

The Contact-Traditional All-Native Community of the Canadian North:

THE UPPER MACKENZIE "BUSH" ATHAPASKANS
AND THE IGLULIGMIUT

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article traite de villages indigènes du type "contact-traditionnel", i.e., des groupements composés de chasseurs et trappeurs qui ont élevé des habitations permanentes à des endroits fixes. Ces groupes sont formés par des indiens athapascans et par des esquimaux, les premiers situés entre le Grand Lac des Esclaves, la rivière Mackenzie et le lac la Martre, les seconds dans la région de la péninsule Melville et de la Terre de Baffin.

Bien qu'il existe des différences marquées entre les deux groupes, de nombreuses similitudes, basées sur les liens de parenté, apparaissent clairement et permettent de classer ces groupes selon le type mentionné plus haut.

Introduction

Our purpose is to delineate the all-native community of the contact-traditional horizon in the Canadian Arctic and sub-Arctic as represented in two sub-cultural areas, the Upper Mackenzie Drainage, occupied by Slave and Dogrib Athapaskans or Dene, and that portion of Melville Peninsula and Baffin Island inhabited by the Igluligmiut.¹

¹ The field work in the Upper Mackenzie River region has been carried out over a ten year period by June Helm, most notably in a "bush" Slavey village on the Mackenzie River (Helm 1961) and the former "bush" community of Dogribs at the south end of Lac la Martre (Helm and Lurie 1961) but includes brief knowledge of four or five smaller bush settlements. Reference to the Dogrib fall caribou hunt is from field data collected in 1962.

The Igluligmiut data come from David Damas, who recently spent 12 months with that group. Since, at the time of preparation of this paper for publication, Damas is in the field and cannot be contacted, the senior author has had to leave his references uncited in the bibliography.

The Athapaskan area considered lies between Great Slave Lake, the Mackenzie River and Lac la Martre and includes the three trading forts of Simpson, Providence, and Rae. This is a land of sub-Arctic coniferous forest and thousands of lakes, many of which are rich fishing waters. The important natural biota of the region include the moose and also the caribou in their seasonal winter migration into the area. The area of the Slavey community includes some of the richest regions in the North for marten, mink and beaver.

The region of the Igluligmiut is the limestone lowland, tundra and gravel plain coastal region of northern Foxe Basin and Fury and Hecla Strait. At the time of the field study the population was distributed among fourteen villages, one of which has been associated since about 1957 with the trading post-mission-school settlement at Iglulik. Other European settlements in the area are a DEW Line site, and a nursing station. Game resources in the Igluligmiut regions include herds of walrus, the seal, small groups of caribou, and, for the market, the white fox.

The "all-native community" contrasts with the types of communities discussed in the other articles of this issue by the absence of white personnel or institutions which act as focal points of recruitment and interest in the community. However, the all-native community is itself oriented toward a focal center of white institutions in the region, commonly a settlement that may be characterized as "Point-of-Trade".

Furthermore, we must distinguish at the outset between what we here refer to as the contact-traditional horizon as against the aboriginal and early contact horizon. The aboriginal-early contact horizon begins immediately prior to first white contact or influence. This horizon extended for the Igluligmiut until about 1930. The end-date for the Upper Mackenzie Dene is much earlier, probably at some period between 1850 and 1900, depending upon particular groups. The prime criterion that we have set for the advent of the contact-traditional horizon is the establishment of all-native communities made up of permanent dwellings — log cabins for the Athapaskans and the *qangmat* or sod, canvas and wood shelters for the Igluligmiut. We consider this physical evidence of significant decline in the

nomadism and cultural independence of the aboriginal and early contact period. These communities of the contact-traditional horizon are perhaps also distinguished by their relatively stable core of personnel.

