The Potential of Traditional Societies, and of Anthropology, Their Predator

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There is an uneasy awareness among some students of anthropology that their exclusive concern with small, isolated societies is becoming an obsolete line of inquiry. Not only are anthropologists rapidly running out of "primitive peoples" on whom they can stake claims, but their conventional association with "primitives" is encountering new difficulties. The symbiotic relationship which anthropologists have often enjoyed with colonial governments in the past has given rise to a stereotype which is difficult to exorcise: they are being barred from certain African countries where rulers reject them in favour of sociologists whose presence suggests that an African nation has "arrived". Closer to home, many Indian and Eskimo communities are outspokenly raising objections to becoming grist for the anthropology thesis mills.

However, anthropology is unlikely to become obsolete if it expands its scope to examine broader issues. One possibility lies in the examination of transitional and modernizing societies. Because values and culture are the substance of anthropology's subject matter, the discipline must contribute to an understanding of the contemporary world in which countries with different cultural traditions are meeting and competing for dominance. Oscar Lewis, who has alternately been praised as providing new insights and damned as a "parasite of the poor" has a compelling point when he notes that

> ...anthropologists have a new function in the modern world: to serve as students and reporters of the great mass of peasants and urban dwellers of the underdeveloped countries who constitute about 80 per cent of the world's population.... Many Americans, thanks to anthropologists, know more about the culture of some isolated tribe in New Guinea with a total population of five hundred souls than about the way of life of

> millions of villagers in India or Mexico and other underdeveloped nations which are destined to play so crucial a role in the international scene.[1]

A further possibility which has been little discussed, and with which this paper deals, is that of exploring and analyzing the designs for living found in those traditional cultures which are currently being drawn into the western economic and political sphere. Despite the subtle complexity of many of these cultures, externally generated programs of "development" geared at creating replicas of "western man" are initiated with practically no understanding or interest in what traditional peoples might be able to teach *us* about coping with our modern man-made environment. As Harrington points out: "Up until the re-entry of the non-white millions into history, it was logical to assume that the cultural standards of the western world were as superior as its technology."[2] It is not necessary to look to Asia or Latin America for such lessons. By focusing on Canada one can see combined the material advantages of the "developed" countries and the problems of many so-called underdeveloped countries. Failure to appreciate the distinct cultural traits which could be useful in the modern world could well limit the country's potential for development.

In this context it is instructive to consider certain aspects of social change occurring in the North, especially since the North has often been suggested as a particularly good "laboratory" for research into the problems of physical, social and cultural adaptation. It is necessary to examine the context of this particular instance of culture change and to consider whether there are indications of static approaches to development in northern Canada, particularly in the area of the Yukon Territory, where the writer has had some field experience. This paper will remain at the speculative level: the extent to which the suggested approaches to change would be practically useful would have to be tested in an empirical situation.

Context of Change

In the North a broadly specialized culture from one environment has filtered into another environment and has displaced a

culture formerly highly adapted to that environment. But by introducing the technological appendages of this new complex culture, its members have substantially altered their physical surroundings. In the Yukon Territory, for example, the Indians underwent numerous changes from proto-historic trade contacts with other Indian tribes. However, the rate of change has accelerated unevenly since the gold stampede in 1896-98 broke the Tlingit blockade which had kept the interior Indians from contact with whiteman.[3] Soon followed the handful of missionaries eager to bring salvation. The next major influx of population came with the building of the Alaska Highway in 1943-45. After the steamboats were removed from the Yukon River in 1953, most Indians relocated along the Alaska Highway or other major arteries radiating from Whitehorse. Although there are still extended family groups who camp along the highway, most Indians live in villages, all of which are shared with non-Indians. Hence the once specialized Indians, without whose technical assistance the whiteman could not have penetrated the Klondike, have now become the least specialized in coping with the man-made changes in the physical and cultural environment. Ironically this displacement in no way indicates that their values are outmoded; on the contrary they are theoretically in a position where they once again could contribute a great deal. As aims, goals and strategies of entrepreneurs from the South become increasingly rigid, the need for new approaches to development becomes vital.

