

## Short Papers and Notes

### THE ANGNASHEOTIK: AN ACCOUNT OF THE INVENTION OF A SPIRITUAL ENTITY AMONG THE UNGAVA ESKIMOS

The reactions of primitive peoples to contact with the western culture take a multitude of forms and involve a large number of variables from both of the cultures concerned. Among the most interesting are reactions that are evidenced in the realm of belief about the supernatural world. These may come in various ways and take various forms. If, for example, there is an active missionary effort to transmit christian belief, the response may vary from total conversion and complete abandonment of old beliefs, or the fusion (or confusion) of christian and native beliefs, to the incorporation of some new element in a native disguise. Where there is no missionary activity, conversion, even of single persons is understandably rare. However, diffusion of aspects of christian belief even to the point where native conceptions of the supernatural are modified, can take place through casual or secular contact. An example is the transmission of many European superstitions to various Indian tribes by *coureurs-de-bois*. The traffic was not all in one direction and Roman Catholicism in Quebec shows some Indian influences<sup>1</sup>. Among those who transmit western culture traits may be superstitious and ignorant men and it is not unexpected that the beliefs about the supernatural world handed on by such persons often emphasize the magical aspects of popular christian belief and sometimes quite clearly belong to the remnants of medieval belief in witchcraft and sorcery that still persist in the western culture. The term popular christian belief is used here to include a number of beliefs and practices that are not articles of faith but which are ancient and widespread, e.g. the bibliomancy of an earlier day and the common belief in

an immediate personal judgement after death.

Where culture contact does not produce great stress, diffusion of religious beliefs may go on either way. In extreme instances the whole system of religious belief may be transformed without any very evident changes in other areas of the culture. In Samoa, for example, the congregational form of the christian religion was so exactly complementary to the existing economic, political and social patterns that they underwent very little change on adoption.

Other kinds of response are observable when culture contact produces stress in, or even disruption of, native society and culture. These appear to take two forms (a) the attempt to rationalize new and often painful experience with the use of familiar concepts about the supernatural or (b) the invention of new beliefs involving the supernatural world. The first form was exemplified in the response of the Sioux and Cree nations to the small-pox epidemic of the 1870's and the almost simultaneous disappearance of the buffalo<sup>2</sup>. It was said that the gods were displeased with men and had sent the smallpox to punish them and caused the buffalo to go underground never to return until men were more virtuous. The second is exemplified in the familiar ghost dance that swept through a number of North American Indian nations in 1889-90<sup>3</sup>, and in the cargo cults of Melanesia and Australia<sup>4</sup>, which, despite the spatial, temporal and cultural distances that separate them, have essentially similar elements. Both are products of heavily threatened cultures and promise supernatural aid to native peoples in the elimination of white domination and a return to the old way of life.

In the summer of 1956 a young Eskimo named Joseph Partridge, a native of the Fort Chimo area of Northern Quebec,

brought to my attention some local beliefs about the spirit world and the rather brisk relationships its inhabitants are thought to enter into with mortals, indicating that Eskimo demonism has been modified through culture contact by both the diffusion of certain popular, western superstitions and the invention of a supernatural entity. The term demonism is used in this article to mean belief in spirit entities of every kind from gods to demiurges no matter what their attitudes to man or their relationships with him are thought to be.

We were walking in the "new" graveyard (which had in fact been in use for a number of years) and reading the inscriptions on the crosses that marked the victims of the measles epidemic of 1952, when Jacob suddenly remarked in his excellent colloquial English that the place was a favourite haunt of ghosts and none of the natives ever dared to venture there after dark.

I expressed interest at once, for I was curious concerning the degree of persistence of traditional Eskimo beliefs about the supernatural world and their use as an index of the amount of acculturation that had occurred. My obvious interest and my matter-of-fact acceptance of his statements seemed to reassure Jacob; he had been watching me closely to see how I would take such a statement from a young man, who, despite his Eskimo birth, had had the advantage of education to the 11th grade in an Ottawa high school. Once he saw that I did not mean to ridicule or dispute his assertions he appeared to be quite eager to talk and he related the following tales:

1. One winter his sister was out seeking a woman who had gone to the willow flats for wood. She met a second woman whom she thought she knew and asked her if she had seen the woman who was gathering wood. The second woman replied that she was just over the hill. Jacob's sister then started up the hill and pausing soon after the encounter to look back at the informant, found that she had disappeared despite the openness of the country and the lack of places to hide. Jacob's sister con-

tinued her search for her friend but ultimately went home without finding her. The woman who had been gathering wood was asked upon her return, if she had seen any other woman out or if she had met Jacob's sister. She said no to both questions and when a check of families revealed no one had been out on the hill, it was concluded that Jacob's sister had met and talked with a spirit. According to Jacob, this encounter took place on the hill overlooking the graveyard.

