

# Diversity in White-Eskimo Leadership Interaction

BY DAVID DAMAS \*

---

## RÉSUMÉ

Il y a un contraste marqué dans les interactions de "leadership" observées entre les esquimaux de la région d'Iglulik et ceux de la région de Bathurst. A Bathurst, "leadership" faible, irrégulier, grandement soumis aux Blancs; à Iglulik au contraire, leadership relativement effectif et en grande partie collatéral à celui des Euro-Canadiens. Dans une enquête sur les régions en questions, l'Auteur tente de dégager les facteurs déterminants de cette diversité.

A sharp contrast in leadership interaction could be observed between the two Eskimo regions of Iglulik and Bathurst Inlet during the early 1960's. At Bathurst native leadership was weak and irregular from locality to locality and largely subordinated to white authority. Native leaders at Iglulik were relatively effective in their sphere of authority and that sphere was, for the most part, collateral to that of Euro-Canadian agents.

A review of the history of each area suggests variables that can be regarded as determinants of the present-day diversity in leadership interaction.

One set of variables is associated with differences in the traditional leadership or co-operative structures of the two areas.

\* This paper was read as part of the Symposium on Leadership in Northern North America and the 63rd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Detroit, Michigan, November 19-22, 1964.

Authority at Iglulik in the aboriginal period was based as much or more on positional criteria as it was on personal qualities (Damas, 1963). The patrilocal extended family which formed the chief residential and economic unit was headed by an *isumataq* (one who thinks) who was almost invariably the oldest male in the male line. Local aggregations of larger scope than the extended family were headed by other *isumatat*. Each of these leaders was usually the head of the largest extended family in the group. The family *isumataq* supervised division of labour, distribution of catch and also the arrangement of marriage and adoption for his kin unit. The local *isumataq* supervised division of food among the family heads and organized winter sealing and walrus hunting. Some *isumatat* also were shamans and had influence in sacred as well as secular life.

The institution of the *isumataq* did not exist at Bathurst and whoever rose to special prominence whether in sacred or secular life did so purely on the basis of personal qualities. The scope and character of secular leadership was diffusely defined.

Positionally defined leadership like that of the Iglulingmiut has certain advantages over the personally defined leadership found among the Bathurst people. Disputes over designation of leaders can be more easily settled and continuity from generation to generation is assured if mechanisms exist in the social structure that outline designation of leaders. Kinship was the chief ingredient in this designation at Iglulik.

Related to the bases for succession to *isumataq-ship* was the ascendancy of kinship factors in determining the course of authority diffusion throughout the local groupings at Iglulik. Each group was a continuous or near continuous aggregation of kin. The dominance-subordinance dyads that make up the bulk of kinship relationships provided a system of command that pervaded the entire group. At Bathurst Inlet dyadic relationships were also important but kinship factors were subordinated to voluntary ones in outlining systems of partnerships in meat sharing, spouse exchange, dancing and joking. The inherently continuous nature of kinship over time as well as the spatial continuity found in the kin-based local groupings provided a firm basis for the persistence

of Iglulingmiut authority systems. The Bathurst social system which was to large extent based on voluntary partnerships did not provide such potential for persistence.

The vertical nature of the dyadic system at Iglulik, based as it was on dominance and subordination, aided execution of decisions good or bad. The Bathurst system operated on a horizontal or egalitarian basis and must be regarded as a co-operative network rather than a network of authority diffusion. Although the opinions of some persons might have been highly respected there was no unvarying final authority and co-operative action often depended on consensus and probably was often characterized by indecision and inefficiency.

