

# Observations on Community Change in the North: An Attempt at Summary

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## RÉSUMÉ

Dans les travaux précédents, des groupements ou des types communautaires précis nous ont été décrits. Ce présent article tente de ramasser en un schéma théorique quelques-unes des données mentionnées plus haut. L'acquisition d'assez grosses sommes d'argent, rendue possible par le travail rémunéré, est un élément nouveau et fondamental dans la vie d'un grand nombre d'indiens et d'esquimaux du nord canadien. L'argent nous est présenté ici comme un instrument permettant à l'homme de contrôler son milieu. C'est ainsi que les esquimaux et les indiens l'auraient envisagé, bien qu'inconsciemment. Ils ont donc accepté de façon générale ce moyen qui leur permet maintenant d'exercer un pouvoir de contrôle sur un milieu qui jusque là les avait assujettis, pour ainsi dire, à ses caprices et à ses limites.

The articles in this issue have dealt with several types of arctic communities. Insofar as we could find examples, these have differed from each other with respect to a variety of axes: one, the Indian as contrasted to the Eskimo cultural background; second, the Canadian as against the United States sociopolitical context; and third, the relative isolation from, or depth of involvement in, the new world of the north created by the intrusion of the sociotechnological civilization of the United States and Canada. The illustrative communities have been examined in terms of their history of contact, types of relationship to the outside, relative impermanence or sedentariness, ethnic characteristics, economic change and diversification, social segmentation,

control and leadership institutions, kinship and family patterns, and other aspects which can be fractionated out as relevant to the functional whole summarized by the concept, "community."

A number of questions have been raised and considered by the authors of the papers, questions having relevance beyond the problems of the Arctic. These include the persistence of certain cultural forms under conditions of change, as well as the loss of others; the conditions under which breakdown of the extended family occurs, or those in which there is a continuity or even strengthening of kinship bonds; the alteration of basic socio-economic units in the change from a subsistence to a money economy; the successes and inadequacies of attempts at combining these latter two types of economy. In an overall sense, the influence of economic base on settlement patterns has been examined. There has been reference to problems of intra-community social control and cohesion under new circumstances; to the question of adequacy of indigenous forms of leadership to meet problems arising from the more intensive contact situation and wider scope of decision implication; to the existence of many multi-group communities, those having native, mixed, and white populations, and to some of the problems of intergroup relations thereby created, such as deviant behavior. In several ways the discussion has pointed to problems of social segmentation within the native group itself brought about by new elements in the contact situation, such as education and the ability to speak English. The "revolt of youth" and the up-ending of traditional authority patterns has been a frequent result, and this is often underscored by the possession of money and the greater earning power which education sometimes brings. In a larger sense, one of the questions implicitly examined has been that of the community and individual effects of a rapid and massive change, and the concurrent conditions under which on the one hand this may be stressful and disruptive or, on the other, be accommodated successfully from a community and personal point of view. Such rapid change is of course dramatically illustrated by the DEW Line or Mid-Canada Line construction opportunities, with their sudden florescence and then sharp decline in many communities across the North.

In terms of my particular predilections the most fruitful way to view these phenomena is to point to the much-changed behavioral environment (e.g., in Hallowell's phrase) that has been created for the native peoples of the north over the last two decades. Now, with settlement patterns tending toward permanent residence in a given place, and with the population usually composed of diverse groups, a new psychosocial field of action has been created. This is one that spawns and encourages cultural change to an extent never before possible, through creating a "conjunction of differences" (as Barnett, 1953, would put it) stimulating daily self-appraisal and question about received forms — a situation relevant to the rubric of the "sociology of knowledge." The new "reference culture," as I termed it elsewhere, which prior to World War II was only segmentally represented in the local community, has now become ubiquitous. In a place such as Frobisher Bay it is indeed a caricature rather than an accurate sample of the culture of the south.

The task of summary of so many diverse observations is a difficult one, and that of finding common patterns as well as suggesting explanations for divergent responses a large one, certainly going beyond a short paper. But perhaps a beginning can be made, at least in terms of pulling out a few common threads from a particular problem area. Toward this end I wish to suggest several relevant considerations.

The most obvious thing we can say about recent *community* change in the North is that we now speak of "communities" in terms that have much more of a ring of stability and permanence about them than was the case 20 years ago. In the last two decades there has been an unparalleled growth in size and relative permanence of these points of population residence. Stability of settlement is not especially new for most of the Alaskan Eskimo coastal villages, but even there the trend has been markedly increased. And among the Canadian indigenous groups it has been nothing short of dramatic over the last 20 years.

