

*Chapter 5*

**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN A  
MODERN INUIT COMMUNITY**

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This chapter examines what happens to traditional means of solving interpersonal difficulties when Inuit move from small camps into large communities.<sup>1</sup> Such moves, though they alleviate, even solve, some of the problems of camp life, create others in their stead. To put the situation in the simplest—perhaps oversimple—terms, nomadic Inuit, moving into a settlement, exchange physical hardship and (relative) social ease for physical ease and social hardship. On the physical side, no matter how inadequate the diet in the settlement is felt to be, there is no longer need to fear starvation; no matter how inadequate the housing, it is always heated somehow; no matter how ill people get, there are nurses and doctors to tend them; and if one has no means of earning money, welfare will, no matter how inadequately, provide. But on the social side, a great many unfamiliar and difficult situations are now encountered. Uncertainties with which Inuit had established ways of dealing have been replaced by uncertainties that they do not know how to manage.

How are conflicts resolved under these new circumstances? What has survived of old methods, and how have old and new been adapted to one another? I begin by briefly outlining some old ways of keeping and restoring peace in hunting camps, and how those strategies worked. Then I describe the new situation in one Canadian Arctic settlement and suggest reasons why the old mechanisms cannot work in that context. Finally, I discuss an interesting new way of dealing with tension that is developing in the community—a new way that both embodies and carries forward some aspects of traditional strategies.

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### **In Nomadic Camps**

The aim of traditional conflict management was to keep social relations smooth. People had several ways of averting conflict before it could arise. They were reluctant to express personal wishes, except through the most indirect of hints or exaggeratedly playful jokes, which allowed others to "not hear" if they so chose. At the same time, they were acutely sensitive to hints and jokes and even subtler signs of the existence of another's need, and they took pains to anticipate and fulfill those wishes, so that it was rarely necessary to make a request. If, in exceptional circumstances, someone did ask for something, the wish was granted if at all possible; and if it was not possible, careful excuses were made.

Unhappiness, discontent, and irritation were kept to oneself or formulated as cheerful jokes, partly because unhappy people were considered dangerous. It was thought that such individuals might resort to aggression in the attempt to change their situation or overcome their dissatisfaction or unhappiness. Indeed, stories were told of people who had killed, or threatened to kill, in grief following an accidental death. Alliances could be dangerous, too, creating factions and escalating conflict by spreading it more widely, so people did not ask one another for support when they were at odds. In general, people did not interfere with one another's actions and did not try to influence or even inquire into each other's intentions, plans, or motives. Above all, they refrained from criticism, except under special circumstances, which will be described below.

On the very rare occasions when people argued or quarreled, bystanders remained silent or melted away altogether, rather than taking sides.<sup>2</sup> But in difficult cases, the community as a whole might delegate someone to lecture the troublemakers in a public forum, such as a campwide feast (Muckpah 1979), or the catechist might pray for them during a campwide church service.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, if the squabble was between children and was therefore not frightening, adults were likely to laugh, joke, and try to turn the dispute into play. Clearly, all these strategies were designed to defuse the conflict; to isolate it; if possible, to make play of it; and so to pacify the quarrelers.

One well-known and striking exception to the pattern of nonconfrontation in pre-Christian days was the song duel, but the ritualized confrontation of the song duel was at the same time an outstanding example of the same principles of indirection, denial of hostility, and pacification that governed nonconfrontational modes of dealing with conflict.<sup>4</sup> The song duel, like the public lecture, was resorted to in exceptionally troublesome cases, when the feelings of the antagonists ran too high to allow them to keep silent. In the duel, the two offended parties exchanged scathing songs while an amused audience looked on; but distance was

created between the antagonists, and between them and their conflict, by means of several devices. First, the contests were held during festive gatherings, and the songs were easily confused with the good-humored, playfully insulting songs that friendly joking partners directed at each other in the same gatherings. Moreover, the dueling songs never focused clearly on the conflict in all its particular, controversial detail. A successful song created a smoke screen through the use of irony—or the ambiguous appearance of irony—as well as metaphor and allusions. In short, the duel embedded conflict in an artistic form, isolated it within a ritualized context, concealed it behind irony and an ambiguity of genre, and at the same time publicized it by focusing the attention of the entire community on it. The festivity, the ambiguity, and the presence of an unaligned audience allowed the antagonists simultaneously to confront each other in a safe context and to avoid confrontation—or more precisely, to pretend they were not confronting.