Mobility and Locale

In the contact-traditional horizon we discern two kinds of societal aggregates. The primary one with which we are dealing is the permanent base community, as identified above. The second kind is a residual category that we term "camps." These represent seasonal and temporary sites and movements of personnel out of base communities. One example of a seasonal camp would be the trapping outpost to which one or a few nuclear families move from the base community for one or more months. This kind of camp is present both in the Upper Mackenzie and in the Iglulik area. Aboriginally, the mobile camp was perhaps the temporally and socially dominant type of local grouping. It appears that the nearest aboriginal equivalent to the contact-traditional base community was the more or less recurrent aggregates of persons, by season, at particular locales for special exploitative activities. An example from the Igluligmiut would be the winter sealing village, large in size, and lasting three or four months in duration. The Upper Mackenzie Athapaskans paralleled this condition at such times as the fall fishery, when large aggregates of people came together for at least several weeks. The overall picture for both the Upper Mackenzie and the Igluligmiut area is one of fragmentation and coalescence of groups by family unit, according to season. Furthermore, among the Igluligmiut evidence is good for movement into or out of a region for a year or more in order to investigate the game resources of that area. Less sure evidence from the Athapaskan area indicates that in the earlier times the same may have held, with small groups of one or two nuclear families exploring an area new to them for its combined fur and game resources.

The factors in the increasing stabilization and sederunty of the base community in both regions have been primarily technological and economic in nature. The prime force was the introduction of the fur trade and the access to new technology that

it permitted. Until the permanent trading post was established at Iglulik in 1947, the Eskimo of the region traveled about 300 miles for trade goods. Nevertheless, by 1930 at Iglulik the increment of items of European technology, mainly the rifle, ammunition, and wooden whale boats, was sufficient to allow accumulation of food reserves to a degree that, together with the introduction of European building materials, made settled winter villages feasible. In recent years, the period of sederunty has increased from six months to nine or ten months.

At Iglulik the new technology, through the intermediation of the fur trade, has to date simply increased and enriched the exploitation of subsistence resources. It is probably true that in early contact times the advent of the rifle was also of primary advantage to the Athapaskan and allowed him, as it does the present day Igluligmiut, to increase tremendously his take of certain game animals, most notably caribou. But this stage of the contact situation among the Athapaskans has probably been gone for at least fifty years. Today, the bush Athapaskan primarily seeks furs in order to obtain money, to buy not only clothing and general equipment but a substantial portion of his food as well.

There are at least two major corollaries of the introduction of new technological-economic opportunities in these two regions. One corollary that appears to be much more important for the Igluligmiut than it has ever been for the Athapaskans is the stockpiling of game food. With rifle and whaleboat the Igluligmiut are able to kill tremendous quantities of walrus, creating a reluctance to move from a site of their meat cache. In certain regions and seasons the Indians experience some reserve fish and flesh take, but this is minor in comparison to Iglulik. Nor is the cash income sufficient to allow the stockpiling of commercial food to any extent.

The second corollary has been the continual accumulation of goods and gear unknown in aboriginal times — for the Dene canvas canoes and outboard motors, wood burning tin stoves, woolen clothing, steel saws and axes, etc. For the Igluligmiut commercial wood products such as plywood are of especial im-

portance. Through the decades there has been increasing access, financial and other wise, to these goods. Increasing dependence upon them, as part of the rising standard-of-living has kept pace.

In the location of the community upon the land, among the Igluligmiut there has been essentially no change. The older sites (pre-1930) of habitation continue to be occupied but on a more permanent basis than formerly. Population increase has resulted in the establishment of new communities in new locales. The main consideration in the selection of a village site in the Iglulik area is proximity to good sea mammal hunting opportunities.

The situation among the Athapaskans of the Upper Mackenzie is different and more complicated. The bush community of the contemporary contact-traditional period appears often to be established in a different sort of locale than those frequented in aboriginal and early contact times. This is the result of a compromise between the pull of Point-of-Trade and of those areas containing marketable and subsistence resources. The fish lakes of the interior of the Mackenzie region are the most notably rich and reliable in staple food. But these fish lakes are in locales that often do not allow easy travel to Point-of-Trade. The Mackenzie peoples today, therefore, are (if not settled in the trading post itself)² with few exceptions settled along the navigable waterways leading to the "fort", rather than in the richest fish, flesh and fur areas *per se*.