Reasons for this population concentration have been many and diverse, and some of the structural and psychological implications have been adumbrated above. Much of what has lain behind it can be traced to the convergence in space and time of several

sets of factors. These include the world-wide political concerns of the United States and Canada and their survival imperatives as nation states. Others can be traced to the demands of the market and the whims of fancy (e.g., the popularity of "primitive" art such as stone or ivory carvings). Still others have their roots in particular historical and cultural circumstances, both of the local populations and of the environing complex societies. An example is technological developments in transportation facilities, which create the mechanical means for intrusion into the North on a massive scale to an extent impossible before now. Some are of an ecological, or, more properly, "socio-ecological," nature, in that they are the result of man's role in changing the face of the earth.

Illustrating the functional interrelatedness of his last type of factor one may look at the increased use of outside material culture and technology. From the earliest contact days, of course, firearms and more efficient animal-harvesting equipment have been highly prized trade objects. Through over-killing, use of repeating rifles has undoubtedly been one of the main factors in the catastrophic depletion of the caribou herds of both the Ungava Peninsula and the Barren Ground, the latter occurring in the last decade and a half. This increased firepower has also had detrimental effects on sea mammal resources in many areas, although there are exceptions, such as the Melville Peninsula. This in turn has added to the subsistence stresses of native populations and undoubtedly been important in the trend toward concentration in population centers, where welfare support can be found. But the depletion of the caribou herds has also contributed to increased unreliability of fox-trapping as an income activity, for without caribou carcasses, an important food source for the fox population and for fox bait is lacking.

In many cases the population concentration has been influenced by government or private agency directive through the centralized provision of schooling, medical help, food and clothing relief, or missionary assistance. These have acted as magnets, drawing people and linking them into new institutional relationships originating in the outside culture rather than the indigenous forms. Unquestionably the most powerful attraction, however,

has been that of *the job*, or, more fundamentally, of money. Aside from the family allowance, welfare payments and relief support (which do not of themselves necessitate population concentration), the most far-reaching form this has taken has been that of wage-work in some industrial or construction enterprise — the selling of labor rather than material product. The mining operations at Ranking Inlet illustrate one type of such activities, while the formerly extensive DEW Line construction jobs illustrate another. Throughout the north, sometimes quite explicitly but always at least implicitly, the hope of participating to a greater extent in the apparent economic abundance of the outside world has seemed to underlie much of the population movement.

Thus, looked at broadly, and without the narrowing vision of “disciplinary” frames of reference, what has occurred in the north is a fundamental change in the behavioral environment in which people act — both the environment as it *is* (as in depletion of the caribou herds or other game animals) and the environment as it is *conceived to be* (as in new orientations and sentiments relating to the world). To a large extent, the people of the north, in coming into population centers for jobs that will yield money, have taken steps to acquire what appears to be the most efficient tool for adapting themselves to some of the salient features of the new environment that has been thrust upon them.

There is, of course, nothing new in pointing to money as a medium of exchange and repository of economic value. But phenomenologically it is much more than that. *It is an instrument of control* (and I do not use this in the restrictive psychoanalytic sense). Given the operation of a system of certain assumptions and understandings, the manipulation of this symbol is a cogent and effective way to achieve interpersonal and private goals of many kinds. It can make a person or group more effective in terms of resources, skills, and knowledge for meeting the demands of particular types of environment. But it can also help create that very environment — perhaps the supreme expression of control and adaptation in the constant transaction between organism and surroundings that is the life process.

For years introductory texts in anthropology have spoken with admiration of the Eskimos' adaptive ingenuity in harsh and bitter surroundings. Many aspects of that environment have now radically changed, but I would suggest that the nature of the "culturally compulsive" response has not. Through direct contact with white men as well as the multiple working experiences northern peoples have had over the last decade, it would seem that the lesson has been clear: money is an inherently compact and transposable *instrument of social action*, far more versatile than traditional adaptive techniques. It is an almost protean tool, translatable into all types of objects and capable of transforming many situations. Given the difficult nature of the setting in which both the Eskimos and Indians live, and the high prevalence of subsistence and survival anxieties, it can be argued that any instrument or adaptive device which promises greater effectiveness will be readily adopted.

