Community Patterning in Two Northern Trading Posts

BY ASEN BALIKCI AND RONALD COHEN

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article les auteurs comparent les conclusions de leurs recherches sur l'acculturation des esquimaux de Povungnituk et des indiens athabascans de Fort Good Hope. Sous le régime du commerce de la fourrure, ces deux groupes indigènes du Canada septentrional avaient connu un système d'organisation socio-économique largement identique: le piégeage d'animaux à fourrure était mené parallèlement à la chasse et à la pêche; la famille demeurait la seule unité socio-économique d'importance; les camps d'hiver étaient restreints, contrairement aux camps d'été; le commerçant euro-canadien était devenu le leader véritable de la communauté, remplaçant ainsi les chefs indigènes; le poste de commerce constituait le trait d'union entre la communauté indigène et le monde extérieur.

Durant la période d'après-guerre des tendances divergentes se firent jour dans les deux communautés. A Fort Good Hope se constitua un groupe d'ouvriers salariés indigènes, ce qui scinda la population en deux catégories occupationnelles. On y remarque également l'absence d'organisations communautaires formelles. Le contraire se produisit à Povungnituk: la sculpture de figurines en stéatite pratiquée par tous les indigènes assura une certaine homogénéité occupationnelle et servit de base à la création de deux coopératives.

The present article attempts to outline the ecological and social features of an Eskimo and an Athapascan trading post community in the Canadian Arctic. For purposes of this discussion, community refers to a grouping of persons in an area whose normal activities bind them to a definite locality, and whose political and economic activities are to some extent analytically separate from outside influences (cf. Beardsley et al. 1956: 133). By community patterning we mean the organization of economic, social, political, and/or ceremonial interrelationships within a community (cf. Beardsley et al. 1956: 134).

The authors have attempted to summarize briefly the history and development of the most significant elements of the community patterning for each of their respective cases, and from these, to draw some comparative conclusions. It should be noted that because of quite different problem orientations, each writer has viewed the community pattern from a different perspective based on his own fieldwork experience. Povungnituk, the Eskimo locality is seen from the point of view of the Eskimo family unit, and the roles played by Eskimos in their everyday lives. Thus the community pattern is seen from the native point of view. Fort Good Hope, on the other hand, is seen as a group of social units including the Athapascan as only one among several segments, and these segments are defined on socio-economic grounds. Despite these differences in approach, the writers feel that a number of the most determinative elements operating in each community have emerged from this collaboration.

POVUNGNITUK

The Povungnituk Eskimos (Balicki 1962) inhabit the barren coast of northeastern Hudson Bay. During the last quarter of the 19th century, these Eskimos seem to have established trade relationships with the posts at Fort Chimo (Turner 1894: 179) and Little and Great Whale rivers (Lewis: 139; Low 1906: 141 and 152) where they obtained guns, fish nets and steel traps. Breathing hole sealing was gradually abandoned and replaced by the more efficient technique of ice-edge hunting, while in summer seals were shot from kayaks. The collaborative pattern of traditional caribou spearing was replaced by individual shooting. With guns the Eskimos could kill scores of caribou anywhere, at any time, not just along the caribou migration routes, and the fish net had the effect of regularizing the fish supply until early winter. Trapping was a marginal activity at this time. The annual cycles of the Povurniturmiut at the beginning of this century reveal a long winter journey to the trading post and increasingly deeper penetrations of the tundra in summer following the gradual disappearance of the caribou herds in the coastal areas. Both migrations were group movements.

The establishment of trading posts in Povungnituk in 1910 and 1927 introduced further changes, characterized mainly by the intensification of trapping, acquisition of whaleboats, and increased dependence of the Eskimos on imported food and clothing. By the early 1950's the local Eskimos were distributed in five main winter camps at the mouths of the larger rivers. In most cases, the camp consisted of a small number of consanguineally related kinsmen, their wives and children, together with some affinally related men.

While winter sealing at the ice-edge was conducted individually as before, summer sealing was transformed following the acquisition of motor-powered canoes and whaleboats. The operation of the larger vessels required the cooperation of several men: pilot, engine repairmen, hunters, and a captain who controlled the use of the boat and organized the seal hunt. Further, the purchase of a whaleboat was often a group enterprise, with two or three close relatives making a common investment. The captain of the boat, usually the best of the hunter-trappers, acquired a special position of leadership and authority in the camp. The meat of the sea mammals was shared throughout the camp.

Caribou hunting was a secondary activity at that time. Fishing continued to be intensively practiced in all seasons, although it did not give rise to communal sharing. Waterfowl on the other hand was shared equally among all the households in the camp.