Another salient characteristic of the song duel was that the singers were required to avoid argumentation and self-justification. A countering song was not a rebuttal or a defensive statement, which might have escalated the quarrel; it was instead a counterattack on some other subject. Thus, the conflict never took the form of a logically linked series of propositions, which could have built to a firm conclusion concerning "right" and "wrong," with its residue of disgruntled "loser," nor did it explode into an all-out battle between factions competing to have their version of truth recognized and to destroy the opposition. These would have been unbalanced solutions; at the end, some people would have "belonged" to the community more solidly than others. In a song duel, performances were judged not according to the righteousness of the case, but by their artistic quality. When the duel or the feast was over, the conflict was supposed to be over, too, and the offenders were (ideally) reincorporated fully into the community.

Notice, now, some of the consequences of traditional ways of managing social conflict. First, attention was paid to the needs of others, on the one hand, and care was taken not to interfere, on the other hand, so that a high level of social responsibility was balanced with a great degree of personal freedom. Secondly, the same pattern of noninterference—which, as I have said, was very broadly defined to include nonintrusion into other people's minds, maintenance of one's own mental privacy, and physical withdrawal from difficult social situations—not only served to prevent confrontation but also created and maintained an emotional and social distance that helped to keep social relationships smooth, at least on the surface. Discretion may have worked on a more profound level, too, by preventing many frustrations and irritations from occurring at all. Thirdly, this emotional and social distance, which inhibited the flow of

information, in addition to maintaining smooth surfaces, also created useful doubts about the intentions of other people and the meanings of their actions. On the one hand, these uncertainties allowed people generously to "give the benefit of the doubt" and to refrain from condemning hastily. But doubting also kept people alert to dangers—resentments and hostile intentions—that might be concealed beneath the surface; such alertness made it possible for people to soothe unspoken hostilities and to repair undisclosed troubling situations before they could break through. Doubt—ambiguity again—allowed people to see others simultaneously as friend and foe, as joking and insulting. There was no clean division between good people and bad. Finally, since people were not singled out as "bad people" in the social drama, they were neither isolated nor humiliated by being made the focus of critical attention but rather were kept integrated in the community. People were not rank-ordered according to their social worth, the bad being less socially accepted than the good—as happens when justice and retribution are the fundamental principles according to which conflicts are resolved.

These ways of managing conflict worked very well in the tightly interdependent world of a hunting camp or a small, homogeneous settlement. But in order for such dynamics to work, it is necessary to *have* a small, tightly interdependent community, composed of people who are well known to each other and who share many assumptions about what is to be valued and what behaviors mean. When these conditions obtain, people can agree on the issues in social life, without having to make them explicit and thus open to argument. They can imagine one another's needs accurately. When someone withdraws from interaction, they can guess the cause and remedy the situation. When someone drops a hint or makes a joke, others can draw from a limited range of possibilities to interpret the message.

In order for traditional strategies to work, people also have to want to fill each other's needs, because they are affectionately bonded to one another; and they must fear the sanctions of rejection and ostracism that may be imposed if they fail, because no alternative life situations are available. It is true that in extreme cases, a family—even an individual—could walk away from camp and set up camp somewhere else, alone. But both physically and emotionally, such a course of action would be very difficult to take.<sup>5</sup>