Obviously there are a number of motivational factors involved in the population concentration — self-preservative reactions to high morbidity rates or threat of food shortage, opportunities for sociableness, etc. I suggest we re-adopt for the moment, however, an essentially Darwinian framework and consider man the animal appraising his environment, seeing how it changes, what moves it, what tools or strategies are effective. Moreover, there is reason to ascribe a functionally autonomous status to such a pragmatic orientation, and not derive it from other motivational sources. This is not to say, of course, that all actions succeed or contribute to adaptational flexibility, for many misfire and get subverted by misperceptions of the environment, especially those structured and transmitted "misperceptions" which we conceptualize as "values," "sentiments," etc. But striving, synthesizing, mending, building — the active mode interpreted subtly — is the prime defining characteristic of the life process, especially that of man. Even symptoms of psychiatric disorder most fruitfully are viewed against the background of attempts at adjusting what is perceived as an undesirable state of affairs.

If one thus argues concerning salient motivational aspects of this population concentration, it would be congruent with some of the considerations advanced by the psychologist R.W. White,

who speaks of "effectance motivation" and the concept of *competence* as a primary motive in behavior. In his comprehensive recent article surveying motivational research from animal studies to psychoanalytic ego psychology, White speaks in terms congenial to much dynamic psychiatry in noting that a

...concept such as competence, interpreted motivationally, [is] essential for any biologically sound view of human nature. This necessity emerges when we consider the nature of living systems, particularly when we take a longitudinal view. What an organism does at a given moment does not always give the right clue as to what it does over a period of time. Discussing this problem, Angyal (1941) has proposed that we should look for the general pattern followed by the total organismic process over the course of time. Obviously this makes it necessary to take account of growth. Angyal defines life as 'a process of self-expansion'; the living system 'expands at the expense of its surroundings,' assimilating parts of the environment and transforming them into functioning parts of itself. Organisms differ from other things in nature in that they are 'self-governing entities' which are to some extent 'autonomous.' In the course of life there is a relative increase in the preponderance of internal over external forces. The living system expands, assimilates more of the environment, transforms its surroundings so as to bring them under great control. 'We may say,' Angyal writes, 'that the general dynamic trend of the organism is toward an increase of autonomy... The human being has a characteristic tendency toward self-determination, that is, a tendency to resist external influences and to subordinate the heteronomous forces of the physical and social environment to its own sphere of influence.' The trend toward increased autonomy is characteristic so long as growth of any kind is going on, though in the end the living system is bound to succumb to the presence of heteronomous forces.

Of all living creatures, it is man who takes the longest strides toward autonomy. This is not because of any unusual tendency toward bodily expansion at the expense of the environment. It is rather that man, with his mobile hands and abundantly developed brain, attains an extremely high level of competence in his transactions with his surroundings. The building of houses, roads and bridges, the making of tools and instruments, the domestication of plants and animals, all qualify as planful changes made in the environment so that it comes more or less under control and serves our purposes rather than intruding upon them. We meet the fluctuations of outdoor temperature, for example, not only with our bodily homeostatic mechanisms, which alone would be painfully unequal to the task, but also with clothing, buildings, controlled fires, and such complicated devices as self-regulating central heating and air conditioning. Man as a species has developed a tremendous power of bringing the environ-

ment into his service, and each individual member of the species must attain what is really quite an impressive level of competence if he is to take part in the life around him (1959, p. 324).

It is unfortunate that White avoided using the term "culture" when discussing man's material alterations of the environment. The development and transmission of a coherent body of adaptive knowledge is one of the central ideas in most definitions of the concept of culture.

Further, it is of great importance, it seems to me, to make a qualitative differentiation between techniques of adaptation. White approaches this in one phrase when he speaks of man making changes in the environment so that it will "serve our purposes rather than intruding upon them." This distinction is basic, for there are different sorts of problems created and responses generated depending upon whether a person (or a group) interacts with environment predominantly in terms of *responding* to situations which it recurrently creates — that is, operates mainly with "*reactive control*" techniques and strategies — or is capable of what I shall call "pre-active" or *creative control strategies*, those which bring about many of the very conditions themselves in which life will be carried on. Obviously, I do not here use "creative" in a narrowly "sophisticated" sense, but rather with the connotation of inherent mastery and power, apprehended subjectively. The difference can be illustrated by pointing to curative and preventive medicine, curative medicine being an expression of reactive control of a portion of nature — responding when nature creates the imperative; and preventive medicine the implementation of pre-active or creative control strategies — bringing about desirable environmental settings through application of control techniques. This is not a hard and fast distinction but rather one of degree. Nonetheless it has widespread implications for group as well as individual adaptation.