There is a pervasive myth in Canada, as elsewhere in North America, that economic solutions will prove a panacea to human problems. Yet it seems that this focus has been a limiting factor, not only for the development of our own society, but in its implications for the people on whom we impose these measures. For example, the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is charged with making the area "north of sixty" economically productive as well as with administering the affairs of the native peoples. The implication in the lumping of these two distinct government branches seems to be that Keynesian principles apply both to economic development and to social-cultural problems. Thus a number of ritual expenditures are rationalized by the Ottawa policy-makers, and native Indians and Eskimos become victims of programs which are supposed to "help" them.

They are built "suitable houses" about which they are not consulted.[4]

Mines are opened at considerable government expense in the hope that they will provide jobs for Indians and Eskimos, who are never consulted about whether they have any desire to be employed in such jobs.[5] Programs of relocation for northern Indians and Eskimos embarass the government and do irreparable harm to the native people when they do not produce the anticipated results.[6] It has become increasingly difficult to assess the extent of social damage as these policies snowball.

In the North today, adult Indians are literally experiencing transition from stone age to jet age in a single lifetime. By circumstance and government design, they are being dragged into the twenty-first century, yet it seems that only by physical dislocation, cultural disruption and ruthless socialization can they become full citizens of modern Canada. The present scheme of things seems to lock Indians and Eskimos into low level economic positions. The acceptable niches are defined by members of the dominant culture, and since those defined as prestigious are filled by non-native entrepreneurs; only bottom level niches are left for Indians and Eskimos. This it not peculiar to the North: John Porter's rough occupational hierarchy of ethnic groups throughout Canada lumps Indians and Eskimos together at the bottom, 60 per cent of those unemployed being in unskilled jobs.[7] The current policy seems committed to making them into "productive citizens" without specifying just what is to be produced and whom it is to benefit. One might ask whether there are ways in which Indians and Eskimos can move directly into the twentieth century while still maintaining important aspects of their value systems. The popular alternative seems to involve abandoning a way of life which until recently has been sufficiently elastic to absorb changes, and might well provide guidelines for members of our own culture.

In northern Canada, the visible problems introduced by the non-Indians who come to change the North, make references to the "Indian problem" a blatant misnomer. The North has often been called the "last frontier". On American frontiers, individualism has always been valued, but the northern frontier is not a replica of others familiar in the history of the continent. The

American West was a frontier ecologically similar to that from which the entrepeneurs came. The northern frontier, physically quite different from the contemporary urban South, creates special problems of readjustment, and the need for co-operation and for the acceptance of one another. The real problems of the North are less mechanical than social and are caused by isolation, long winters, job competition, use of leisure time, etc. Now the Indian and Eskimo populations are being presented with the whole gamut of these problems. A consideration of certain aspects of the traditional culture would suggest that many of the tensions which exist in the North were traditionally managed by the native people, and that anthropologists could learn and teach a great deal about broader contemporary human dilemmas by considering the variety of social mechanisms which have been employed. Anthropology is essentially the study of alternative ways of organizing behaviour, and definitions of such alternatives are greatly needed in the modern world.

Work-Leisure Dichotomy

McLuhan aptly notes that "... work ... does not exist in the non-literate world. The primitive hunter and fisherman did no work any more than does the poet, painter or thinker of today. Where the whole man is involved there is no work."[8] The concept of leisure in our society was created as a by-product of work and now, confronted with non-work time, there emerges the baffling problem of what to *do* with it.