### **In Modern Settlements**

In most Arctic communities today it is not possible to avoid conflict.<sup>6</sup> For one thing, many settlements are too large and too diverse in all manner of ways. The settlement under discussion here is of this sort. First, it is

ethnically and linguistically diverse. Represented are not only Inuit and *Qallunaat* (Europeans and Euro-Canadians) but also, and perhaps equally troublesome, a number of different Inuit groups, who speak different dialects and suffer from a variety of usually unpleasant preconceptions about one another. There is economic and educational variation, too. Incomes range from a few hundred per month for people who are on welfare to the extremely high sums earned by artists and sculptors, a few of whom are millionaires. Amount of schooling ranges from none at all in older generations to several individuals who have teaching degrees from provincial universities and many who have high school education or vocational training of one sort or another. Experience outside the community also varies greatly. A few people have never traveled beyond the settlement and its hinterlands, while many others have visited, or even lived for a while, in southern Canada for medical or educational purposes; and some few—sculptors attending exhibitions of their works, or high school children on organized trips, or women married to Europeans—have visited Europe or Latin America. Of course, with or without formal education and travel, people vary with regard to the kinds and extent of expertise they have managed to acquire. Needless to say, all of this diversity results in a variety of lifestyles, values, and goals, with attendant social divisions and hierarchies of influence and power. I think we have always overgeneralized about the cultural "traits" shared by the members of a group, but now it is even more irresponsible than it was formerly to make general statements about what "Inuit" do, think, and feel.<sup>7</sup>

Diversity and complexity is found also in the texture of a single individual's life. To take one example, Samuel [a pseudonym], a man of about forty, is a hunter, a sculptor, and a town official. When he is at home, he spends a great deal of time camping "out on the land," and one often finds an animal carcass lying on the kitchen floor, from which people help themselves when they are hungry, in the style of camp life. He ran for elected office, a new phenomenon, in his settlement, but his reason for wanting the office had strong traditional resonances: "If you love these people you have to help them." In addition, Samuel teaches sculpture to other native sculptors in a southern city. He speaks good English and good Inuktitut, a combination that is rare in this community. He also writes songs about strongly felt personal vicissitudes, as his grandparents and other old-time Inuit used to do. The words, often reflecting Christian religious beliefs, are in Inuktitut, and the tunes are "western," sometimes borrowed from hymns and sometimes created by Samuel himself on a country-and-western model. And as he bounces over the tundra in his four-wheel-drive truck, coming back from fishing, a Mozart quartet plays on his tape deck. He says he likes to play chamber music before he goes to sleep, too, because it is peaceful.

Needless to say, such an intermingling of traditions and lifestyles, both individually and socially in the community, creates a troublesome tangle of wishes and needs. People disagree about the legitimacy of any given expectation, and, thus, about whether it should be accommodated. Some of these disagreements are interpersonal, owing to divergent values. A traditionally oriented grandparent may think that a small child should be given what she wants, whereas a young parent influenced by Euro-Canadian child-rearing patterns may protest, "I don't want to spoil her." One person may feel offended when a kinsman, a friend, or even a neighbor asks for or offers money in exchange for some needed commodity, whereas others are offended if they are not offered money. Some people feel it is incumbent upon them to lend freely, when asked, any object, no matter how valuable, that they are not currently using—a boat, a snowmobile, a citizen's band radio—and at the same time, they resent being asked. Others refuse to lend for fear that the object will be damaged, and the person whose request is refused is outraged.<sup>8</sup> Problems also arise when people have consistently different resources at their disposal. A person on welfare may expect to be supported at need by a kinsman who has a job, while the latter, who has many financial obligations not understood by his have-not relative, may feel desperate at the drain on his funds.

Questions concerning the legitimacy of a need may also arise intrapersonally, that is, people may be ambivalent about their own goals, values, and so on, so that no matter how others try to assist, those who are helped perceive themselves to be unhelped. One woman of my acquaintance always wanted to be out on the land when she was in town and vice versa. When she was in town, she complained that none of her kin had offered to take her camping with them, and when she was out camping with some kinsman who *had* taken her, she complained that no one would come to pick her up and bring her home.

