

Social Organization, Acculturation, and Integration Among the Eskimo and the Cree:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article, la communauté esquimaude de Kaktovik sur la côte nord-est de l'Alaska est comparée au village de Winisk, peuplé d'indiens Cris et situé sur la côte ouest de la baie d'Hudson. Bien que les deux groupes aient été soumis à des influences à peu près identiques (i.e., une base de radar a été érigée aux deux endroits), les résultats n'en furent pas moins différents. Alors que chez les Cris l'organisation sociale subit un déséquilibre assez profond, chez les esquimaux au contraire, elle s'en trouve renforcée.

The recent introduction of the DEW Line and Mid-Canada Line radar sites to the far north have had an important and dramatic impact on many previously isolated Eskimo and Indian settlements located near these installations. In some instances new and relatively permanent communities have emerged. During the summer of 1958, we made studies of two such communities — one the north Alaskan Eskimo village of Kaktovik, the other the northern Ontario settlement of Winisk — and found strikingly different responses to the establishment of a large radar installation.¹ The Kaktovik Eskimos made a fairly successful adjustment

¹ The data for the Eskimo study is drawn from a long-term project Arctic Studies in Culture Change and Mental Health, supported in part by the Arctic Institute of North America, the U.S. Office of Naval Research and its affiliated Arctic Research Laboratory, and the National Institute of Mental Health, U.S. Public Health Service. In the early phases of the study, help was provided by the American Philosophical Society and the University of Oklahoma Faculty Research Fund. Invaluable aid has also been given by the director, Mr. Max Brewer, and the staff of the Arctic Research Laboratory, the Arctic Health Research Center of the U.S. Public Health Service and the Russell Sage Foundation.

to the rapid changes brought on by the introduction of the radar site whereas the Winisk Cree showed numerous signs of community disruption and conflict. Indices used to measure the degree of post-radar adjustment include an increase in excessive drinking, stealing, broken homes, sexual delinquency (culturally defined), overt aggression within the family, and other measures common to this type of comparison. In each instance the Cree community exhibited many more signs of unresolved conflict than did the Eskimo community.²

Furthermore, since there was no formally recognized "community" — in the sense of having a permanent resident settlement — prior to the coming of the military, previous village disorganization could not be considered a factor explaining the differential response of the two groups. Given this fact, we sought our explanation in (1) the traditional forms of social interaction and organization present in the two groups prior to the introduction of the radar sites, and (2) the type and extent of intercultural contact that took place between site personnel and the local resident populations.

Community Profiles

Kaktovik

The village of Kaktovik is located on Barter Island approximately 400 miles northeast of Fairbanks, Alaska, along the Arctic

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² For a more detailed discussion of the changes that have occurred in the two groups following the establishment of the radar bases, reference may be made to the following: Norman A. Chance, "Culture Change and Integration: an Eskimo Example". *American Anthropologist* 62:6:1028-1044; and Elliot Liebow and John Trudeau, "A Preliminary Study of Acculturation among the Cree Indians of Winisk, Ontario". *Arctic* 15:3:191-204.

Coast. It is a small community of a little over 100 residents and is one of the most geographically isolated Eskimo villages in all of Alaska. Until recently, all its members had to rely on hunting, trapping, and fishing as their major source of livelihood. While most of the present residents grew up in this part of Alaska, they did not come together to form a permanent village until the late 1940's and early 1950's. Only when the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey and the military began hiring local Eskimos for surveying and construction work did Kaktovik become formally recognized as a community. Prior to this time, most of the Eskimos lived in small family clusters scattered along the northeast part of the Alaskan coast and except for infrequent meetings with missionaries, bush pilots, and nearby traders, they had very little face-to-face contact with whites.

Before the late 1940's the basic economic pattern was one of hunting and fishing supplemented by some cash income derived from trapping. The family clusters were composed of coexisting bilateral kin groups, flexible in their composition and not infrequently undergoing minor variations to fit individual needs. The emphasis placed on mutual cooperation and obligation in the sharing of food and labor was much more rigidly defined, however, both in intra- and inter-related family affairs. Furthermore, the Eskimo practice of extending kinship privileges to non-kin by means of formal partnerships frequently enabled other Eskimos in the area to become integrated into the existing cooperative system.