A dramatic example of extremities in these two types of control strategies is found in the northwestern corner of Greenland near Wolstenholme Fjord, well within the Arctic Circle and formerly the site of the northernmost human habitation of recent historic times. The contrast here is between the way of life — the culture, the set of control strategies — practiced by



the small band of Polar Eskimos, and the way of life of the huge Thule U.S. Air Force base established in the same place in the early 1950's.

What has happened, of course, is that within the very same geographic area is exemplified the contrast between a group depending for its survival and perpetuation mainly upon reactive control techniques in relating to the environment, and a group which through an astonishing development in the mechanical-technological area of its culture relates almost overwhelmingly with creative control techniques.

Each of these dominant strategies has its own set of sub-problems to contend with, which are linked in a system and derived from different sources. The reactive techniques are obviously more closely tied to the types and quantity of natural resources at hand than is true of the creative strategies. But this is not the only feature, nor, probably, is it the most important. Skills and knowledge are what make most of the difference between these two control strategies — as illustrated by the growth of culture and application of technology. Of great importance also are properly trained and functioning personnel in roles necessary for translating the skills into socially and personally useful ends.

A constant problem involved in implementing both strategies is that of allocation among priorities, of selecting *which* goals of action are to be sought rather than others, and in what sequence. In societies living close to the margin of survival, however, this problem *per se* does not loom so large, for the overshadowing problem is that of basic survival itself, not "survival under what alternative conditions." The more immediate goals of nutritional and physical need press in upon the group and have an imperative quality in demanding satisfaction, allowing little leeway for experimentation in allocating the society's productive energy.

But in groups which have crossed the threshold and are advancing into a stable foothold in the area of creative control, the problems of charting, defining, and selecting among goals of action become more acute. How to choose in the midst of

plenty? This depends on and demands skills, knowledge, values (perhaps even the old fashioned concept "wisdom"). Particularly important is knowledge of human resources — of human potentials and motivational capabilities as well as limitations. Not only what *can* man or corporate group do, but what *should* they do now that they have the realistic ability to accomplish most of what they want to do? The engineering problems are rapidly being solved; the allocative ones remain, a note which Galbraith stresses in his book, *The Affluent Society*.

Many of the factors influencing the way a people will utilize new opportunities are rooted as much in their particular security systems as in their attainment of and confidence in skills and control strategies for meeting unfamiliar challenges. Techniques of reactive control developed in the traditional situation are often grossly inadequate in a setting demanding those of creative control and decision-making — where *creating the conditions of life* becomes a problem of more moment than just responding to outer directives. In a sense nature with its stern demands for survival has long been man's crutch, for within broad limits it indicated the proper response. But increasingly this is no longer the case even for many peoples of the north who, having discovered the power of this new adaptive device, money, have not at the same time acquired the skills in using it effectively, neither with broad nor delicate brush stroke.

A lack of allocative skills may also lie at the root of much of the anxiety, rootlessness, bewilderment, and social division found in many northern communities and graphically illustrated elsewhere on various American Indian reservations following sudden receipt of natural gas or oil revenues, or money as a treaty adjustment. No matter the relative means, the lack of both obvious and subtle articulation, of gearing into each other, between means and perceived goals engenders disruption of an "essential physical condition," as one theorist puts it, often serious enough to predispose the individual toward the development of psychiatric symptoms as a readjustive expression (cf., Leighton 1959). Increasingly, with the predicable movement of the outer world into the North, the problems have become more those of deciding among alternative "goods" rather than those of making

the relatively simple decision to opt for the good over the bad, or those of responding to stark survival needs rather than those having equal valence. The increased availability of money as an adaptive and creative control device in many ways engenders more rather than fewer problems — at least in the short run.

It is the ceaseless attempt to become as fully as nature permits the master of events — to move from a predominance of reactive patterns to one of creative patterns — that lies at the root of these two contrasting types of control strategies. In a recent article, Eiseley recalled Sir Francis Bacon's early vision of man's long struggle. In speaking of "the advancement of learning" Eiseley noted that what Bacon "sought was no more nor less than an education which would give men power over their own destiny. 'For the world,' Bacon said, 'is not to be narrowed till it will go into the understanding (with has been done hitherto), but the understanding to be expanded and opened till it can take in the image of the world... Then, and only then, admonished Bacon, shall we no longer be kept dancing within little rings, like persons bewitched, but our range and circuit will be as wide as the compass of the world.'"

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