Another conflict-generating consequence of the diversity and size of the community is that there are just too many people who have needs to fill, and many of these people are not one's kin. This means that the bonds of affection and obligation that support prosocial behavior are much weaker in town than they were formerly on the land, and fear of sanction is also weaker. Moreover, as I have just suggested, even when people want to help others—kin or friends—their resources may well be inadequate because of competing claims. Here again is fertile ground for the breeding of frustration and resentment. The result of all these situations can be an acid bath of human relations, erosion of a sense of social responsibility, and proliferation of conflict.

Another problem, which generates a great deal of friction, is that individual freedom is eroded to the point where some people complain of feeling "caged." What causes Inuit to feel this way in a social context in

which Euro-Canadians might experience increased opportunities for independent choice in thought and action, as compared with life in a hunting camp?

One part of the caged feeling is purely physical: some people find it hard to live in a house; they feel cooped up, uncomfortably enclosed. In such cases, periodic escape to "the land" is a real necessity, even if the "land" is only a tent pitched behind the house. But the cage is symbolic, too. It is not only that conflicts between incompatible lifestyles and goals, both (or all) intensely desired, make people feel bound or constricted: "I really want to live on the land, but I have to have a job to support my family." It is more than that. Town life entails contractual relations, which require unprecedented kinds of interference with the sort of spontaneous decision-making that was possible—indeed, mandatory—in the life of a hunter on the land. If one has a job, one has to make an explicit commitment to work, in a particular place and for a specific period of time defined in terms of hours, days, weeks, sometimes months. And if one wants to make an exception to this commitment—to take a day off, for example—one must publicly state one's intentions, sometimes even one's reasons. Worse, one must ask permission and subject oneself to the judgment of one's employer. It doesn't matter that one's child is sick and can't go to school and one has to find a babysitter, or that one has a hangover and overslept, or that the weather is fine for fishing and the larder empty of fish; one's employer considers it imperative, nevertheless, that one appears for work every day and on time. Any other behavior is "unprofessional" or "irresponsible;" and employers tend to be very irritated when Inuit behave "erratically."<sup>9</sup> But the necessity to justify one's actions is an intrusion on what would be a legitimate sphere of privacy in camp life. Not only that, it places one in a subordinate and therefore demeaning status vis-à-vis another person. Moreover, when it is necessary to label intentions and reasons clearly and categorically, the safety screen of ambiguity, behind which so much of social life took place in camp, is peeled away, exposing one to others' judgments concerning the validity and legitimacy of one's actions and forcing confrontation.

There are also now community bylaws and other organizational regulations that have to be taken into account in planning one's activities. Like contracts, these universalistically formulated rules fail to take into consideration the contexts of action and the personal circumstances of an individual actor. Again, freedom of action is eroded and people feel caged and resentful—so much so that on one occasion the Inuit mayor of the community instructed the bylaw officer (who was not Inuit) to delay enforcing the laws that the Community Council (who were Inuit) had themselves formulated and approved.

In sum, life in a modern settlement both generates new sources of conflict and undermines old ways of managing it. Social order has to be

renegotiated on a new basis, and new modes of communication more appropriate to life in a large and diverse community have to be found. Most importantly, those new modes have to involve *some* confrontation.

So what is happening? How is this difficult situation being met?

### **New Strategies for Conflict Management**

Some, perhaps all, of the camp dwellers who moved into this settlement twenty or more years ago still fear aggressive confrontation. One man, for example, was reluctant to have me come to a meeting that he was chairing, because a controversial bylaw was to be discussed, and, as he put it: "We're going to argue." On the same subject, another person told me: "People won't come to meetings; they don't like to fight." I understood this reluctance when that same person told me about the violent fantasies she endured when she sat in meetings and heard people express views that she disagreed with. Again, a young woman told me that in order to avoid conflict with her mother, she did not speak to her for two years. And children regularly drop out of school when teachers criticize them.

