

An Eskimo Village in the Modern World. Charles Campbell HUGHES, with the collaboration of Jane W. HUGHES. Cornell University Press, 1960, 419 pages, 2 maps, 21 figures. No price mentioned.

This study will be reviewed¹ following its own organization. I: It proposed a point of view, called "psychobiological", requiring a phenomenological approach, and in relation to this it presented a number of concepts. It also stated a problem. II: It offered in summary form a mass of data of two kinds, (a) those derived from records, reports and informants concerning a number of events, statistics, activities, etc., in time and space; (b) those derived from statements of native informants in response to questions put to them, some of which were multiple choice in form while others were nondirective, and which purported to gain access for the reader to the "behavioral space" or phenomenal fields of key informants. III: It arrived at two conclusions, (a) there is probably no profit to be expected from the Eskimos remaining on St. Lawrence Island, their home, and (b) Eskimos feel this way too, but are not disturbed since they would like very much to be Americans.

I

The purpose of this study has been to document changes that have taken place between 1940 and 1955 in the Eskimo village of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island. Alexander Leighton had visited the island in 1940, producing the report which served as background for the study under discussion. In chapter I ("The Torn Grass") the problem is stated thus: "The utilization of this 'experiment of nature' for the investigation of socio-cultural change was thus the primary impetus for a return to St. Lawrence Island." (p. 23). In this chapter the various approaches and techniques are mentioned; besides amassing 5,000 pages of notes (on 5 x 8 paper), surveys, check lists, Rorschachs, life histories and diaries are all mentioned. Although there is mention of observations there are few data or generalizations which suggest its systematic occurrence. For instance, there are no first hand descriptions of interactions in any situation; in spite of very special Eskimo attitudes toward food, there is no description of a meal and none of family and household routine although the insides of houses, which in the absence of such observations seem empty, are described. It may be argued that this study is psychological and therefore need not rely on observations. This is not true. Rather, this is simply a study of events and of statements about them. The key informant technique which might have been used to make use of a manageable sample for observation leaves the key informants as obscure as the rest — one gains no notion of their roles in families, clans

¹ This review was written in the field where I did not have access to a library for precise citations.

or the community. I would argue that one should, if the reader is to appreciate the world as it appears to — not an average — but a specific informant. Sometimes the technique appears misused as when a statement of one informant in 1955, an “opinion setter for many people” (he would like to leave the island) is compared with a statement of one informant in 1940, a “setter of standards for many of the population” (he would like to stay), and these two are contrasted as indicators of the trend in sentiments for the community as a whole. (p. 73). In chapter II (“A Clearing Away of Idols”) the general conceptual and approach dimensions of the study are laid down, and some concepts (function, system, adaptation, striving) are included but not presented in any particular way; also I was concerned to know the meaning of such processes as thus described: “its social structure overwhelmed” (p. 29) and “...the group crumbles and its culture is shattered.” (p. 23).

The explanations concerning the “psychobiological” approach, included in chapter II, appear to have been given no systematic relation to subsequent chapters and therefore will not be dealt with here. A note is called for, however, on the phenomenological approach and the use of the term “behavioural environment” (or “behavioural space”): Koffka’s famous example of the man who drove his sleigh across Lake Constance thinking it was a snow-driven field is relevant. On discovering that it was the lake and not the field, the man apparently dropped dead. This example of Koffka’s assumes and outer “reality”, which he calls the *geographic environment* and an inner “reality” which he calls the *behavioural environment*. The relation between the two provides the psychological question, but the phenomenological question concerns only the *behavioural environment*. This method, moreover, also presupposes the possibility of finding out what the “real” outer world (i.e., the *geographical environment*) is like and it deals with the characteristics of that environment in a limited way. There is contrast between this kind of approach and that which is essentially “projective” in nature. For instance, questions directed at informants concerning the relative lengths of lines on Müller-Lyer figures (where lines are identical in length but appear not to be) are, in conception, very different from questions directed at informants concerning the identification of a Rorschach card where the geographical environment (i.e., the ink blot) has no characteristics that can be defined. Kohler, in *The Place of Value in a World of Facts*, similarly insists that part of the phenomenological method is a presupposition that the field to which behaviour is related can be defined. Without this important check and limitation, what can the anthropologist say or know about the phenomenal field of an informant who looks upon a world that is alien to the investigator? Obviously the investigator must use the best measure of “reality” that he can, and then he must be sure that his question is related to the measure. Failing that, his “disciplined naïveté” plus his intimacy in a “*verstehen*” way with the whole complex about which he is asking a question must prevail, but always to be tentative, always seeking successive approximations to some kind of behavioural “truth”. This book follows

the method of finding measures. These concern information about the environment, the food supply, disease, death, and so on. The method fails, however, because premature judgments appear to be placed on the summation of this information, namely, that it is all *depriving or punishing*. It is this prior judgment that impairs the method in question. The study therefore simply concerns data and statements about them by informants and is not convincing as a depiction of "behavioural space" (p. 371).