Composition of the Community

The building-block unit of the Athapaskan community is the nuclear family household. Occasional variants may include the addition to the core marital pair and immature offspring of the widowed parent or unmarried sibling of one of the spouses, or of a dependent young-married pair, sometimes maintaining a semi-separate but dependent household. The number of independent nuclear families in a base community usually varies between three and ten, with the total community population commonly

² The monthly family-allowance payments of the last few years have accelerated the permanent settling in the forts.

ranging from an estimated twelve to eighty persons.³ The residences within a community are in a compact, cleared area, except in some larger groups where a few dwellings may be scattered a few miles away from the main settlement.

The Dene native community is built up link by link through primary relative ties between marital pairs. Either husband or wife may be the linking member of the pair to one or more other pairs of the community, either in a parent-child or sibling-sibling relationship. Characteristically, unless intervening linking pairs have been eliminated by death, every marital pair of the community will be linked by at least one primary tie into the total chain. The Athapaskan community is neither exogamous or endogamous. Propinquity and convenience operate to encourage marrying in. Too close kinship of many community members encourages the seeking of a mate from beyond the community. More in former times than at present, customs of courtship and temporary uxori-locality, conjoined with small community size, operated to take the newly married male out of his community of orientation. But, past and present, the choice for permanent residence has been essentially bilocal. The relative dominance, solidarity and energy of husband's versus wife's set of male siblings and/or father seem to be an important factor in determining the final residence location of the pair.

For the Upper Mackenzie Athapaskans, essentially only one sort of all-native community has been identified; in the case of the Igluligmiut, it is necessary to differentiate two varieties. Community Type I averages about twenty individuals and three or four marital pairs (range: one to five marital pairs). Type II has as a population average of about fifty individuals with perhaps a dozen marital pairs (range: six to twenty-five marital pairs). The building-block unit for Type I is the nuclear family which combines with a few others into essentially one extended-

³ This is based on an estimated four to eight persons in a family unit. Population increase within the family is proceeding at such a pace, due to the decline of infant mortality and deaths from infectious diseases, that it is difficult to assess an "average" family size. Some young families in the last decade have swelled to 10 or more immature children. A generation ago, four or five surviving children would be considered a large family.

family household. Type II is comprised of aggregates of Type I plus a periphery of independent nuclear units.

The Type I (extended household) aggregations of the Igluligmiut are reminiscent of the Athapaskan total community in the internal linkage by parent-child and sibling-sibling ties between the constituent marital pairs. But one difference is that the emphasis is virilocal, with father-son and male sibling bonds dominant. In the Type II community, which, as we have indicated, is made up of Type I units, the connections between the constituent extended households are usually of a variety of bilateral, usually non-primary, kin bonds. These generalizations hold true for both aboriginal and contact-traditional horizons. In both past and present a period of bride service somewhat obscures the essential virilocal emphasis. Local exogamy seems to have emerged with increased sederunty and stronger identity of the local grouping .

Among both the Dene and the Igluligmiut there are other considerations that in particular cases intertwine with the basic kinship factors in community composition. For example, ecological factors, such as over-population and over-exploitation of an area, or personal frictions may be involved in individual and unit location and relocation within communities and among communities.

Coordination and Authority

The general tenor of our comparisons is that the Igluligmiut have more organized and systematic patterns of authority, coordination and distribution than do the Dene of the Upper Mackenzie.

Among the Igluligmiut the most important area of coordination, and decision-making is in the realm of subsistence activities, involving three units of cooperation and distribution, with attendant systems of authority, which correspond roughly to the groupings and organizational phases of the seasonal cycle of earlier times. These units today are: (1) the extended family, (2) the whale-boat crew, and (3) the village-whole. The division of cash profits takes place within the extended family. The

summer kill of walrus is divided along the lines of the whale-boat crew; whereas game taken in the winter is, ideally at least, distributed on a village-whole basis.