Nevertheless, there is some recognition that old ways have become unworkable. Evidence of this is the wish (that is, advice) that was given by one older woman to her newborn namesake: "Learn to answer back—because *I* can't." New ways of dealing with interpersonal difficulties are also developing, ways that carry forward and combine with the new some elements of old, still active values and ways of interacting. In general, people recognize a much greater need to *talk* about issues and problems and *negotiate* solutions, and forums in which to engage in these activities are proliferating. For example, in the community under discussion there are more than twenty voluntary organizations, which play a great variety of roles: administering housing, overseeing the ecologically careful use of game, organizing recreational activities, consulting with troubled individuals, and so on. The forums are not all organizational, either. A number of people serve as informal advisors to their friends and relatives on domestic problems related to marriage and child-rearing—problems that never used to be discussed at all.<sup>10</sup>

I am going to limit my discussion here to just one of the new forums, one that I find exceptionally interesting in the way it combines old and new principles in managing social tensions. I observed its operation in only one community, but I am told that in one form or another it has developed in many other native settlements as well. I refer to local radio.<sup>11</sup>

There are actually two sorts of local radio in the settlement. One of these is citizen's band (CB), colloquially known as "red radio" because of the color of the instruments. Many, if not most, households have red

radios and use them extensively, not only to keep contact between settlement and camp, or between camps when family members are out on the land, but also to communicate within the settlement, even when the people called on the radio also have telephones.

The other kind of local radio is the ordinary, centralized sort, with a "station" in a room of the local government building. I think this radio plays music for some hours every day, and perhaps there are other programs, too; but I never found anyone listening to any program other than the one I describe here. Most people seem to listen with religious regularity to this program, a phone-in hour that comes on twice a day, at lunch and supper time (noon and early evening). People who phone the host, a bilingual Inuk, either leave messages that the host relays to the community in both Inuktitut and English or speak their own pieces in either language, and—if it is a meeting notice or an announcement of some other public event, or in any case when the speaker requests it—the host will translate into the other language.

The phone-in hour is regularly used by settlement officers and organizational leaders of all sorts to make announcements and exhortations to the community at large. Meeting notices, promulgation of new bylaws, public health advice and warnings, reminders to individuals who have appointments to see visiting medical specialists, mundane school announcements, and lectures on the importance of sending one's children to school are all made through this channel, rather than on red radio, perhaps because almost all households have ordinary radios, whereas CBs, being more expensive, are more unevenly distributed.

While many of these organizational messages are "purely" practical, evoking a mundane response, others are likely to have emotionally charged connotations for some hearers: "The water in Fish Lake has been tested and has been found not safe to drink"; "Young people have to be at home by 11 o'clock on school nights"; "If hunters abandon animal carcasses they will be fined"; "Because of the danger of rabies, unchained dogs will be shot"; "Now that it's spring, we should clean up around the houses so that the town will look beautiful."

Both radios are used to send personal messages.<sup>12</sup> Some of these are practical, too—domestic requests, invitations—or simply informational: "Johnny, come home, your dinner's ready"; "Susie, come home and stay with the baby, I have to go to the store"; "I need a ride to the fishing lake"; "Michael, you're welcome to sleep and eat here if you want to"; "I had a phone call from Mary [in Montreal] today; she says a big hello to Michael and Ruby and Sally."

But again it is clear that such messages, though matter-of-fact on the surface, have a potential for communicating far more than the words themselves: "I care for you" and perhaps "You are heedless of that care";

"Why don't you ever stay home and be useful instead of running around town and neglecting your responsibilities?"; "Why don't any of my kin who have transportation ever think to offer to take me along?"; "My daughter and I forgive you for treating her badly"; "Mary's special friends are Michael, Ruby, Sally," and so on.

Other personal messages have more explicit emotional charges, both positive and negative, though they are phrased in general terms: "I am grateful to the people who helped me when my snowmobile broke down [out on the land]"; "I am an old man and it's hard for me to carry my groceries, nevertheless the young people of this town never offer to help me"; and "I don't like it when people come into my house, drunk, on Friday nights and make a mess."