White fox trapping was the most important activity in winter. From December until April the trappers took a number of trips out on the trapline. Young trappers "inherited" their traplines in stages from older relatives, including affinals. Boys began by accompanying older trappers: a father, an elder brother, an uncle. They owned their personal traps and placed them alongside the traps owned by the principal trapper. With time the young man extended the trapline, using only his own traps, or he occupied a whole section of the old line. When the father was too old to travel, his son set his traps for him. Animals caught in the father's trap belonged to the father.

Money earned through trapping was considered to be individual property. Imported foodstuffs and clothing purchased

by the trapper were used within the household, usually a nuclear family.

The patterning of the Povurniturmiut in the early 1950's reveals two divergent orientations. The people persisted in their traditional search for local food. Although some ancient collaborative practices have been replaced by individual activities, new cooperative patterns emerged, founded upon the tight kinship composition of the camp unit and the guiding efforts of a camp leader. In these acquisitive and sharing activities the camp people often behaved as a unit. In the field of trapping, however, and in all transactions with the trader where the credit system was applied, a different and more individualistic right prevailed, making the household an increasingly autonomous socio-economic unit.

The Community Pattern (1958)

In 1953 Euro-Canadian agents introduced commercial carving of soapstone figurines in the area. This was a new activity providing men and women alike with a substantial and regular income. In 1953-1954 $1,347 worth of carvings were sold, compared with $49,000 in 1957-1958. Trapping, with all its fluctuations in pelt prices and fox availability became a secondary activity. The Povurniturmiut abandoned their winter camps and settled permanently in the vicinity of the store. The search for meat was continued with the help of new boats acquired with the new carving income. This was done through the establishment of camp accounts. Each of the old winter camp groups opened a collective account at the trading post to which went a fraction of all earnings. Only selected group leaders had authority to spend the funds for collective use. These formal group structures were established under the initiative of the trader. No over-all community organization was envisaged. The camp account system had the advantage of strengthening the traditional economic relations between kinsmen for a practical purpose well understood by the people. In most cases the whaleboat captains became camp account directors. Thus in the camp account system initiated by the local trader appear organizational traits developed

previously which have persisted as a social basis for the new economy.

During the period of intensive trapping the trader occupied a superordinate position in the community. His relations with the trappers were personal and through control of credit he kept his clients at his mercy. The trader's native helper acted as informant on native affairs to his master and frequently managed to take advantage of his position. In recent years, with the increase of government help and new income from carving the credit system has been all but abandoned and the trader-Eskimo relations have become increasingly impersonal. In addition to his usual functions, the trader delivered family allowances and occasional relief. In 1956 a Catholic missionary established a mission in this all-Anglican community. He encouraged some of the better carvers to form a Sculptor's Association, aiming at bettering the standards of these crafsmen and tried to obtain the direct sale of carvings. The missionary also acted as a teacher and gave first-aid help to the community.

Summary of Community Patterning

In summarizing the emerging community patterning of Povungnituk, the following points can be made:

(1) The Povurniturmiut have shown a great willingness to continue hunting and fishing, utilizing more efficient technical means. This has continued the pattern of periodic dispersal of the hunter-trappers.

(2) The Eskimos of Povungnituk easily substituted a new, less arduous, and more regular cash income activity (i.e., carving) to replace the now traditional trapping economy. In accomplishing this change, organizational traits previously developed were applied to the new situation.

(3) Following the decrease of ecological pressure brought on by the new income source, the tendency of these Eskimos to concentrate in larger, more stable groupings around the post becomes fully operative, and the necessities of hunting and trapping become subordinate to it.

(4) Extended kinship alignments developed during the period of systematic trapping tend to persist in the larger settlement around the post, and even acquire new functions.

(5) The changes in the economy and the settlement patterns have not been detrimental to native leadership; on the contrary, they have strengthened it.

(6) Although it is linked to the southern market, the local economy (carving and hunting) has retained considerable organizational autonomy expressed in formal economic structures and minimal contacts with Euro-Canadian agents.

FORT GOOD HOPE

Data for this section of the paper were gathered by Cohen (1962), and by one of his students (Hurlbert 1962) and her co-worker (Sue 1961, 1962). Fort Good Hope lies eighteen miles from the Arctic Circle on the Mackenzie River. Traditionally these Athapascan-speaking Indians moved about the area in small groups hunting, gathering, and fishing in annual cycles. Reportedly, the entire Hare Indian "tribe" gathered together for ceremonial purposes several times a year. Smaller groups forgathered at the fish camps on the Mackenzie in summer, and for regular and sporadic hunts. Leadership on such occasions was based on age, male sex, personal achievement as a hunter, and prognostication of successful access to local resources. In spring and summer most of the Hare were on the Mackenzie River while in winter and part of the fall they broke up into small camp groups of not more than two or three family units spread throughout the bush on both sides of the Mackenzie, north of Great Bear Lake and the Bear River.