Leadership traditionally resided with those individuals who through their skill in hunting, trapping, and in other activities, were able to command respect of the other group members, but was seldom recognized in any formal capacity. The family served as the principal agent of social control although collective action might be taken if the group as a whole was threatened.

In 1953-1954 when construction began on the Barter Island radar installation, the local Eskimo pattern of life underwent a dramatic change. The site was erected within a few hundred yards of the newly emerging village and all available Eskimo men were given employment opportunities at considerably high salaries. Since there were not enough local residents to fill the new posi-

tions, a number of families moved to the village from other Eskimo communities as far away as Barrow and Aklavik. While some were newcomers, quite a few of these new immigrants were actually returning to an area in which they had lived earlier and had many friends and relatives in the community. This influx of new residents was not large enough to seriously disrupt the close kin and friendship ties characteristic of most of the older community members.

During the period of construction, several Eskimos were given specialized training in semi-skilled occupations, and a few even achieved positions as union carpenters and mechanics. The fact that Eskimos were considered an asset by most construction and government personnel kept discrimination to a minimum. Eskimos and whites worked together, ate together in the mess-hall, participated jointly in a variety of recreational activities such as volleyball, games of strength, and the like, and in other ways shared many occupational and social experiences. At the request of the lay Eskimo Presbyterian minister, an old building was donated by the DEW Line to serve as a chapel.

Although problems of drinking and sexual misconduct occasionally arose, the government policy enabling Eskimos to set up their own restrictions concerning the admittance of whites to the village kept this potentially disruptive force under control. Those white men who made friends with the Eskimos and participated in their social and recreational life were welcomed by the community members, whereas those who were viewed as a potential threat to the village were discouraged. Any man, white or Eskimo, causing serious problems in the village or at the site, would be fired or sent to another installation.

Positive inter-ethnic relations were also furthered by the congruence of traditional Eskimo leadership traits and those required to articulate with whites. The Eskimo leaders' mental alertness, industriousness, generosity, cooperativeness, and ability to assume new technical skills were attributes also valued highly by whites, thereby enabling the local leaders to maintain their effectiveness and position of importance in both groups. At Kaktovik, the two traditionally recognized leaders worked steadily as carpenters, machine operators, and labor foremen and also

formed close ties with construction and government personnel in the area.

In 1957, major construction of the DEW Line was completed. This did not result in a reduction of jobs, however, since extensive maintenance was still required. During the summer of 1958 approximately 75 percent of the men in the village were earning salaries of six hundred dollars a month. For most of these men this was a full-time relatively permanent occupation. Although unions ceased functioning at the close of construction, and the large majority of salaries no longer differentiated between occupational skills, members of all age groups over eighteen continued to work at the site in preference to their earlier pattern of hunting, trapping, and fishing.

Given the dramatic changes that have occurred in the economic and social sphere of community life, the internal stability of the group did not appear to have been seriously affected. Patterns of cooperation and sharing were still carried out although the items of exchange included guns, tape recorders, western food and clothing, as well as the more traditional ones of native food and labor. Earlier forms of social control remained adequate to resolve internal problems introduced externally. That morale and enthusiasm for the *new* way remained high was evident from the extensive recreational and social activities participated in by almost all members of the village, young and old.

Winisk

The settlement of Winisk, with a population of about 150 Cree Indians, is situated along the west coast of Hudson Bay, 350 miles northwest of the nearest railroad town of Moosonee.

Following the turn of this century when the Roman Catholic missionaries built a church and the Hudson's Bay Company established a permanent trading post in Winisk, the settlement became an annual summer meeting place for the Indians. It was not until 1924, however, that a permanent resident missionary was sent to the area. Before the arrival of the radar base, the only other Cree-white contacts were the annual visits of the

federal Indian agents following the signing of the Treaty in 1930 and, more recently, of provincial government agents.