2. Once Jacob himself and another Eskimo boy about his own age named Tommy Gordon were out on the hill behind the post coasting on sleighs. Jacob decided to go home and Tommy went off up the hill for another ride. Shortly after, Tommy appeared at Jacob's house and told this tale: As he was sliding down the hill he saw a skeleton coming up the hill toward him. He decided it was "after" him and thereupon steered his sleigh into it, knocked it down and continued on his way to the bottom of the hill and from there ran home.

3. Jacob's father was down near the mouth of the Koksoak River at a fishing camp. He and two other men were sleeping in the Peterhead boat tied to the shore. They were awakened by footsteps on deck and then two Angnasheotik (Jacob's spelling) came below and demanded fish saying that if they were given fish they would go away and do no harm. Jacob's father (Jimmy Partridge) and his companions were very frightened and gave them all the fish they had upon which the Angnasheotik went away and were seen no more. I have not found this term anywhere in the literature. Miss Helen Wiltshire, the school teacher at Chimo, at the time reported having heard it in Frobisher Bay.

4. In the fourth and last story, Jacob's sister Eva was sleeping under a mosquito net in a wood-framed tent in which there were two other women. The two women went out for water. An Angnasheotik came in and heaped up pots and pans in one corner and then went out and locked [sic] the door. Eva

laughed because the Angnasheetik did not see her and when the two women came back she told them what had happened and they were so frightened that they did not go out again that night.

At the end of this tale, I asked Jacob to explain the term Angnasheetik which I had assumed from the context to be an inhabitant of the spirit world. He then wrote the word in my notebook and translated it as "going for our women". He explained that both Eskimo and Indians are bothered by these spirits who peer in windows, lurk about tents and sometimes throw stones at people at night. The Indians referred to are the northernmost band of the Naskopi who used to come to Chimo regularly every summer, from the vicinity of Fort MacKenzie. In the autumn of 1957 they were relocated at Knob Lake and no longer make the annual trip<sup>5</sup>.

According to Jacob, Angnasheetik are the spirits of white men and have dead-white faces, black, close-fitting clothes, long noses and "hoods like the witchmen in comic books". They will go away if you go outside (this applies to men only, presumably) or if, when they are following you at night, you turn and look back. This account exhausted Jacob's information on the subject. When asked he repeated very positively that Angnasheetik are the ghosts of white men.

To check the extent of the belief about the Angnasheetik, which I had not met with before, I asked two other informants, Big Jacob and Daisy. Big Jacob, who uses a clear if rather racy variety of English learned as a construction labourer in Fort Churchill, seemed both astonished and interested by my direct question about the Angnasheetik and countered by asking if I knew very much about "those things" and what we called them in English. I replied, somewhat boldly perhaps, that I knew much about these matters and that we used the word spirit in talking of these manifestations. He thereupon repeated the word several times as if intent upon mastering it; Big Jacob then described the Angnasheetik much as Jacob Partridge did. He reported that the Eskimo see them outside and that they have

white faces and black clothes. According to his account although the Eskimo are much troubled by them, the Indians are even more troubled "because the Indians live only in tents".

Daisy Watt who speaks quite fluent English, was voluble when I asked her to tell me about them. She was as curious as Big Jacob about my sources of information but seemed quite satisfied when I told her I had known of them for some time. Daisy said very definitely that they are the spirits of white men and that they had thin faces and wore flat hats, white shirts and black suits [sic]. She was most insistent that they chase only women and do not bother men. She described one aspect of their behavior thus: A woman is sleeping, she opens her eyes and happens to look out the window; if an Angnasheetik is there he catches her eye and she then becomes rigid and cannot move or look away. The Angnasheetik may then come in and copulate with her. Again Daisy emphasized that these spirits are those of white men and not Eskimos or Indians and she too added that they troubled the Indians even more than the Eskimo. How my informants could be so sure of this is puzzling when one considers the very slight contact between the two peoples. There appeared to be an almost complete lack of communication between the Naskopi and the Eskimo. I never observed them to speak or pay the slightest attention to each other and mixing at missionary sponsored entertainments was mechanical rather than social. However, there was one mixed marriage of an Indian man to an Eskimo woman. This couple squatted in a shack on Hudson's Bay property equidistant between the camp sites of the two peoples and were largely ignored by both although the woman did retain some family relationships.

Daisy said that she had heard of a little girl who many years ago had been picked up and carried away by an Angnasheetik and undertook to demonstrate on my person the rather peculiar method in which the child had been held by her captor, which seemed identical with what we call the fireman's

lift.

If these stories and accounts are considered together with what is known about Eskimo beliefs prior to white contact, it is evident that new elements have been added both by diffusion and invention.