Kinship considerations are pervasive in each of the three levels but lessen as a prime factor as we move from the extended family to the whale-boat crew and the village-whole. Criteria determining dominance and subordination among kindred are those of sex difference, age differences and the ascendancy of the consanguineal group over in-marrying affines. The extended-family leader is usually heir to that post by virtue of being the oldest male in the male line. Within the whale-boat crew decision-making and coordination is partly regulated by these same sort of kinship directives. In crews made up of representatives of more than one kin group the locus of authority usually resides in the group owning the boat. On the village-wide level the leader of the largest constituent extended family is often the *issumataq* of the village or head man.⁴ Today the ownership of a whaleboat in such a family unit is prerequisite for village leadership, but other factors such as personality qualifications and ability in the hunt have always influenced the assumption of leadership to some extent. In matters other than economic, such as marriage and adoption arrangements and the naming of children, the extended family leader usually has the strongest influence, although there are two or three older men whose opinions carry supra-familial and even supra-village weight.

Among the Igluligmiut, relations between kinsmen seem seldom to depart from the ideal definition, although personality qualifications may mitigate dominant-subordinate dyads. Status factors that influence relations between non-kinsmen include relative position within each family, the relative numerical strength of each family, hunting ability of the individual, and the wealth of the family, especially with regard to boat ownership. Also, outside the limits of the particular kindred, some degree of status differentiation within the community is made on the principle of relative age.

⁴ This principle applied in all the villages in the winter of 1921-2 (based on Mathiassen's census and native recall information).

For the Athapaskans of the Upper Mackenzie, we can generally say that the picture of authority and coordination that emerges is one significantly less clearly defined than among the Igluligmiut. Lacking the extended family as a functional grouping, the Dene have no kin group beyond the nuclear family that evinces any consistent pattern of authority and coordination. Hard work, reliability and generosity draw respect, and may make a man influential. The distribution of large game kill still obtains, but appears to be community-wide only in smaller settlements. There is no exploitative opportunity comparable to the walrus-hunt that might evoke differentiation of status and labor comparable to the whale-boat crew organization among the Igluligmiut. The fall caribou hunt of the Dogribs, the nearest parallel we can find, is today of more symbolic than economic importance. Some of the men of the old regional groups, extending beyond a single base community unit, tend to cluster together into "crews", with the "boss" for each crew a matter of yearly selection by consensus, based on the individual's personality and good judgment, hard-working qualities, and knowledge of the route to the Barren Lands. In only one bush (Slavey) community, recognized as unique, do resident kinsmen own and operate special equipment (analogous to the Igluligmiut whale-boat) with some differentiation of labor and authority. One area of dyadic coordination not evident among the Igluligmiut but common to many of the Dene groups is the trapping partnership, often between primary kinsmen or brothers-in-laws, ranging from temporary to semi-permanent. Other joint productive efforts are few and are *ad hoc* arrangements between close consanguine or affinal kinsmen.

Among neither the Igluligmiut or the Dene of the Upper Mackenzie do we find that the deliberate and formal impositions and expectations of the governmental and religious structures of Euro-Canadian society have made much penetration and reordering of native life within the all-native community. Some coordinated activity among both the Igluligmiut and the Dene occurs around the expectations of the Christian churches. The Igluligmiut have a nominal leader of religious services within the all-native community. Usually this is the same person as the native-selected headman. In many Dene bush communities Sunday

religious services are a regular practice, with the role of host and/or prayer leader alternately assumed by older, respected men of the community. The structure of authority and coordination in the indigenous Igluligmiut community remain essentially unaffected by Canadian government action. Among the Athapaskans government fiat has created the "tribal" chief, regional headmen or "councillors" and their election. Their social and political role is generally limited to that of intermediary between the Indian individual and/or group and various government offices. The degree of influence and importance that a "councillor" has in his bush community stems from his personal qualities, rather than his official status. On occasion, group policy and goal formulation *vis-à-vis* a particular government requirement is achieved by consensus among the adult men of the community through informal exchange and semi-formal gathering.