These early white contacts had relatively little effect on the basic pattern of Cree social and cultural life. Subsistence continued to be based on trapping, hunting, and fishing, the former assuming major importance.

Trapping and hunting activities were generally carried out by the nuclear family. Each family, living in relative isolation from nine to eleven months of the year, was a self-sufficient unit of production as well as the center of social life. Only during the summer, and for relatively short periods, did these small family groups live together at the post in any kind of larger social unit.

A senior member of a family, especially skilled and successful in trapping and endowed with additional social qualities, could assume a position of prestige and leadership outside his immediate family group. However, due to long periods of isolation and the high value placed on individual freedom of action, these leaders were able to exert relatively little influence on the band as a whole. As a result, mechanisms for the maintenance of social control were usually limited to the nuclear family.

With the construction of the Mid-Canada Line radar site in 1955, these semi-migratory groups of Indian trappers were suddenly faced with a totally new situation which drastically changed their whole way of life.

The base was erected across the Winisk River, about five miles from the Cree settlement. During the two years it took to build the site, all the able-bodied Indian males of Winisk were hired along with several Indians from a neighboring post to the north. None of these Indians were seriously trained for any skilled or semi-skilled jobs, and were hired instead as janitors, kitchen helpers and on the general clean-up crews.

The Cree were all paid the same minimum wage of \$1.25 per hour. During the two year construction period, the average income for each worker was about \$5.000. This form of cash income was entirely new to the Indians who, prior to 1955, had

almost always been paid in kind for pelts and for work completed at the post during the summer.

Although the Cree worked with whites at the base, they were often subjected to discriminatory attitudes and practices. They were refused entrance to the mess-hall and were requested to eat their lunch in huts assigned to them by base officials.

Social contacts between whites and Indian men were fairly limited in contrast to the much more frequent meetings of white men and Indian women. These surreptitious contacts usually took place at, or near the base and settlement and were commonly arranged for purposes of sex and drinking.

Effective leadership, needed to keep Indian-white relations under control, was absent in Winisk. The government-imposed Indian chief was recognized officially but not in practice. The Cree rejected his interventions in their affairs and because of this the whites often by-passed him in matters concerning Indian-white relations.

On the job, the behavior of whites toward the chief or potential traditional leaders did not contribute to the strengthening of indigenous leadership. Although the chief had little or no authority, he held an official position in the village. At the base, however, he was treated like other Indians and was assigned to a general clean-up crew. Moreover, because the chief and other older men were incapable of speaking English or showed reluctance to use the little knowledge they had of the language, the white foremen usually requested young English-speaking Indian men to transmit their orders to the Indian crews. Although this new role did not give the young men real power or authority, it did tend to minimize the chief's position and to suppress the traditional pattern of leadership based on seniority and skill in hunting and trapping.

In 1957, when construction of the radar site was completed and the Indian labor force was cut by approximately two-thirds, a new set of problems arose. During the two years of full-time employment, the Winisk Cree had lost much of their interest in trapping, considering it too difficult and economically unrewarding. Following the major lay-off, which mostly affected the older

married men, many of the unemployed Indians chose to remain at the settlement during the winter in the event that jobs would again be made available. Those who decided to trap left their families behind and spent but very short periods in the bush. A few young men tried to migrate but soon returned to Winisk due to the lack of jobs and funds.

The severity of the situation can be seen in the new problems that appeared with increasing frequency following the establishment of the radar base in 1955: drunkenness, stealing, lying, and perhaps most disruptive of all, the frequent sexual contacts that took place between young girls or unmarried women and white men at the base. The number of marriages between Indians dropped sharply since the young women nourished the hope of marrying white men.

Not only have these conflicts increased in frequency, but they have become more enduring and more pervasive in the group setting. At first, the chief tried to control disruptive sexual contacts by leading girls away from the base but lack of cooperation on the part of the Indians and whites rendered his actions fruitless. The same could be said of inter- and infra-family squabbles. Individuals or families could no longer avoid each other as was possible on the trapline. The chief intervened but there was little he could do on his own and, moreover, he could not shake the apparent indifference of parents or relatives of the persons concerned.