Finally, some few messages are both highly charged and explicitly personal: A woman makes acid remarks about the defects of another's children; a mother pointedly asks her married daughter if she has taken an object belonging to her mother.<sup>13</sup> Most interesting of all, a daughter sends her mother a *loving* message that makes reference to the latter's recently deceased husband, and she tells me that her decision to use the radio was motivated by the fear that her mother would cry.<sup>14</sup>

Notice, now, how many of these messages are capable of generating conflict or just interpersonal discomfort. Troublesome on the community level are the promulgation of controversial bylaws and exhortations on divisive, symbolically loaded subjects<sup>15</sup>—indeed, exhortations on *any* subject, which, by attempting to influence, intrude on autonomy of decision-making and freedom of action. On the individual level, messages can cause difficulties not only by expressing antagonistic personal interests—making accusations, implied and explicit—but also, as my last example indicates, by raising the spectre of a painful past. Why broadcast all of this socially disruptive matter, especially the personal tensions, which, one might imagine, could be handled more discreetly on the telephone or more sensitively face to face? If the characteristics of radio and the ways in which the radio messages are formulated are compared with patterns of conflict management in camp life, I think some light may be shed on this question.

First of all, in camp life people feared and avoided confrontation, preferring to say nothing about disagreements, resentments, and other painful feelings, rather than risk social unpleasantness. Nevertheless, sometimes tensions built up in the camp to the point that it was difficult not to express them. I have tried to demonstrate that this dilemma exists in exacerbated form in the settlement. One still finds fear of confrontation, while at the same time, the diversity of lifestyles and the adoption of the European practice of living by rules and regulations, instead of by subtle interpersonal negotiation and silent adaptation, mean that matters certain to be controversial must frequently be expressed.

We have seen that in former days the dilemma was resolved—or at least addressed in extreme cases—by the public song duel, which allowed antagonists to express and conceal hostility at one and the same time. Radio, I shall argue, has some of the same characteristics as the song duel. I think particularly of publicity, ambiguity, and the complex role of the audience.<sup>16</sup>

Communications broadcast over radio are of course received by a large audience, either directly from the radio or indirectly via the gossip network. In the case of red radio, they are even heard in other communities and out on the land, in widely dispersed hunting and fishing camps. Eckert and Newmark (1980: 200-201) point out, with regard to the song duel, that the presence of an audience, whether visibly present or merely symbolic—referred to in vague terms in a song—can intensify both accusation and sanction by causing persons who may feel uncomfortable about their behavior to imagine that there are many critical eyes upon them. The public lectures and prayers that addressed the delinquent in a camp served the same purpose of isolating the offender in the presence of a phalanx of critics; today it is radio that provides the audience.

Eckert and Newmark (1980: 200) also point out that when the *community* is perceived as critical, some of the burden of responsibility for criticism is removed from the individual accuser. In this way, the confrontation is diluted and so made safer: for the accuser, who has the backing of the community; for the accused, who need not fear retribution at the hand of a single irate individual; and for the community, which can, more easily than an angry antagonist, reincorporate offenders and so reconstitute itself.

Reintegration following castigation is also facilitated when offenders, instead of being clearly identified, are left to imagine their own offense, real or potential, and to worry about its possible consequences.<sup>17</sup> Thus we come to the subject of ambiguity—an important quality of song duels, as mentioned earlier. There is ambiguity in the radio messages, too, though it is not created in the same way as in the song contests. The songs were art forms, shaped of metaphors and allusions, and the audience responded to them on this level. Moreover, they were often ironic, and they could easily be interpreted as joking. At the same time, by the very nature of a "duel"—and also because of the intimate, face-to-face nature of life in a camp—it was always clear to whom a song was addressed. None of this is true of radio. The ambiguity of a radio message is based, first, on the fact that speakers often refrain from naming both themselves and the people they are talking about, and, second, on the vague, general, or altogether implicit manner in which criticism is usually phrased. Of course, many of those who listen will recognize the voice of the speaker and will know to whom the messages are addressed, even when no names are mentioned; and some will take personally the criticism,

explicit or implied. Nevertheless, speakers who have not named the individuals they have in mind can deny any personal reference.