> No trait of Western man is more evident than his determination to load himself with work, to find in work the main values of life and to use his gains to extend his work into wider areas... Not only has Western man forced work upon himself and learned to like it, he tries with missionary zeal to stimulate others in accepting his strenuous way of life. Those who do not respond with energy are regarded as backward.[9]

The problems native people face in adapting to industry parallel the problems western man faces in adapting to leisure. Yet the attitudes of northern Indians toward work seem to parallel closely the attitudes of many professionals, scientists, writers, artists, and students in our own society who somehow manage to synthesize work and leisure. Energy is expended unevenly; periods of work are followed by periods of relaxation in no pattern. This

is precisely the direction in which technocratic society is moving, and the synthesis will have to be effected more widely for all people in this society. In some parts of North America and Scandinavia, industries are making efforts to maximize employer-employee satisfaction by letting employees choose the hours of the day during which they wish to work. A woman may be home to prepare all three meals for her family and fill in her work time around this, or a man may fish until three in the afternoon and come to work late in the afternoon and evening. Where this has occurred, indications are that production has increased and waste has been substantially reduced; the result is greater profit for the industry as well as more job satisfaction.[10] It would seem that the North could be a good testing ground for such industrial policies.

The expanding breach between work and leisure is accentuated in the North by the kinds of work available. Most southerners who go to the North in government employ soon learn that there is little emotional satisfaction to be gained from their work, a situation which virtually forces the dichotomy. They find that the easiest way to get through the year or two on the margin of the world is to go through the motions of busyness from nine to five and then leave work totally behind. Those who are unable to do this often find that the pressures of their job ineffectiveness drive them from the North even sooner.

On the other hand, non-industrial cultures seldom define leisure as a bothersome category separate from the rest of life. Salz' study of Equadorian Indians indicates that they lacked the concept 'leisure'.[11] They worked steadily when necessary and otherwise engaged in such structured activities as fiestas, dances, weddings, etc. But the attitudes taken to these activities were different from western ideas of fun-making and involved execution of rights and obligations. Helm's description of gambling, games, dances and of New Year's eve celebration as a spontaneous rite indicates that some northern Athapaskans cope with recreation in similarly structured ways.[12] In the not-too-distant future, western notions of work will have to be replaced with more creative ideas involving a combination of production and leisure. Since models for such time management exist in other cultures, our culture might do well to examine them more closely.

Communications

The study of communications is gaining both theoretical and practical significance in the North. Examination of cross-cultural communication in northern Canada could clarify specific cues to which different people react; for example, a transaction between an Indian person and a non-Indian administrator brings into focus a number of issues involved in role bargaining, since each party operates under a different set of constraints and toward different goals. Yet neither fully understands the constraints or goals which motivate the other. Indians are sensitized to a whole spectrum of behavioural cues which are, in effect, "educated out" by our programmed classroom socialization. It is not difficult to identify areas in which the Indian cultures have a great deal to offer in terms of social and psychological sensitivity; the difficulty is for non-Indians, trained strictly in auditory and verbal categories, to learn to respond to more subtle cues.

As a corollary of the system of ordered verbal communication, western cultures have expanded the written tradition, the cultural assumption being that rules once written down become legitimized. Western cultures then try to tie traditional cultures to an outmoded written tradition; for example, many officials protect themselves from contact with real problems by operating strictly by rule books. They further present Indians with a rule book which the whiteman has written for him called the "Indian Act". Paradoxically, at the same time the oral tradition is being reborn through electric technology; radio and television, telephones, tape recorders and films present new possibilities for oral, person to person communication in which Indians could be directly involved.

Some advantages which might follow from having Indians assist teachers in schools would seem to be self-evident. Besides helping Indian children to bridge a considerable culture gap, they could introduce both native and non-native children to new patterns of thought and new respect for each other's traditions. All children are sensitive to a number of cues which few elementary school teachers in the North have the capability for, or the interest in, developing. If Indians could be drawn into the education system on their own terms, some of these sensitivities could perhaps be

creatively developed rather than destroyed, and could benefit children from many cultures.[13]

