowley 2004). The Daughters of Mikak narrators see courage in women who reprimand others for their wrongdoings. Like Sue Harris, Eva Palliser also had the courage to speak the truth, as her granddaughter, Carlene Palliser recounted, and she found her strength by being grounded in her culture and identity:

> She wasn't ashamed of their language. It was a large part of who she was and where she came from. Being there through all the changes in the culture and

> language, she never lost who she was. She always spoke the truth, even it if was something that someone didn't want to hear or agree with.

A similar image of strength permeates Tyler Edmunds' tribute to his grandmother, Silpa Sillett Edmunds:

> One of the strongest memories that I have of my grandmother, she was very tenacious, she was very strong, she always spoke her mind – she was very blunt. If there were any injustices, anything she felt wasn't fair, she would be the first to speak out against it, and she would invest all of her time and energy into ensuring that she did what she could to try to rectify that, to try to fix it. Right until her dying day, she had that passion, that energy to try to speak out against injustices.
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> And she always said, the well-being of the Inuit was always of the biggest importance to her. It was a very beautiful thing. She always spoke out for what mattered, and what was important to her – her culture, her family, and her communities … I just remember her as being a fighter, and I always respected that. I think anyone who came across her respected her for being that as well.
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> She spoke Inuktitut … [It] was a vital piece of who she was. She was very passionate about the language, and she was a very strong advocate … She was one of the individuals who fought for the language, and fought for the language's rights.
>
> I was energized and I got a bit of passion from my grandmother for the need to pursue the language. And anytime that she would see that I had some interest in the language, she would throw herself behind it, 100 percent. You could see it in her eyes, when something was pronounced just right! She would become so proud. It's definitely one of my fonder memories, just that little connection that you would have in that moment, just sharing the language, and having that little bond.

Beatrice Watts was also fiercely outspoken about issues that impacted her community:

> She was an advocate on so many levels. She certainly fought all the time for anything to do with Inuit, and making sure that Inuit were treated fairly. And also that went for women, and Labradorians in general … I think of my mother as a kind, patient woman, but when she thought that people were being treated unfairly or that there was some injustice or prejudice, she became angry and she spoke up … She wouldn't stand for anything that put down other people, particularly based on race, and she always stood up. So in general, kind and patient, but with injustices, she had a steel backbone, I tell you.

In speaking up, however, Beatrice Watts did not aim to position herself as better than others or as an individual who stood out from the crowd. She "didn't like being praised up or made to be wonderful," Gwen Watts said. In the same way, Ruth Flowers "wasn't looking for rewards," recalled her daughter, Sharon Edmunds. "She wasn't looking for praise or admiration. She was just trying to make people's lives better. She didn't want any acknowledgment or fanfare – that wasn't her. She knew she made a difference." Miriam Brown also did not want accolades for her work:

Figure 21.2 Miriam Brown, Nain. Photo used with permission of Candace Cochrane.

"She was a humble woman, and when you look at it now, everything was kind of quiet, like whenever there was stuff that was happening that she should be recognized for, it just passed. She was happy to just let it pass, no matter how big an achievement or hard work she did." Again, humility is a much-admired trait in these tributes, echoing Steenhoven's (1962) description of an Inuit leader in the central Arctic: "Everything he did was done quietly and without pretensions but with natural poise and dignity" (cited in Bennett and Rowley 2004, 96). One's positive impact on others is what is important, not the praise that might come with it (see Figure 21.2).

EMBODYING STRENGTH AND CREATING STRENGTH IN COMMUNITY

A broad definition of strength seems to tie the Daughters of Mikak stories together. These women embody physical and mental strength in their perseverance, courage, and ability to remain composed, patient, and humble in the face of challenges. They also create strength in others by binding people together, helping those in need, and inspiring others to follow their lead. The narrators' shared experiences with the women, whether through speaking Inuktitut together, as Tyler and Silpa did, or spending time together on the land, as Charlotte and Eva did, create bonds and memories. In their tributes, the narrators identified these memories and shared cultural experiences as giving them strength in their own lives. Joanne Voisey of Makkovik, for instance, illustrated how her grandmother's example gives her strength to overcome her own challenges:

> Ever since I've been a little girl, I've really looked up to my grandmother, my mother's mother, Rhoda Voisey. I've picked my grandmother because to me, she

> is a woman of great strength and courage … My grandfather passed away, and my grandmother raised her children on her own. She didn't remarry, so she had to work hard in a time when there wasn't a lot of modern conveniences and she had to do a lot of hard work on her own. She had to provide for her children outside of the home, she had to work, as well as do everything that you'd have to do to raise a family of 10 children … I feel her influence in my life. I can see it in the lives of my family and in my mother, as she goes through her own struggles and needs to persevere – I can see that strength from my grandmother in her and in her being. I can feel her influence in my life as I pursue my education degree, and I know that when I go through hard times, or I'm struggling with things, trying to raise my children, that I draw on the strength of my grandmother. I hope that if I can be even a shadow of a woman that she is, that I will have achieved a great thing in my life as a Labrador woman.

Salome Jararuse from North West River identified her mother's strength as one of her most admirable qualities. She described how Selma developed this strength by experiencing times of hardship:

> My mother, Selma Jararuse, is one of the most inspiring women that I know. I've heard stories of her past, and the trials and triumphs that she has went through as a women growing up in the community of Nain. She went through a lot of abuse, a lot of very negative things, but still to this day, she's very strong, she's very resilient, she's very happy-go-lucky. She has a lot of wisdom, and a lot of knowledge.
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> She's the rock of our family, she keeps us all together. She makes us stick together – she's very keen on that. Family is a very big thing to her. She likes to keep us all together and to lean on each other, to make sure we're always there for each other, to always love each other and to watch out for each other.
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> My mother has seven children and seven grandchildren … She has taught us how to be strong, how to overcome things. She's very strong in her culture. She's taught us, her family, and a lot of the community of Goose Bay, she's taught us a lot about our culture, and about keeping our traditions alive, and how to respect our culture.
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> My mother is somebody that takes things that happen to her and learns from them in order to better her life and to make her a happier person. That's another thing that I really love about her. She don't let her past or the negative things define her. She learns from it and moves on.
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> … She likes to participate in a lot of things in the community, to volunteer, to be a part of traditional things, and to mingle with people. It just brightens her up. You see it in her when she's around people and helping people. It really does good to her soul, I believe.
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> My mother, Selma, is one of the biggest role models that I know. She is somebody who always leaves a mark, no matter where she goes. She'll leave a mark wherever she's to. For that, I believe, she is very wise, very knowledgeable, very smart. I love her very much.

BECOMING STRONG

In going through difficult times, Salome celebrated how Selma emerged stronger and wiser. As she said, Selma does "not let the negative things define her." Instead, she learns, develops, and teaches others to do the same. Other stories also celebrate how the women have learned and changed through their life as they developed into someone that people now admire. The narrators focus on how people are dynamic – our characteristics are fluid and we are able to transform ourselves through life. Sharon Edmunds, for example, admired how Ruth Flowers developed a deep sense of responsibility towards others after going through hard times herself:

> She experienced a lot of difficulties in her life that led her down the path that she lived. One of the things that came from that was a real desire to try to help people … It came from not a good place, but it directed her on a path of forever being there, stepping forward, and helping people the best way she could.

Rosina Brown of Nain also outlined how Miriam Brown developed as a person:

> She made herself go places where other people were afraid to. She didn't mind taking that extra step. And she grew from that. I saw her process, how it evolved … All of this really made her blossom, and made her more sure of herself.

Jim Goudie described Shirley Goudie's "progression as a woman" in his tribute, as she transformed herself from being a fisher raising six children to becoming the town manager for Postville. "I had this impression of her – and I think most people would see her as a very loving woman, very kind – but someone who was physically and mentally just impressively strong." In a similar way, Jodie Lane admired how her grandmother, Mary E. Andersen, dealt with difficulties in her life, including treating her two-year-old son after he was mauled by dogs in Makkovik:

> Would I have been able to be as strong as my Gram? In the face of tragedy, would I have been able to stand up and do what was needed? She did. They all did. We are here because of those strong women who were resourceful, courageous, smart, and brave. They were heroes and we must continue to honour them. Let us be resourceful and courageous and smart and brave. Let us be like them. Strong and beautiful.