Even when the intended recipient of the message is named, I have suggested that confrontation in the radio situation is diluted and controlled by the fact that the recipient is at a distance and need not be met face to face. Moreover, as in the song duel, the audience helps to control the uncomfortable situation by witnessing it and by implicitly judging both accuser and accused. The fact that all participants, both antagonists and audience, are sitting quietly and separately at home, addressing their critical comments only to fellow listeners in the household, inhibits both the dyadic escalation of hostility and the development of active factions.

Another point of comparison concerns the formulation of response to an emotionally charged message. Eckert and Newmark (1980: 192) have told us that in song duels, antagonists were required not to respond directly, defensively, but rather to counter with a statement on a different subject; and I have mentioned that in everyday camp life, too, argument was strongly proscribed. I noted only two instances of response to an item that was broadcast, and both demonstrate the enduring strength of old patterns in the new context and show us something of how radio works. In one case, a young woman, in her official capacity as representative of a community organization, had broadcast a message urging all young people to help with village cleanup. In the next session of the phone-in program, an elder picked up and repeated her message but without acknowledging or directly replying to it. The young woman was supported but a faction was not created and "autonomous" expression was preserved. The other case was that of a woman who repeatedly criticized the moral character of another woman's children. The woman who was the butt of the attacks told me that she refrained from replying for five years; then finally she turned the accusation back on her antagonist's children: "It's *your* children, not mine.. ." And, said she: "She never said another word." So great is the fear of direct rebuttal.

In sum, in radio talk as in the song duel, conflict is embedded and isolated within a formal—one might say, ritualized—context, concealed behind ambiguity, and publicized before an audience, which can perform several functions: giving (imagined) support; providing (imagined) sanctions; creating safe distance between potential opponents; and, through all of the above, controlling antagonism and preventing actual conflict. Talking on the radio allows people in emotionally uncomfortable relationships to avoid speaking face to face or even on the telephone, either of which media would create a dangerously dyadic situation. As did the song duel, radio allows people to confront without confronting and to respond without responding. The value of the radio is indicated by the fact that in the socially stressful environment of the settlement, the public is called

on, not just occasionally in rare and exceptionally troublesome cases, but every day. Indeed, twice a day.

Finally, radio does not serve the community only by airing troublesome situations in a relatively safe mode; we have seen that it also provides a forum for the expression of warm and positive sentiments like gratitude, which can create and strengthen bonds among community residents. Not least in importance, the radio is a focus for participation in settlement life: almost everybody talks, and listens to their fellows talking, on one kind of radio or the other, or both. So radio, like the song duel, draws the diverse and fragmented community together in more than one way.

Nevertheless, lest this picture, complex though it be, leave too tidy an impression, I will conclude by mentioning that in this community there are—not surprisingly—traditionally minded individuals, even in younger generations, who disapprove of using the radio to "complain."

## Notes

1. This chapter was originally a paper delivered at the CHAGS 7 conference in Moscow in August 1993. Sections of this revised version have been borrowed from another essay on Inuit conflict management in which traditional strategies are more comprehensively discussed (Briggs 1994).

The chapter is based on fieldwork in Canadian Inuit camps in the 1960s and 1970s, and two to three decades later in a modern Canadian Arctic community, where some of the camp members now live. I withhold more precise information to protect the identities of individuals.

A more extended treatment of the same subject is found in W. C. E. Rasing's study of changes in Iglulingmiut social order between 1821 and 1989 (Rasing 1994). Rasing analyzes the historical processes that have "decivilized" (as he puts it) the Iglulingmiut in modern settlements by increasing social differentiation and decreasing integration and self-control (p. 279). His case material concerning instances of conflict is especially interesting and instructive.

2. I once saw a woman have an asthma attack from fear when a man, accidentally struck in the face by a flying rope, said angrily to her husband: "That wouldn't have happened if you hadn't let go!" The woman in question was not a timid young thing, either; she was a daunting personage and widely respected. The man who had spoken went hunting and did not return for several days.
3. The Inuit with whom I lived were all Anglicans.
4. The mechanisms through which the song duel worked in Central Canadian Inuit society are perceptively and subtly analyzed by Eckert and Newmark (1980: 191-211), and I draw heavily on their work throughout the account that follows. The Eckert and Newmark article is well worth reading in its entirety, as are two other fine studies by Phyllis Morrow (1990: 141-58; 1996: 405-23) on the fundamental philosophical concerns that underlie conflict management and much other behavior, too, in Inuit and Yupik societies.