Turner who is probably the best source of information on Ungava Eskimo ethnology says (ref. 5 p. 193) "While these people have but little fear of the dead man's bones, they do not approve of their being disturbed by others". Turner is much at variance with E. W. Hawkes concerning Eskimo attitudes to death and burial. Hawkes says of the Labrador Eskimo, "But they do have a superstitious fear of a corpse . . . and are very much afraid of ghosts" (ref. 6 p. 118). Since Hawkes's observations were admittedly cursory and since he did not visit the Ungava district at all, it seems wisest to accept Turner's account which emphasises regard for and attachment to the deceased, not fear of them.

Turner further said that the soul of the deceased might stay in the vicinity of the grave for as long as 4 or 5 years. The relatives would visit the grave, deposit food and even replace articles of clothing etc. that had been destroyed by animals or weather. The whole feeling one gets from his report is that there was respect for the dead and marked reluctance to offend them and that intimate and essentially benevolent relationships continued to exist during the period the soul was thought to be present. Ultimately the soul went to the spirit world whence it could be summoned by the Angakok to provide information and advice, returning there afterwards, and the souls might at some time elect rebirth. However, they apparently were not thought to remain in the world attached in some way to the locality of death or burial.

Thus, it seems probable that just as the graveyard itself as an area set aside for burial of the dead is an intrusive cultural trait, so is the fear of graveyards and earth-bound ghosts. The introduction of European, which is to say christian burial practices is at-

tributable to missionary effort but although missionaries introduced such items as consecrated ground set aside for the burial of the dead, religious services, crosses, coffins and all the other specifically christian traits of this particular complex, it is unlikely that they introduced such pagan or pre-christian western culture traits as a generalized fear of ghosts in association with graveyards or the belief in ambulant skeletons since they are contrary to christian doctrine. It is probable, although evidence for the assertion is lacking, that these beliefs were introduced by whalers, fishermen, and fur-traders who beginning as early as the 17th century have transmitted many western culture traits to the Eskimo. Certainly if Turner is accepted, fear of graves and the deceased represents a complete reversal of attitudes.

These elements of popular western demonism have received reinforcement from sources as yet largely neglected in anthropological study in this area, that is comic books, films, and popular magazines. Comic books circulate freely among the whites in the Eastern Arctic and frequently find their way into Eskimo hands. As an examination of a selection of them shows, the depiction of ghosts, zombies, witches, ambulant skeletons, etc. is quite common. Films, which are sometimes carefully selected if intended for native audiences but not if intended for whites, sometimes depict elements of popular western demonism too. Other media, especially picture magazines and the heavily illustrated popular magazines which the Eskimo are fond of, may in picture and advertisement depict some conventional supernatural entity. The Eskimos, who do not know the western cultural conventions, take these representations literally and would be surprised to know that not all whites give them credence.

The Angnasheetik, wicked and earth-bound, clearly accord with these intrusive beliefs about ghosts. However, they are not themselves to be explained by diffusion since nothing corresponding to them appears to exist in western

demonism. The closest Eskimo conception is of spirits called tornait (sing. torngak), malevolent, but controllable by magic. These are "pure" spirits, however, not the ghosts of the deceased. This difference as well as the description of the clothing, the flat assertion of "whiteness" and general physical appearance of Angnasheotik lends force to the argument that they are a new conception in Eskimo demonism, invented as a consequence of culture contact. This conclusion gives rise to questions about the time of and reasons for the invention and its function(s) for the group.

The Eskimo are a people without a written history, although they have creation myths, and my informants thought there had always been Angnasheotik. If it were to be assumed that the concept is rooted in some real events in the past, the descriptions of appearance and behaviour might offer clues. The clothes especially as Daisy described them, sounded formal in cut, almost like evening dress. Her gestures conveyed the impression of a tailcoat and the "flat hats" sounded rather like the kind worn in the last decades of the 19th century, the period when there was a surprisingly large population of whites in the Eastern Arctic composed of fur traders and the crews of supply ships and whaling vessels, which sometimes spent years in arctic waters. When ships arrived at settlements there was often, as one would expect, a large sexual commerce based on barter. The obvious interest of the ships' crews in women could have given rise to a native belief in an abnormally strong sex drive as characteristic of white men. At the same time it is probable that ships' crews, traders, etc. were sometimes guilty of forcing their attentions on isolated females. Thus it is possible that the Angnasheotik belief grew out of a fairly common pattern of rape or near-rape of isolated females by white men, reinforced by a belief in white hypersexuality, 75 to 100 years ago. Given the contemporary Eskimo attitudes to sexual behaviour and relationships between the sexes in general, a sexual

assault by a spirit might literally have been more believable than one by a mortal. A few such incidents graphically reported might well have been sufficient to give the new concept an ultimate general acceptance. Whether or not this is an accurate guess about the beginning of the Angnasheotik which is quite beyond proof, the fact remains that they are now accepted as part of the spirit world with a standard appearance and specific attitudes and behaviour.