Comparative Analysis

Any explanation of the differential response of the Eskimo and Cree to the establishment of the radar bases must take into account both the pre-radar cultural differences and the type and extent of inter-cultural contact.

While the cultural variations are numerous and include such differences as the presence or absence of a prior cash economy, differences in government policy and its impact on the local population, all of these appear secondary when compared with the degree of inter-family organization present in the two groups.

The social and economic self-sufficiency of the Cree family, the long periods of isolation, and the emphasis placed on intra- rather than inter-family resolution of conflicts did little to prepare the Winisk Indians for the emergence of community life irrespective of the problems raised by later relations with radar base personnel. In contrast, the greater inter-family solidarity, more effective leadership, and willingness to try and resolve problems together as a group provided the Barter Island Eskimo with a much more adequate framework for adjusting to a more restricted community life and to the introduction of the radar base.

Important differences were also noted in Eskimo- and Indian-white relations. Whereas Eskimo-white contacts were in large part based on attitudes of mutual respect and took place within clearly defined limits, white relations with the Cree were more discriminatory resulting in a loss of self-respect for the latter.

Second, the impact of wage-labor favored the development of western-oriented goals and aspirations among Eskimos and Indians alike, but the Cree's means of fulfilling these aspirations were suddenly withdrawn in 1957. This loss of income combined with a new distaste for trapping encouraged strong feelings of frustration with which the newly emerging settlement could hardly be expected to cope.

Finally, the fact that all Eskimo men regardless of age were given an opportunity to participate in this new way of life limited the outbreak of inter-generational factionalism. Among the Cree, however, factionalism quickly developed when in 1957 most of the older men lost their jobs. Young men were suddenly able to act independently of their parents' wishes. In addition, young Indian women, because of their frequent association with whites, felt freer in their relationships with other members of their family and the band in general. These new feelings of independence were valued much more highly than their prior subservient roles characteristic of life on the trapline.

Thus, among the Eskimo, the formulation of new but attainable goals, combined with the reinterpretation of old ones by the group as a whole, were facilitated by their traditional cultural framework as well as by positive interaction with whites. For

the Winisk Cree, the lack of group-feeling coupled with disruptive inter-cultural contacts and limited opportunities which conditioned inter-generational conflicts, rendered delimitation of shared goals and the achievement of individual ones impossible.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the picture presented here is a reflection of the two settlements at a given point in time. In Kaktovik, recent study has shown new signs of conflict appearing with the immigration of large numbers of unmarried and unrelated young Eskimo men to the village — men not bound by the traditional family-based mechanisms of social control; and the rise of a new religious sect which has attracted several of the older Presbyterian residents. The Cree, on the other hand, while still lacking in community organization, are at least searching to find new ways of resolving their problems as can be seen by the recent incipient "specialization" in the marketing of fresh meat and firewood. Continuing study of these two groups should provide further information on the long-term effects of rapid acculturation and integration.³

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³ Recent discussion of the relation between culture change and mental health of the Kaktovik Eskimos may be found in the following: Norman A. Chance, "Conceptual and Methodological Problems in Cross-cultural Health Research", *American Journal of Public Health* 52:3:410-417; Norman A. Chance, "Eskimo-White Relations at Remote Military Installations". *Tri-Service Conference on Behavioral Problems of Small Military Groups under Isolation and Stress*. Edited by S.B. Sells (Arctic Aero-Medical Laboratory, Fairbanks): 57-61; Norman A. Chance and Dorothy A. Foster, "Symptom Formation and Patterns of Psychopathology in a Rapidly Changing Alaskan Eskimo Community". *Anthropological Papers of the University of Alaska* 11:1 (forthcoming); and Norman A. Chance, "Cross-cultural Contact, Identification, and Personality Adjustment among the North Alaskan Eskimo". Paper read at the 1962 annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association (mimeographed).