II

In the first chapter ("The Torn Grass"), the community is located with its historical and ethnological background. Chapter III ("Birth, Death and the Community") presents the age-sex composition of the community, age-specific fertility, death rates, etc., and in the fourth chapter ("Into a World of Sickness") the comparatively high death rate data are augmented with figures concerning sickness, especially t.b., some of epidemic proportions in 1955 (p. 82). These data are related to the unhygienic state of the community. The details of the exploration into such probably determinants of illness and predisposition to it (including dietary habits) in indeed impressive. One is therefore not surprised to discover that the Eskimo are much concerned with the facts of illness and premature death. Evidently this concern runs beyond simple anxiety for, it is implied, this state of affairs reaches deep into sentiments toward the dead who are disposed of as quickly as possible, their clothing being cut up or burned so as best to release the newly departed soul. This is regarded as "fear of the possibly malevolent return of the shade of the dead person" (p. 68) and is said to underlie the Eskimos' desire to maximize the distinction between the living and the dead. Alongside these practices appears a belief, however, in the ultimate reincarnation of souls of the dead in the bodies of the newborn. These two sets of data do not seem to have been reconciled. Similar minimizations of emotional reactions at death and similar beliefs in reincarnation among the Hopi bring Titiev (1944, *Old Oraibi*) to very different conclusions concerning sentiments toward the dead.

Chapter V ("Warmth and Well Being") moves well beyond the statements of bare statistics toward a large number of interesting ethnographic details concerning hunting (walrus, seal, whale, and other animals), fishing, trapping, and so on. An excellent description of whale hunting which is reminiscent of Drucker's description of that activity among the Northern and Central Nootka is supplied. Unfortunately it is split between two chapters and divided by a hundred pages or more. In relation to subsistence activities and the data of the last two chapters (the central theme of the book is now beginning to emerge strongly) one learns a good deal about the undependability of the food supply and the multiplicity of causes for this which presumably have made the Eskimo want to pick up and get out. The

gradually diminishing walrus catch between 1940 and 1955 is one — and probably the most important — loss in native food. Several reasons are tentatively advanced although I note that the Eskimo no longer exercise in order to toughen themselves against the cold, their modern hunting techniques are, by their own admission, sloppy, and in general inferior to what used to be. Further, they are not much motivated to hunt for a living anyway. Thus, it is “the job that pays a salary” which is sought (p. 136). Migration to the mainland (i.e., Alaska, not Siberia) is the big thing, for most people want regular work, good food and adequate warmth. One might therefore be surprised to discover that the hunter commands great prestige in the community, indeed “is the cynosure of approving comments” and those don’t succeed “are set aside from the main stream of cultural approbation”. (p. 133). I wonder if two distinctions should not be more rigorously maintained in this regard, (a) that between what *was* and what *is* and (b) between *prestige* and *esteem* as social phenomena — the two may or may not coincide. Dietary changes are given full and careful documentation and the history and present role of the Gambell Native Store is well and comprehensively treated. In this latter connection, one may be impressed at the rather complex commercial activities in which these Eskimos have become proficient — this would be more than unusual among sub-Arctic Indians. I note that the store, with its central and crucial role in the community, is under the direct control of the village council which appoints the manager and the assistant manager. Clearly the village council itself will warrant detailed examination. While the theme has by now become established in the book that this is the beginning of the end, and that the Eskimos are said to be preparing (psychologically at any rate) to abandon St. Lawrence Island, some evidence enters which is disturbing to the acceptance of that theme and that conclusion; this evidence concerns the village council, to be discussed below.

Chapter VI (“The Texture of Social Life”) is similarly large and carefully constructed. It deals with the kin term system which manifests significant departures from Murdock’s “normal Eskimo” in the direction of patrilineality in which the principles of *age*, *generation* and *sex* enter as significant determinants of widespread respect relations. An examination of the dyads should reveal the “widespread principle on which the entire kinship is constructed... that of the equivalence of brothers” (p. 234), but in my opinion accomplishes very little in that direction. Term similarity (i.e., between *fa*, *fabro* and *fabrochi*) presents insufficient evidence. Consider, for instance, Crow terminology where *fa* and *fabro* are identical terms whereas *fabrowi* and *mo* are identical as they are here. But the Crow system is strongly matrilineal and sibling equivalence (especially brother equivalence) would be upsetting to the whole lineage system. The device is used in the normal Crow system as it is among the Gambell Eskimos of recognizing sibling age differences in terminology, thus appearing to remove the possibilities of real equivalence. Solidarity between brothers and clansmen there may be, but this is not the same thing as equivalence.