This means that the belief may be in some way functional to Eskimo society. It is obviously not messianic as the ghost dance or the cargo cult for it promises no salvation. It has the general function of promoting group solidarity that is characteristic of all shared beliefs. However, this fails to account for the insistence that Angnasheotik are the spirits of white men since solidarity functions can be as well subverted by supernatural entities without white characteristics. Beyond that however, it is possible that the Angnasheotik have persisted within Eskimo demonology as surrogates for the white man whom the Eskimo felt powerless to attack directly. Culture contact, especially since World War II, has produced considerable stress in the simple social structure of the Ungava Eskimos as dependence on the white trader or administrator has increased; and to define the unpredictable, malevolent and hypersexual Angnasheotik as white would allow a safe expression of hostile attitudes.

Such a function is made more probable by one of the more unusual characteristics of Eskimo culture, the lack of middle ground between complete and cheerful co-operation and outright conflict.

Even now, after much culture contact, feelings of hostility are almost always dissembled under a guise of cheerfulness but they are real enough for all that and when they do find direct expression, it is usually in acts of great violence. Repressed hostility universally finds expression in dreams, symbolic acts, and fantasy; and it is possible that the Angnasheotik have become a means

for the expression of these attitudes in a manner consistent with fundamental thought modes of the old culture.

That these spirit entities are a response to white contact seems certain. However, the explanations of the functions of belief in the Angnasheotik advanced here, plausible though they may be, are little more than guesses. Systematic study would be necessary to establish or refute them and might at the same time add something to our knowledge of the processes of acculturation.

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<sup>1</sup>Bailey, A. The conflict of European and Algonkian cultures. Cited in S. D. Clark:

The Social Development of Canada, Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1942, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Howard, J. K., Strange empire. New York: Wm. Morrow and Co., 1952, p. 254ff. and p. 299.

<sup>3</sup>Mooney, James, The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890, 14th Ann. Rep., Bur. of Ethn. 1892-93, pt. II., Washington, Government Printing Office, p. 657.

<sup>4</sup>Worsley, Peter. The Triumph Shall Sound: A Study of Cargo Cults in Melanesia. Magibbon and Kee, 1957.

<sup>5</sup>Turner, L. M. Ethnology of the Ungava District. 11th Ann. Rep. Bur. of Ethn. 1889-90, Washington, Government Printing Office, p. 267.

<sup>6</sup>Hawkes, E. W., The Labrador Eskimo. Geol. Surv. Mem. 91, No. 14, Anthropol. Ser. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1916, p. 118.

#### THE BARREN GROUND GRIZZLY BEAR IN NORTHERN CANADA

Although little is known of the ethology and ecology of the Barren Ground grizzly bear in the Northwest Territories, its occurrence there is none the less very interesting from a zoogeographic viewpoint. The present note is prompted by Dr. A. W. F. Banfield's recent review of its distribution<sup>1</sup>. Banfield supports his thesis that the species has only recently spread eastward from the Coppermine River-Bathurst Inlet region with three successive distribution maps on which are shown many early and recent records, both positive and negative. However, we feel that some of the earlier ones, which Banfield considered negative, admit of a contrary interpretation. Moreover, two of them (discussed below) appear to support the more probable hypothesis that the range of the Barren Ground grizzly bear has undergone at least one major fluctuation since the disappearance of Wisconsin ice from the mainland Northwest Territories, which, according to ref. 2, took place some 7,000 years ago. Another point that comes to mind when examining the three maps is the difficulty inherent in comparing the records of early explorers

with those of more recent observers, whose coverage tends, on the whole, to be more systematic. Finally, the apparent trend in the data depends partly on the limits selected for each map-period.

Banfield writes that Hanbury (ref. 3, pp. 14, 40) "... mentioned black bears in the Thelon Valley but made no mention of grizzlies". However, Clarke (ref. 4, p. 32) says that "He [Hanbury] did not see one [black bear] and because, apart from his suggestion, no evidence has ever been found of such an occurrence, whereas the barren ground bear is well distributed on the Thelon, it must be assumed that the signs he observed were of the barren ground bear". Following Clarke, there is ample basis for the view that both Hanbury's record and the discussion of black bear distribution in eastern Keewatin by Freuchen (ref. 5, pp. 101-2) refer to the Barren Ground grizzly bear and not to the black bear. It should be noted also that Eskimos from Baker Lake, the lower Kazan River, Aberdeen Lake, and Garry Lake, at present know only one dark bear, the Barren Ground grizzly bear, and that the black bear is very rare even at Padlei, on the tree-line<sup>6</sup>.

Lyon (ref. 7, p. 175) heard from an Eskimo in 1822 that "both black and