A second set of variables is concerned with differences in resources and in the changing adaptations that leadership structure was faced with in connection with changes in economy after contact. Iglulik possessed a varied resource base with caribou, polar bear, ringed seal, bearded seal, beluga, and most important, large herds of walrus. The Bathurst people had only the ringed seal, fish and caribou, and only the caribou in abundance. The resource advantage, principally in sea mammal life, that the Iglulingmiut possessed over most Eskimo groups was not fully exploited until after introduced artifacts made more efficient hunting possible. The whale-boat in particular, brought into play an approach to walrus hunting that greatly increased meat production (Damas, 1963). Manning of boats in hunts brought about an action group, the boat crew, that had a traditional basis in kinship organization and the system of authority diffusion was probably enhanced by its operation. The *umialiq* or captain usually coincided with the family or local *isumataq*. His authority was probably crystallized to a greater extent in directing (walrus hunting from boats) than it had been in any aboriginal activity. That situation can be contrasted to the one at Bathurst Inlet where introduction of trade goods probably encouraged atomization in economic organization. The chief activities that required co-operative action; breathing hole sealing with harpoon, fishing at weirs, and caribou drives were replaced by sealing hooks, fishing with nets, and rifle hunting of caribou, all being activities that could be carried out by one man. Although all of the latter pursuits

could have benefited from better organization of personnel, resources remained stable enough for a time to not require more unified group effort. Occasions demanding co-operation tended to perpetuate the loose, informal traditional leadership structure. With the removal of the necessity for co-operation it seems likely that emphasis in individualization became accentuated. After the large winter sealing villages were abandoned owing to a shift to winter caribou hunting, local affirmation of the broad ranging partnerships of the area was drastically narrowed. The seal sharing partnerships which had been important to economic life disappeared rather quickly.

Continued abundance of resources at Iglulik can be seen as a chief factor in the continuance of a large measure of autonomy in native leadership. Reduction of caribou herds in the 1950's at Bathurst, and the incomplete readaptation to a mixed economy not only for tools and supplies which were needed at Iglulik as well, but also for food for humans and dogs. The present-day marginal character of current subsistence at Bathurst is not due entirely to depletion of resources. The report of an areal economic survey (Abrahamson, 1964) agrees with my own impressions that local resources could probably support the now reduced population (97 persons remained in the area in 1963) if native leadership and co-operation were better organized to exploit them. Men go off singly or in pairs to nets or after caribou with no overall plan of action being laid out as is the case at Iglulik for the village-wide walrus hunts and also regarding division of the multiple economic tasks within the extended family. Each adult male at Bathurst usually has his own cache of meat and sharing is largely a personal matter with no firmly outlined rules for division of meat existing for the most part. It appears that because of changes in the economic cycle even the loosely organized co-operative networks of the aboriginal period have lost whatever efficacy that they once had and that nothing very substantial has grown up to replace them.

The third set of variables has to do with the intensity and character of white contact. During the early part of the post-contact period point of trade remained distant from the Iglulingmiut region. Until 1939-42 and again until 1947 three hundred

mile sledge trips were necessary in order to reach trading posts. These trading trips took place no more often than annually. No continuous pressures were brought to bear on authority in economic matters, and native networks were allowed to flourish and develop largely in their own direction. In the Bathurst area for the same period rival trading concerns competed for furs. Direction of trapping by the natives seems to have been rather well organized with independent white trapper-traders or the employees of the two major firms setting examples of efficient trapping techniques. The population was split in its loyalty to one or the other of the rival concerns though some Eskimos traded alternatively at the various posts. External economic influence was therefore strong but it was not unified. During this same period native co-operative networks were weakening in the face of economic changes noted above. Later when trading was unified at the post of the Hudson's Bay Company the rather intensive direction of trapping and the dependency that had been created with regard to trade goods had built a reliance on outside authority that could easily be centralized. This centralization, though unifying local loyalties to the one white agency, did not provide a climate for the spontaneous development of new native authority systems or for the revival of traditional co-operative systems.

Another sort of influence that could be expected to have some effect upon native leadership patterns is missionization. At Iglulik the Anglican religion was introduced by a native from Pond's Inlet. Later an English missionary made occasional trips through the area but for the most part Anglicanism has been perpetuated by native leaders. The village *isumataq* often performed the role of prayer leader. Shamanism seems to have virtually disappeared. Religious innovation was therefore absorbed into the extant social structure and Anglicanism provided a rallying-point, a bond of common sentiment and belief that was probably greater than any native religion had been able to accomplish. Roman Catholicism was less successful in the area with regard to number of converts although the resident priest probably exerts considerable influence in sacred and perhaps as well in certain secular matters in this minority group. Proselytization was not greatly successful at Bathurst; the dominant Anglican group does not generally hold services and the sabbath is not

observed as is the case at Iglulik. No real unification of the population through religion occurs at Bathurst.