The first Fort Good Hope was built by Alexander Mackenzie in 1806. Throughout the early 19th century the Indians were progressively involved in the fur trade. Even at this early date some were hired by the traders as hunters and fishers for the post as well as interpreters. In 1859 the Oblate Order put up a Roman Catholic mission at the Fort and began converting the Hare, introducing education, baptism, and an annual cere-

monial cycle from which emerged three important festivals — Christmas, Easter, and Assumption Day (August). In 1921 government officials signed a treaty with all of the Mackenzie Indians, bringing them into a formal relationship with the federal government. The Hudson's Bay Company monopoly on fur trading was abrogated at this time and a series of free traders began utilizing the Fort as a base of operation. With the rise in fur prices in the 1930's, most of the Indians built houses in the Fort although these were lived in intermittently. By the end of the 1940's this boom had burst; the prices slumped drastically and have never fully recovered. In the 1940's the oil at Norman Wells to the south of the Fort was exploited; its associated construction and maintenance work gave Good Hopers their first taste of wide-scale wage labour. This was expanded in the 1950's when DEW Line construction and the building of the new town of Inuvik (north of Good Hope) gave many of the population high paying jobs. The result of this period can be seen in the work histories of all the Hare Indians. Very few of the adult males have not worked at wage labour at some time during their lives, and only a tiny minority say they would not take up wage labour if given the chance.

In terms of outside institutions represented in the Fort, there are now the Hudson's Bay Company store, the free trader's store, the Catholic mission station, a wireless station, a two-room school house, a nursing station, and an R.C.M.P. constable and his Indian assistant. During the summer a fire ranger from Fort Smith lives in the town.

Present Groupings at Fort Good Hope

The population of the Fort and its surrounding area is split into the two major groupings of Indians and whites. The term "half-breed" is seldom applied; persons of this status being classified for most purposes as Indian. Elsewhere in the Mackenzie area, half-breeds together with non-treaty Indians form a semi-separate group in the community (Cohen 1962). The Indian group can be sub-divided as follows:

(1) Wage Employees — these include the janitors of the nursing station and school, clerks at the Hudson's Bay Company store

and the free trader's store, and the R.C.M.P. Indian assistant. These people receive from $1,000 to $3,000 per annum which allows them to maintain a high standard of living in comparison to other non-white groups.

(2) Semi-Wage Employees — about 15 per cent of the adult male population has fallen into this category for the last five years at least, although the individuals converter vary from year to year. Semi-wage employment includes construction work, both in town and in other larger centres, work on river boats, cooking for construction crews, and fire fighting. For the rest of the year the men are dependent on subsistence activities and government relief.

(3) Subsistence Dependents — these households are entirely dependent upon hunting, fishing, gathering, and trapping. With the decline of the fur prices and a reported scarcity of animals these people are becoming progressively more dependent upon government relief.[1]

As already noted, all Indians would prefer if given the choice, to work as permanent wage employees. The scarcity of such jobs has so far limited their distribution to those whose need is greatest and/or to those with the greatest degree of southern Canadian education.

The white population can be sub-divided in a number of ways, the most obvious of which is length of residence in the community. This applies to all Mackenzie Fort towns. First there are the permanent residents, usually a free trader or white trapper, often married to an Indian or half-breed. In Good Hope the free trader is the only person in this group. He is married to an Indian woman, and is friendly with the Indians, although he keeps to some extent apart. Secondly there are

[1] There is perhaps a fourth category which cross-cuts (2) and (3). These are the Colville Lakers or "Large People" who have set up a new settlement of Hare Indians at Colville Lake, 150 miles northeast of Good Hope as of 1961. Hunting and trapping are (for the present) very good here and a number of Good Hopers have moved. The free trader at Good Hope has set up a branch at the new settlement, and a church is being constructed. So far the Colville Lake people still come down to the Mackenzie for the summer.

semi-permanent whites. These make up about 90 per cent of the white population. They include all the government, Hudson's Bay Company and Mission personnel whose stay in the Fort lasts from two to five years. Their contact with non-whites varies with whether or not their jobs are a social service and to what degree this is so. Thus the nurse has more contact with Indians than the wireless operators. Contacts also vary with the history or tradition of such contact which at Fort Good Hope are minimal, and the attitudes of the whites. That this latter factor is an important one can be seen in the case of the nurse. In 1960 the nurse maintained only formal contacts with the sick who came to the nursing station, while in 1961 the new nurse made a definite effort to contact the Indians, and even gathered important information for the anthropologists studying in the area, during their absence. The third group are the transient white workers and officials who visit for very short periods. These people have only a very peripheral influence on local affairs.