Interpersonal Relationships

Co-operation. Traditionally, an Indian's manhood was actualized by participation in male activities such as hunting, and his social position was confirmed by his willingness and ability to share. Safety valves existed in different cultures: the medicine fight among the Beaver Indians enabled a man to save face despite success or failure in the hunt.[14] Sharing had both economic and social functions. The successful hunter shared his bounty with others thereby gaining prestige for himself; others could consume meat assured that the next time, they might be the ones to contribute. Maintenance of shared obligations helped to stabilize the kinship network by clearly reinforcing rights and obligations. Tanner's description of the history of the fur trade in the Yukon shows how group co-operation was also important among native trappers during the period when white traders dealt directly with Indian trading chiefs.[15]

Despite the high level of technology and skill required to hunt and trap, non-Indians have now defined hunting, a co-operative venture, as less prestigious than holding a regular job, an individual activity. Blishen's socio-economic index scores 320 occupations found in Canada, as they were rated by a representative sample of Canadians, and puts hunting and trapping at the very bottom.[16] This shows the fallacy of imposing categories of one culture on the activities performed in another. However, this lack of prestige, combined with an improved technology, decrease in game and in fur prices, and loss of skills by young men who are partial products of the non-Indian school system, makes men reluctant to hunt. The scant renumeration from jobs available to native persons provides no surplus for sharing and its by-product, prestige. Government welfare checks are uni-directional and originate in a foreign redistribution system; this precludes any possibility of sharing and of establishing oneself as the potential saviour of one's group.

Now it is decreed by the dominant society that manhood is achieved through competition. Competition was never absent

among Indians, but it never operated in the undisguised fashion in which it has been introduced. Among northern whites, many of whom see themselves facing a hostile environment, individualism is often carried to extremes. Their social adaptations may result in a segmented "every man for himself" approach. The value of co-operation, once necessary for survical in the North is breaking down, yet at the same time the absolute need for co-operation remains and is increasing in a large area with a limited population originating from a variety of backgrounds. The new competitive patterns often preclude exchange, even of ideas, with a rival. Paradoxically, individualistic competition, the gift of the newcomers and the source of so many difficulties, is still touted as the solution to, rather than the actual cause of so many problems. Educators, especially, express keen interest in having children learn to compete. It would seem that the North provides a unique opportunity for real co-operation toward commons goals and that non-natives could learn a great deal from Indians and Eskimos about how to cope with the constraints in their environment. Fragmented western man, trained to compete with his peers, yet experiencing alienation in the process, may be moving into an era when co-operation — economically, socially and politically — will be necessary if he is to survive. As attitudes on major social and political issues become increasingly polarized, opportunities for real social reform decrease. If we are to make realistic efforts to solve some of the major social problems facing us, we would do well to internalize some of the general principles, such as co-operation for survival, used in non-western cultures.

Coexistence. By subtle but structured use of their kinship network, Indians were able to manipulate their social environment in order to minimize social tensions. In the Northwest, this network was infinitely expandable and threatening persons were often adopted, put into a framework and given an identifiable role. McClellan and Tanner have both described how Tlingit Indians blockaded the Athapaskans from direct contact with white traders and held the role of middlemen in fur trade relationships prior to the gold rush; however, they minimized potentially hostile relationships by incorporating the sub-dominant Athapaskans into their kinship network.[17] Tlingits gave women to Athapaskan men as wives, involving the inland bands in reciprocal relationships

while simultaneously introducing considerable Tlingitization into the interior. In the southern Yukon, partnerships resulted from economic motives, but further north among the Kutchin bands, partnerships were initiated as a security measure, with or without trade obligations.[18] The same process continued after the gold rush: those whitemen who stayed often took Indian wives. Indians are still able to "adopt" individuals into their social network, placing them into some kind of a known context and removing the threat from new roles. Non-Indians are usually less able to do this and may regard new persons as potential competitors and hence, as a threatening force.