STRENGTH AND WISDOM THROUGH HARDSHIP

These stories celebrate strength. The women have gained strength in their lives by going through difficult times, and they continue to create strength in those around them. In paying close attention to how others are doing and helping when needed, they bind people together and strengthen the social fabric of their community. They give others strength by sharing experiences, often based around the Inuit language and cultural activities. They work to strengthen their community by speaking out,

correcting people's behavior, and tackling injustices, but without self-aggrandizement or appearing "proud," as they say in Labrador. By modeling generous, thoughtful, courageous, and persevering behavior, they inspire others to follow their example. They demonstrate how to confront difficult times with patience and equanimity, remaining grounded in their culture and identity.

These stories celebrate the strength and wisdom that come from experiencing difficulties, but the narrators do not describe those challenges in much detail, if at all. The Daughters of Mikak stories are almost universally positive and focused on celebrating the women's strengths, rather than dwelling on the hardships they have faced. The women are seen as role models rather than victims. This commitment to strength-based narrative and research was an important part of the project. Although we encouraged narrators to tell their stories as they wished, the goal of Daughters of Mikak was explicitly to honor the women in a positive light. As Tuck and Yang (2014, 231) argue, moving away from pain-based or victim research narratives towards desire-based narratives "does not deny the experience of tragedy, trauma, and pain, but positions the knowing derived from such experiences as wise."

Despite this emphasis on celebration, the social context of these stories and the challenges that the women have overcome are remarkable. In addition to the harsh physical environment and difficult living conditions of the region, Labrador Inuit have endured centuries of colonialism. Epidemics have torn families apart, relocations have evicted people from their lands, and foreign overfishing has destroyed local livelihoods (Brice-Bennett 2017; Budgell 2018). Residential schools and provincial education policies have resulted in a decline in people's proficiency in the Inuktitut language, and the child welfare system continues to separate families (Procter 2020). Intergenerational trauma and its resulting violence, substance abuse, suicide, and sexual abuse continue to plague many communities (Kavanagh 2019). All of these destructive and violent processes threaten to sever the connections between people, their families, and their communities. As Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, 28) argues, colonialism brings "complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with the world." Everyone in Labrador Inuit communities has been affected by these issues. But in these digital stories, the narrators have chosen to leave this context unspoken. The focus is firmly on the women who emerge as strong, inspirational leaders, and who demonstrate how to persevere and how to create strong, positive, and healthy communities.

Fran Williams' tribute to Kitora Boase is a prime example of this unspoken context. In her story, Fran does not mention that Kitora was a survivor of the Spanish flu epidemic in northern Labrador in 1918. Of the 263 people in her community of Okak, only 59 women and children survived the influenza outbreak (Budgell 2018, 209). After almost complete devastation, Okak was abandoned, and the 20-year-old Kitora moved with other survivors to Hopedale. Her new community witnessed her resiliency, as she rebuilt her life after the deeply traumatic experience. She became a strong role model for other women, opening her home and her heart to others, carrying on with day-to-day chores as needed, keeping up the traditions of craft-making, sewing, and cooking, and ensuring that family values were strong and visible. In her tribute, Fran describes how grateful she is for Kitora's kind nurturing, and for creating a home where Fran felt safe and loved. It is Kitora's impact on others that

is celebrated; her traumatic experiences may or may not be already known by the audience, but the devastating details are not shared. Instead, her strength and her influence on the community are the focus of the story.

RE-THINKING LEADERSHIP

Anthropologists and missionaries have historically understood Inuit leadership in Labrador to comprise solely of political or institutional roles, most of which were assumed by men. With an eye only for conflict management and power, they did not recognize non-hierarchical and non-authoritative roles as constituting leadership. But the mainstream definition of leaders as solitary, powerful, and competitive individuals is too narrow. As this chapter has illustrated, Inuit in Labrador employ a vastly different definition. The style of leadership that has emerged from the Daughters of Mikak narratives values community, relationships, and the strength of social networks over individual authority and acclaim. Amy Hudson, an Inuk scholar from NunatuKavut in southern Labrador describes how this decentralized form of leadership is prominent among Inuit of NunatuKavut:

> Leadership in governance … is not about the knowledge, power, or charisma demonstrated by a single leader (female or male). Rather, leadership can perhaps be best defined or recognized in those who are committed to shared knowledge and community and cultural preservation.
>
> (2020, 153)

In similar fashion, Indigenous scholars across Canada are challenging mainstream leadership theories, and highlighting instead the importance of relationships, responsibilities, and cultural values (Archuleta 2012; Pidgeon 2012).