Contacts with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police also showed contrast between the two regions. At Iglulik the annual patrols from Pond's Inlet were concerned principally with census taking, incidents of actual law enforcement being few in the post-contact history of the region. The Bathurst people, on the other hand, refer to the police as "wolves" because of their persistence in bringing to trial Eskimos accused of murder or illegal musk-ox slaughter, the two chief crimes known in the area. Murderers have served sentences on several occasions but almost invariably those brought to trial for musk-ox killings have been exonerated by the magistrate and the natives are consequently left confused regarding the nature of Canadian legal norms. Outside pressure has thus affected both a traditional hunting practice and a traditional means of settling disputes at Bathurst.

In the recent history of the two regions government representatives have joined the contact-traditional white agents: traders, missionaries, and police. Areal administrators moved to Cambridge in 1955 and to Iglulik in 1960. Among the most important duties of the administrators were issuance of social legislation and relief monies and direction of the relocation of sick persons. Administrators were left a certain amount of freedom regarding what they deemed a minimum level of subsistence for the Eskimo but, in general, were expected to forestall famines and extreme hardship.

At Iglulik the areal administrator lived at the point-of-trade and kept in close communication with the trader who actually issued much of the relief goods. Both men agreed on rather a tough philosophy of relief, feeling that the land could support any reasonably ambitious Eskimo and his family. Continued abundance of game kept decisions regarding relief at a minimum.

The post manager at Bathurst found himself in a difficult position with regard to issuing relief. The areal administrator resided 165 miles away at Cambridge Bay and decisions regarding relief were left largely to the judgment of the trader. He felt that over-issuance would tend to destroy native incentive to carry out the trapping and hunting that is the basis for the fur trade. If, on

the other hand, too little relief was given, the resulting hardship conditions would not only be directly his responsibility but the administrator would also be subject to criticism from Ottawa. Difficulties brought on by the spatial separation of the two agents responsible for relief distribution were compounded by occasional inconsistencies in issuance which were the result of difficulty in determining subsistence conditions in the outlying villages. If one adds to these problems the natives' lack of understanding of motives behind issuing relief, it can be seen why this important medium of contact with white authority left the Bathurst Eskimos confused.

Another factor that affected native autonomy at Bathurst was the emigration of a number of young men from the area after 1955. The men were drawn away by employment possibilities on the DEW line and also by the prospect of finding wives. Few of these men returned to Bathurst, and their emigration removed active members from the community, thereby weakening the efficiency of local co-operative networks.

The variables that have been discussed here were generally cumulative in producing divergences from already contrasting aboriginal regional leadership patterns and seldom provided mechanisms which could counterbalance the general trend toward divergence.

There is a possibility that a move toward convergence could take place in the future. If increase of population and/or decline of resources occurs at Iglulik there will be greater reliance on relief and government directed industries. Such reliance would weaken native economic autonomy.

Movement toward increased autonomy on the part of the Bathurst natives is less probable. While current plans for economic recovery through more efficient exploitation of resources could be successful, success or failure of the program will probably be largely dependent on the leadership of Euro-Canadian agents. Lack of tradition-based authority structure, coupled with the emigration of educated youths who might provide a fresh basis for organization, makes it unlikely that internally organized leadership or co-operative structure will appear in the area.

## REFERENCES

ABRAHAMSON, G. et. al.

- 1964 The Copper Eskimos: an Area Economic Survey. Industrial Division, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Ottawa.

DAMAS, David

- 1963 Iglulingmiut Kinship and Local Groupings: a Structural Approach. Bulletin No. 196, National Museum of Canada, Ottawa.
-