5. In Greenland, today as in the past, people are believed occasionally to run away from society into the mountains. Such individuals are called *qivittut*—the word means "disappointed ones." "The *qivittoq* [singular form] is loneliness personified, the expression of all that is feared about rejection and isolation" and has no more social identity (Nuttall 1992: 114).
6. Sources of interpersonal and intercultural tension in modern Arctic settlements are outlined also in Briggs 1985.
7. The twin assumptions that cultures are constituted by shared traits and that the world's societies can be tidily described as culturally separate are widely criticized these days. See, for example, Fredrik Barth 1969; 1993, and Eric Wolf 1982.
8. Strong ambivalences about giving and sharing existed in camp life, too. However, in that environment the resulting tensions were commonly expressed in joking and hearty laughter, in acute watchfulness and a tendency to count and remember the neighbor's possessions, and in suspicious gossip. Goods were not often either directly requested or withheld unless a convincing pseudonurturant excuse could be concocted. ("The baby is hungry" was a particularly effective one.) But now, Euro-Canadians—and some Inuit—model possessive behavior, creating more opportunities for acting on feelings that were formerly covert, and resentment may be exacerbated.
9. Tensions between Inuit and Euro-Canadians in northern settlements, and the critical judgments that the latter make of Inuit are frequently mentioned in books and articles about the Canadian North today. An especially perceptive analysis is that of Hugh Brody (1975).
10. Similar phenomena are occurring in many Inuit, and also Yupik, communities. A plea that problems and feelings about problems should be openly discussed as a means of healing divided generations and troubled communities has been most eloquently made by an Alaskan Yupik Eskimo in a paper that he wrote while in jail and addressed to his fellow Yupiit (Napoleon 1992). Phyllis Morrow tells me (personal communication) that a Yupik friend once remarked to her that the "talking cures" now used to treat substance abuse are "very non- Yupik ... but maybe new poisons require new cures."
11. I have found local radio programming in all the Canadian Inuit communities that I have visited, and Phyllis Morrow has told me (personal communication) that in the Bethel area of Alaska in the 1970s and 1980s, radio was used for many of the same purposes that I describe here, including the management of social tensions. For a discussion of the partly similar, partly different, uses of local radio in a Canadian Ojibwe Native American Indian community, see Lisa Valentine 1992 and 1995, especially pages 34-40 and 50-57.
12. I did not check whether there were systematic differences between the personal messages that were telephoned to the radio station and those that were sent via CB radio. The question—a cogent one—did not occur to me until I read Phyllis Morrow's pre-publication review of this essay and (at Morrow's suggestion) Lisa Valentine's comprehensive study of the communicative patterns in an Ojibwe community (1995).
13. My field notes tell me that these two messages were sent by CB.
14. This message was sent through the radio station. I am not sure whether the daughter feared her mother would feel more pain if told in person and she wished to spare her that grief, or whether she thought her mother would cry in either case and she just preferred not to witness it. The point (to be elaborated below) remains the same.
15. The symbolic loads carried by everyday activities in modern Inuit communities are discussed in Briggs 1997.
16. For lack of space, I present only a partial and, I hope, provocative comparison here. A careful reading of Eckert and Newmark (1980) would suggest additional points of significant similarity and contrast.

Phyllis Morrow, in her prepublication review of this essay, pointed out yet another way in which communication by radio resembles traditional interaction patterns, though not specifically the song duel. Individuals "volunteer" both what they have to say and also the time of speaking, "rather than being asked, prompted, or confronted by another" (personal communication).

17. I have only touched in passing on the parallels between radio and other traditional mechanisms of social control. Concerning the crucial role of imaginary sanctions—warnings issued in the form of playful hints and jokes—in maintaining order in camp life, see Briggs 1994.

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