Rather than understanding leadership as a quality that is reserved only for the elite few, the participants in the Daughters of Mikak project depict Inuit women's leadership as inclusive and accessible to anyone. While this project has centered on women's leadership, it does not exclude the possibility that men also assume this style of leadership. None of the tributes claimed that these roles were exclusive to women, and we did not pose the question. The cultural values that foster community solidarity, in fact, encourage everyone to assume these leadership roles. Leadership is shared rather than invested in a single authority figure. Inuit social organization is "inclusional (that is, calculated to pull people in)," as Guemple (1988, 146) observes, providing everybody with both membership and obligation. The importance of being generous and being mutually responsible for each other prompt people to act in the community's interest. At the same time, the cultural values of humility and patience discourage people from assuming too much authority over others or acting simply to gain recognition and acclaim. The importance of these values is apparent in the Daughters of Mikak project in the outpouring of admiration towards the women who embody them. At last count, Labradorians and other Canadians have watched the Daughters of Mikak digital stories over 150,000 times, and have shared them hundreds of times. These women and the roles they play have a profound impact on Inuit society, and Labradorians have been enthusiastic in their appreciation.

The stories told by Nunatsiavummiut through this project differ in some respects from the stories traditionally told by anthropologists. Anthropological research on Inuit social organization and socialization has focused on the combination of *ilira* (fear) and *nalli* (love, nurturance) in developing *isuma* (the ability to be rational) in children (Briggs 1970; 1998). By teaching young children that the people around them could be both loving and aggressive, they learn to be careful, uneasy, and controlled in their relations with others. Anthropologists have given much attention to *ilira* (fear) as a central controlling influence on Inuit behavior, often with the observation that the effectiveness of these traditional means of social control has crumbled with colonialism (see, for instance, Condon 1992; Rasing 1994). This focus on *ilira* and conflict management emphasizes restrictive power and the role of cultural values in inhibiting and restraining social behavior. In contrast, the Daughters of Mikak highlight the role of *nalli* (love, nurturance) in inspiring behavior and community solidarity. The narratives have an unwavering focus on positive influences and on the role of cultural values that support and strengthen social behavior. In dealing with the disruptive impacts of colonialism, these Inuit leaders foster values that encourage rather than limit as they aim to create positive change.

At their core, the Daughters of Mikak stories describe the women's strength in counteracting the fragmenting effects of colonialism. In the face of social challenges that threaten to tear communities and families apart, these Inuit leaders build relationships with those around them. They champion kindness, patience, humility, and strength, and emphasize relationships and responsibility over individual recognition. Many demonstrate courage by speaking up against injustice, and all have a fierce commitment to their communities. They are admired for their capacity to both learn and teach. They have learned and developed by experiencing hard times, and now act as role models for those who are going through the same thing. As leaders in the struggle against colonialism, these women heal fractured relationships by both modeling strength and strengthening others.

One hundred years ago, at the time of the Spanish Flu, the common Inuktitut greeting used in Labrador for goodbye was *atsunai* (Erdmann 1864). The word's literal translation takes on a new meaning in light of this discussion on women's leadership – "be strong," people told each other: "*Atsunai*."

NOTES

1 Mikak was an 18th-century Inuit woman whose leadership in negotiating with the Moravian Mission in Labrador has had lasting impacts. See https://www.facebook.com/DaughtersofMikak/videos/1735593536673054/

2 See www.facebook.com/DaughtersofMikak/ to view and listen to the digital stories.

3 Fran Williams defines *KaKak* as "a way of showing your love to a baby or a child with words that describe how much you love them – mimicking, loving words."

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