The whites of the community are all, except for the free trader (and even he is to some extent), local representatives of larger bureaucratic organizations. Although the free trader is not an employee of a large firm, his credit and merchandizing relationship with the Edmonton Fur Auction Company links him to the policies of an outside organization. The whites are at the edges of their respective organisations whether these be government or private in origin. For a few, such as the wireless operators, this means they must simply maintain a local installation. For others, however, whether it is trade, aid, police work or religious service, they must implement the policies of their outside organization with reference to the local population. Dunning (1959:117) has suggested that these people are marginal in terms of their attitudes and personality, and indeed this may be so. What is obvious is that they are at the structural margins of their own organizations which demand from them certain kinds of performances and results. Since they cannot deal with subordinate members of bureaucracies in their jobs, there is a built-in potentiality in such a community for authoritarianism. In order to comply with demands made on them by superiors, local whites often find it easiests to bridge the cultural,

social, and economic gap between themselves and the people they must perforce work with, i.e. the Indians, by simply using their valued goods and services as rewards and punishments to obtain the responses they require. Resort to more democratic means can often lead to a lack of success for the local white who must fulfill the long range goals of his superiors. It takes either exceptional attitudes or special training to counter-act such tendencies.

Except for a very poorly organized community club whose meetings are attended by whites only, there i no traditional structure of social action that binds the various segments of the community into one working social organization. The whites organize *Sports Day* at the end of June to which many of the Indians come, and they also put on weekly movies, but these are viewed by all residents as services for Indians, by whites, rather than community projects. Thus it was widely believed that the white person collecting the money for the movie was simply pocketing the money. Indian-white relations are based primarily on the role functions of whites. An Indian individual has separate relations with the traders, the nurse, the missionary, the Indian agent, and so on. These depend on the specifics of personality, acculturation of the Indian, and the situation, and vary enormously through time. The Indians have their own elected chief and counsellors, but these are regarded (a) as intermediaries between the Indians and white government officials and (b) as lacking in authority. As one informant put it, "We don't like a bossy chief."

The emerging community pattern in Fort Good Hope is thus one in which the community decisions are made on an ad hoc basis by the local white residents. The Indians are forced by the economics and traditional patterns of their adjustment to the local habitat to maintain a very low level of integration with the Fort. Until there is a real and tangible economic basis for residential community life in the Fort, or until steps are taken to include the Indians in community decision-making, their participation in community life at Fort Good Hope will remain minimal, and the community will remain what it is, a post or trading centre.

CONCLUSION

The authors feel that prior to the introduction to wage earning at Fort Good Hope, and soapstone carving at Povungnituk, these trading post communities represented a type of community patterning widespread throughout northern Canada. The fur trade led to the development of such communities, and gave to them a common residence and socio-economic pattern with the following basic components:

(a) intensive trapping of fur-bearing animals for trading purposes along with continued dependence on traditional subsistence activities; (b) relatively small, dispersed winter camps consisting of a few, usually related, families; (c) the gathering of families in the vicinity of the post for the summer months and the creation of some permanent dwellings at the post site; (d) the emergence of a trader as a leading figure in the community; and (e) the trading post acting as the chief connecting link between the community and the outside world.

Although both Fort Good Hope and Povungnituk developed these common features by the 1930's, divergent trends have appeared in the postwar period along with the retention of some elements from previous period. In both Fort Good Hope and Povungnituk new income-producing activities were introduced which did not however replace trapping and traditional subsistence activities. Trapping decreased in relation to the extent of new cash income sources — more so at Povungnituk and less so at Fort Good Hope. Partial wage labour at Fort Good Hope led to the formation of occupational sub-groupings and the maintenance of population dispersion. In Povungnituk just the opposite occurred. Carving, practised by all male adults prevented the emergence of occupational sub-groupings; but it did provide the economic basis for the concentration of all the local Eskimos around the trading post.

In Fort Good Hope a growing number of Euro-Canadians took up residence as representatives of various agencies. This produced a white segment in the community of a semi-permanent nature. Euro-Canadian leadership became increasingly specialized

and impersonal. In 1958 no such community segment existed in Povungnituk as a specialized group at the trading post.

In Fort Good Hope, no community-wide social organization exists which unites all the population into a unit. The band organization has been introduced from above and the position of the band chief carries no marked authority; he is instead an intermediary between Indians and whites. In Povungnituk there is also no over-all social organization as yet. However, the camp-account system has led to a strengthening of native leadership and can serve as a structural foundation for the development of a wider and more complex social organization based on the greatly increased stability of the population around the trading post. No such development is at present possible in Fort Good Hope.

Université de Montréal

McGill University

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