However, one of the most compelling reasons for my unwillingness to accept this principle as operative can be applied in the coupled loss of power and significance of the clan in favour of that growing entity, the community, and especially its organ, the council.

Cross cousin joking (dyads include both sexes) has apparently no structural significance, even though some form of respect or avoidance seems to apply to all dyads excepts sisters and includes, incidentally, brothers. "In the present case... its function (i.e., the function of joking) as a patterned and legitimate way to express pent-up and displaced antagonisms would seem... prominent." (p. 245). This represents one of the few psychological generalizations in the book; I wonder why a similar generalization was not applied to the sentiments towards killing animals since (a) there is surely nothing that a Gambell Eskimo seems to love to do more and (b) some animals seem to be (phenomenologically speaking,) displaced kinsmen. Lantis' quote concerning the Eskimo's guilt feelings in regard to the killing of game animals (p. 134) adds to the possibility. At any rate, the sociological significance of the cross-cousin joking relationship is not considered. The investigation of the form and functions of the localized clans is extensive as it is for that most important of co-operative units, the boat crew.

Because the final chapter of this book is titled "The Broken Tribe" I should like to include a summary statement concerning the role of the village council in this community:

"The council is given almost unlimited areas of legitimate authority. It appears to be a conrescence of institutionalized power for enforcing a multitude of quite diverse social norms. Acting upon the broad directives contained in the constitution and bylaws, the council legislates and judges in matters pertaining to the health and bodily welfare of the people, marriage and family relations, economic problems of the entire village, social welfare, recreation, and crime. It is also the political voice of the village in dealing with out-groups." (p. 287).

In support of the above statement, minutes are quoted at length from council meetings that more than amply bear it out. Why, then, the "Broken Tribe"? Perhaps these Eskimos are forcing their clans out of existence (most criticisms of the council seem to take the clan as a point of reference), but they are also replacing kinship and clanship with a larger, more complex, and more sophisticated concept of organization: the segmented community. Is a group lost just because it chooses to change, seeks guidance in the change, and has to put up with a bunch of misbehaving kids? The Manus of Mead's *New Lives for Old* managed a comparable situation admirably and arrived at a concept of the community, too, in the presence of an outside (chiefly American) model. It is the *presence of the council* in that community and its apparent effectiveness that make it appear to me that Gambell village has a future.

III

One may learn, then, that in the final analysis the Eskimos are prepared to quit. Apparently they have become not only a politically and economically dependant people; they are emotionally dependent as well. Furthermore, "In the present day... the emphasis on being Eskimo has begun to pale, and personal identification is increasingly drawn toward the prevailing alternative model — that of the white man of the mainland, the citizen of the United States..." (p. 344). This involves identification and liking, but it also means steady work, regular pay, cars, being Christian. These amenities of life (again, phenomenologically speaking) must be had. "If this means leaving the island, they are prepared to do so." (p. 345). Especially do the young people "persistently throw in the face of their elders defiance of the old way..." (p. 358). Thus, while there are various negative reasons for leaving, technological and sociological, the hope of finding a bright future seems futile, for all possible avenues appear impracticable. (I wonder if the Siberian experiment, which apparently has been successful, should be so readily rejected) (p. 379). But the positive side of the desire to leave, to go to the mainland, is there for it means being American. Apparently, extensive relations with the military were without too much conflict and did not result in attitudes that generally involve natives and Anglos in well-versed mutual hostilities.

In conclusion: the amassing of data in this study is impressive and useful, but the conclusions are not convincing. One of the outstanding reasons for this is that the data do not adequately support the conclusions; I refer principally to summary statements concerning the village council. I feel that as an historical document of events that transpired between 1940 and 1955 and as an ethnographic account, this study stands well and securely on its own feet and does not require the tedious build-up of conceptual orientations which are mainly incidental to it.

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The North Alaskan Eskimo: A Study in Ecology and Society. Robert F. SPENCER. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 171, 1959. vi, 490 pp., 6 plates, 2 text figures, 4 maps, \$2.50 (paper).

This very full and detailed ethnographic account of the Eskimos of north Alaska immediately takes its place as one of the outstanding ethnographies published on the Eskimo area and at the same time fulfills a long felt need. Aside from Rainey's reconstruction of the aboriginal culture at