Non-Indians could benefit considerably by learning about the principles by which Indians handled early contacts with cultures other than their own. We could make more effective use of our own potential "kinship systems" which could be based on common interests and activities rather than on genetic ties. The kinship analogy could be of practical use when applied to an area where people might be drawn together by common concerns: knowledge, information, and ideas flow from person to person in ways similar to the bush kinship system. Such kinship systems become self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing as they grow and expand.

Isolation. The physical environment places certain constraints on activities in the North. Winters are long, cold and dark. Combined with the effects of relative isolation, this generates considerable stress for those newly arrived from the South. Throughout modern urban society the individual is seen as an isolate: the crowd isolates him, but this is a kind of psychological, rather than physical isolation. The isolation in the North, involving separation from people of similar interests, presents an unfamiliar and often difficult experience.

Darkness and isolation seldom generated such tensions for native persons born and raised in this environment. Traditionally they had a limited and known number of primary interpersonal relationships in an animistic world which included non-human as well as human social beings. Further investigation of how they handled hostilities which emerged in their world could unearth new approaches to social behaviour. There is no doubt that one of the most pressing problems for modern man is psy-

chological alienation and the feeling of isolation. Indians have much to teach us about coping with isolation in the modern world. The possibilities of silent contemplation are more familiar to Indians than to western man who places greater value on activity for its own sake.

Conclusion

Cultures act as selective forces on one another, but it would seem more logical to encourage complementarity among cultures than the manufacture of weak replicas. The introductory Research Statements for a series of projects to be carried out in the eastern Arctic by Memorial University in Newfoundland suggest looking for possibilities of such complementarity. If, as the researchers propose, "...the nature and degree of complementarity between two or several cultures and other behavioral systems is within the power of men to influence if not yet to control...,"[19] then it is necessary to examine possible directions. Paradoxically, critical lessons for western man — in personal relationships, co-operation, person to person communication, creative use of leisure, and others — are all embodied in the very cultures which he is systematically trying to destroy.

The search for panaceas which will cause problems magically to disappear in the North continues, but there persists the naive belief that only non-Indians are capable of devising them. Yet, there are no "right solutions" to "problems", because the solutions, like the problems can reflect only the interests and perceptions of specific groups. Dr. Edmund Leach has pinpointed one of the most serious hindrances to co-operation in the modern world. The education system in the western world places great importance on analyzing and breaking down all elements of behaviour and slotting all experience into categories which were developed by the Greeks in the 5th century B.C. When experience proves so complex that it will not fit neatly into expected patterns, people alter neither their categories nor their expectations but persist in trying to make the two coincide. Within any one culture the categories are relatively clear, but when different cultures structure experience differently, non-communicating systems build up which must somehow be interconnected. Leach also points out that what

kept human beings from speciating in the evolutionary process was not interbreeding but the ability to communicate.[20]

Only by enabling people to define channels through which ideas can be openly exchanged will any effective starting point be achieved. This is certainly not uniquely a Canadian problem. Mannoni, speaking of colonial Africa argues:

> The social and mental state of the native is certainly not to be expressed as a fraction in which the numerator represents the proportion of Western civilization he has absorbed and the denominator the amount we think he ought to absorb.[21]

The possible role for the anthropologist suggested in this paper is not to be interpreted as one of saviour or missionary, but rather one of providing sound advice in areas where he is competent. Anthropologists have sometimes been employed to assist western powers in introducing technological and social changes to traditional societies: a more significant role might well involve teaching people of western cultures how they might learn from those peoples whom they high-handedly assume must simultaneously modernize and westernize. By working with real situations involving real problems of real people, rather than with pure abstractions, anthropologists might well solve some of their own pressing problems. The niches in anthropology as it now exists are finite in number and some anthropologists will have to move beyond the delimited work of pure academe to bridge the theory with the practical possibilities. This need not and should not mean a distinction between theoretician and technician, for if separated (as they so often are) neither would be further ahead, nor could problems be tackled adequately. It could well mean that development of new roles and a continued link between the university and the outside community could give the field scope for balanced development which has not yet been achieved.