Trends and Prospects

The Igluligmiut seem to be on the crest of an economic wave. Their economy is still heavily a subsistence economy, and so far game resources, most notably walrus, have not been outstripped by the food needs of a rapidly expanding population. Native social institutions have had great continuity to the present in spite of important economic changes and growth. In the attempt to perceive future trends in Igluligmiut society it is useful to look at the experiences of other Eskimo peoples. There have been other groups that have enjoyed the florescence of native subsistence activities, usually in the form of increased exploitation of caribou with advent of the rifle. Almost inevitably that emphasis resulted in the local depletion of that animal. Adjustments to these caribou crises have been sought in several directions. One of these was a shift to a more nearly complete sea mammal economy. In some cases this included government relocation of natives into regions in the Archipelago that were well endowed in that respect. At places where marine resources are not abundant, trapping opportunities and government subsidies generally have not been sufficient for most of these groups to maintain an adequate level of living. Sometimes these situations have been alleviated by access to local white wage-labor opportunities. Native industries have developed under government or private

stimulus in other localities. Native authority patterns have usually persisted but on occasions have been insufficient to meet the new economic situations and have been supplemented by white authority.

At Iglulik there is no subsistence crisis at present. On the other hand, even if local games resources were to be more efficiently exploited or if personnel were moved to new areas of sea mammal hunting, the cash needs of the Igluligmiut would not be met by the present modes of income, namely trapping and government subsidies. Wage labor opportunities in the region, such as at DEW Line and government installations, do not promise to absorb many more workers. If other means of livelihood develop, it seems likely, on the basis of comparative data, that native authority and coordination patterns will have to be supplemented by white intervention through governmental or private agencies.

Within the discernible contact-traditional horizon, the Upper Mackenzie Dene have been heavily dependent upon the fur market not only for almost all equipment but for a significant proportion of foodstuffs. The long trend in the last hundred or so years has been to abandon subsistence activities in order to procure more furs for the money and market economy and to retreat from areas rich in subsistence biota for easier access to Point-of-Trade. Only government subsidy through family allowance and old age pensions as well as outright relief has in recent decades allowed the Dene level-of-living to rise. Government subsidy heavily supports the household even of the bush community, although not to the extent that it does the average household of the fort dweller. In recent years the slowly expanding but erratic wage-labor market, mainly in government enterprises in the North, has been of some economic benefit and is a source of hope to the Indian. All factors, then, continue to operate to remove the Indian from the bush settlement and into the trading fort or white-focus community where opportunity for wage labor and access to white goods, services and subsidies is better. Only if some bush resource becomes exploitable, for example in the development of a lumbering or commercial fishing industry, can we expect the bush population to hold or increase in a particular

region. But it must be recognized that should such resources open they will be organized essentially through representatives and interests of the greater Euro-Canadian society.

Summation

The all-native community has here been considered as a feature of the contact-traditional horizon in the Canadian North. This has been a period of prescribed, stabilized and regularized relations between native and white persons and institutions. The member of the indigenous community goes beyond his own settlement to contact at special locales a few representatives of such standard white institutions as trading posts and missions, which historically have been created for the purpose of creating and promoting those relations. Increasingly, representatives of government offices especially, seek out the native in his home community.

We have suggested that Iglulik in broad outline represents an early phase of contact florescence (due to the introduction of European technology) that was at least approximated at other times and places in the North, although the special local endowments in game at Iglulik have permitted a degree of florescence to the present day perhaps in excess of that generally experienced. The bush Dene have for several generations been in a condition of a stabilized fur trade-*cum*-subsistence production. Government services have allowed level-of-living (and standard-of-living aspirations) to rise without comparable growth in the productive base. Despite observable differences in composition, activity, and coordination in Upper Mackenzie communities as against Igluligmiut communities, both ethnologists discern a common pattern of sentiment and affiliation. This revolves around kinship loyalties in general and the localized kin-community of which the individual is a resident in particular.

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