Notes

1. Oscar Lewis, *Five Families* (New York: Mentor, 1959), p. 15.
2. Michael Harrington, *The Accidental Century* (New York: Penguin, 1967), p. 31.

3. "Whiteman" is a category used by the Indians in the Yukon to distinguish members of the dominant society from themselves. It is pronounced, not as two words, but as one, and includes all non-Indians when used in a general sense. I also heard it used as a derogatory term applied to Indians who were trying to assume non-Indian values and standards of behaviour.

4. A letter asking to what extent Indians were consulted about their potential houses was sent to an architectural firm involved in Indian housing projects in northern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Despite the ambiguity of the reply, the answer was obvious:
"As regards the influence of opinion of housing, in the area we covered, most conditions were of a low subsistence level and the obvious areas to cover were quite basic. For this reason, coupled with the vast separation between need and supply of housing, there is little attempt on the part of the Indian to affect the housing but rather the attitude is to accept what is given." Dec. 1967.
The whole subject of Indian housing, and the attitudes many Indians express toward the houses which this firm indicates they passively "accept" deserves much more consideration.

5. See Jim Lotz, "Myth of the Rich North," *Canadian Forum* 47:217-219 (January 1968).

6. Jamieson Bond, "A Report on the Pilot Relocation Project at Elliot Lake, Ontario" (Report submitted to the Indian Affairs Branch, Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, 1968); David Stevenson, "Relocation of Eskimos" (Draft of a Report submitted to the Northern Co-ordination and Research Centre, Dept. of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, 1967).

7. John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965).

8. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), p. 138.

9. Nels Anderson, *Work and Leisure* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1962), p. 2.

10. Nancy O. Lurie, "The Indian Moves to an Urban Setting," in *Resolving Conflicts — A Cross-Cultural Approach* (University of Manitoba, Dept. of Extension, 1967).

11. Beate R. Salz, "The Human Element in Industrialization — A Hypothetical Case Study of Equadorian Indians," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 4:100-102 (1955).

12. June Helm, *The Lynx Point People: The Dynamics of a Northern Athapaskan Band,* National Museum Bulletin no. 176 (Ottawa, 1961), pp. 92-107.

13. In one village in the Yukon, Indian women specifically mentioned that "Indian stories" should be taped and used in the schools. Because the school is accepted in this village it is possible that they see it as a vehicle by which legends could be legitimately taught and validated beyond the home.

The Indian Affairs Branch has instituted a "Teacher-aid program" in some western provinces. Here, Indian mothers are trained to help in classrooms by relieving teachers of non-professional duties and by helping the child adjust to school. However, it seems that the Branch is overlooking two important facts:
a) By subjecting these women to a training program, they are perhaps discouraging the use of many of the important qualities the women may have to offer. They are really doing little more than teaching non-Indian categories to Indians and seem to be doing little more than 'window-dressing' by putting the women in the schools.
b) By limiting them strictly to 'non-professional' duties, they are reinforcing a situation in which the white is always in an authority position. There are probably a number of things that the Indian mother could teach which would help both the students and the teacher.

14. Robin Ridington, "The Medicine Fight: an Instrument of Political Process Among the Beaver Indians," *American Anthropologist* 70:1152-1160 (December 1968).

15. Adrian Tanner, "The Structure of Fur Trade Relations," (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1965), pp. 37-43.

16. Bernard R. Blishen, "A Socio-Economic Index for Occupations in Canada," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 4(1):41-53 (1967).

17. Catherine McClellan, "Culture Contacts in the Early Historic Period in Northwestern North America," *Arctic Anthropology* 2(2):3-15 (1964); Tanner, "Fur Trade Relations."

18. Tanner, "Fur Trade Relations," p. 35.

19. R. Paine, ed., "Identity and Modernity in the East Arctic," Research Statements (Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1968).

20. Edmund Leach, *A Runaway World. The Reith Lectures, 1967* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 77-92.

21. O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: the Psychology of Colonization* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 23.