OBSERVATIONS ON THE "ESKIMO TYPE" OF KINSHIP AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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The Unalik and Malemiut dialects of Eskimo language are spoken within the limited range of Norton Bay villages of the northern Bering Sea region. The author has noted, in building an ethnographic background for his archaeological work, that discrepancies occur between the two closely neighboring groups in their kinship terminologies and in their social practices, and that these singularities are not easily classified into an over-all, inclusive "Eskimo" pattern.

The Malemiut of Koyuk, for example, include all first cousins in the same relationship term except the children of the father's sister, while the Unalit of Elim call all first cousins "Elowak" and joke with them, excepting the children of the mother's brother. These cousins include preferred marriage partners and are treated with formality. The same Malemiut have different terms for the grandparents on the mother's and the father's side, while the Unalit set apart only the mother's mother's brother. Emphases such as these on one or another side of the descent show up frequently in other parts of western Alaska.

The term "Eskimo" has long been used as though it were descriptive of a single cultural group in both the historical and ethnological sense. A rapid excursion through the literature will show, however, that those ethnic groups speaking an Eskimoan dialect and scattered across more than two thousand miles of the Arctic and sub-Arctic region, are by no means identical in physical type and in culture; remarkable changes have also taken place periodically in the materials which we recover from frozen and buried occupation sites in various parts of the area concerned. Greenlanders who have never seen a tree can hardly be equated with certain West Alaskans who do not leave their forests of spruce and birch; nor can people who live on the ice-free coasts of the North Pacific be equated with those of Point Barrow, where open water is a short-lived phenomenon of the summer months. A customary division of Eskimos into eastern and western groups is hardly more satisfactory, although students who speak in terms of such a dichotomy are acknowledging more than they themselves sometimes practice in their analyses of the Arctic American field. If, as we suspect, "Eskimo" is primarily the name of a linguistic group, it should be employed as critically as are such terms as Yuman and Algonkian.

The term "Eskimo" has long been associated with a system of kinship reckoning, and it now designates a form of social structure. Even though this usage is not meant by its proponents to identify a specific whole culture and area, one is encouraged by the label to assume that all of those people who are known by no other broad

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grouping than Eskimo will exemplify the social structure that bears their name. In view of the limited source material on northern North America at the time when Morgan (1871, pp. 267-277) first set up criteria on Eskimo kinship, we can understand his assumption of a high degree of cultural uniformity not only between Greenland and the coasts of Arctic Canada but across the whole of the American Arctic. A half-century later, however, when Spier (1925) surveyed the kinship systems of the whole continent and divided them into eight basic systems, it had become clear that some disharmony existed even in kinship terminology between the east and the west of the Arctic slope. Spier noted that "the Alaskan Eskimo resemble the Chukchi and Koryak in their tripartite division, older, younger, and youngest brother and sister," but at the same time his eighth category is inclusively the "Eskimo type," distinguished mainly by the calling of cross cousins and parallel cousins by the same terms (Spier, 1925, p. 79). More recently, as we shall see, it has become extremely doubtful that the relatively dense population of the Bering Sea coast of Alaska is to be included in the type that bears its linguistic label.

Both Spier and Lowie (1916) seem to have based their Alaskan information on limited notes from E. W. Hawkes and others, as no thorough study of kinship in the area was published before 1946. Lowie perhaps saw historical significance in the similarity between the above-mentioned aspect of West Alaska kinship and that of the Chukchee, pointing out that "while the differentiation of elder and younger brothers and sisters is of very common occurrence, a tripartite classification of *Geschwister* is not found in (North America), so far as I know, except among the Eskimos" (Lowie, 1916, p. 294).

By the time of the appearance of Murdock's *Social Structure,* in 1949, the "Eskimo type" had become attached to a particular form of social organization and had transcended those groups of people considered by Morgan to such an extent that only two Eskimo-speaking local groups were included among the eighteen world groups compared under this heading (Murdock, 1949, p. 228). It is surely no fault of the Cross-Cultural Survey that more Arctic American groups could not be included in this basic report, nor does this circumstance interfere with the primary aims of the study. Murdock states that he has "occassionally chosen a society because a good source was readily accessible rather than because a sample was demanded." He has, however, "sought consciously to avoid any appreciable over-representation of particular culture areas" (Murdock, 1949, pp. vii-ix). Nevertheless, students of Eskimo ethnology and archaeology would be interested in knowing whether or not all speakers of Eskimoan dialects practice Eskimo social organization.

The two groups chosen by Murdock from the Eskimo linguistic area are prejudicial to a regional study. Both are from the east, where archaeology shows us that a single, rather rapid spread of the Thule Culture (Mathiassen, 1927, pt. 2) probably laid a relatively recent foundation for the present-day cultural similarity between Greenland and North Canada. These are the Copper Eskimos (Jenness, 1922), who live north and a little west of Hudson's Bay on the shores of the

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Arctic Sea, and the Angmagsalik (Holm, 1914) of East Greenland. This choice of groups reflects the ethnographic thoroughness of the several Danish investigators who have for many years taken the American Arctic as their special field of research, and of the Canadian, Jenness. The peoples in question, despite their geographical separation, are culturally very close. One group confirms the other in many respects.

The absence of an Alaskan Eskimo-speaking group in Murdock's survey undoubtedly relates to availability of adequate reports. Although *Social Structure* was published in 1949, its substance was largely complete before the issuance, in 1946, of Lantis' *The Social Culture of the Nunivak Eskimo*. The latter volume is eminently suited to the purposes of the Cross-Cultural Survey and contains a body of information from a central point in the densely populated Bering Sea area. The Nunivagamiut live under climatic conditions greatly different from those of the Copper Eskimos or the Angmagsalik, and their material culture, physical appearance and social practice differ in marked respects from those of the eastern groups to which their language is basically related. Although we cannot yet say how generally the Nunivagamiut represent their neighbors along the coasts of Alaska, it is clear that they form no group entirely apart.

Nunivagamiut social structure differs in some major respects, by the standards set forth in Murdock's book, from that of the Angmagsalik or of the Copper Eskimos. We shall examine this structure briefly in light of the two groups mentioned in order to determine whether it belongs within Murdock's "Eskimo type" or in some other.

We are puzzled by a statement regarding Nunivak kinship. Dr. Lantis says, ". . . there is nothing unusual about this kinship terminology;" but she goes on to say, "It has the basic pattern of the Iroquois and Western Eskimo systems, according to Spier's classification . . ." (Lantis, 1946, p. 236). While it is true that Spier differentiates his Eskimo type from his Iroquois type mainly because cross cousins and parallel cousins in the former are called by the same cousin terms, it is clear that he felt this a sufficiently important reason for setting up a separate type in full equality with the other seven (Spier, 1925, p. 79). It appears that there is something unusual in the Nunivak terminology. Parallel cousins are siblings, while cross cousins are cousins. This is true of the Iroquois type (Spier, 1925, p. 77), but not of the eastern Arctic groups. Again, to quote from Lantis, ". . . older siblings (are) distinguished from younger siblings (the Nunivak terminology differs here in classing younger brothers and younger sisters together; at the same time it shows traces of the Eskimo system of using six sibling terms, distinguishing middle from older brothers and sisters) . . ." (Lantis, 1946, p. 236). Here again is the tripartite division that has crept into both Lowie's and Spier's summations with the implication that because it is found among Eskimo-speaking groups it must belong within the "Eskimo type." No evidence appears that this practice has ever been current among the peoples of Greenland and North Canada, however. At this point we may return to the revised system proposed by Murdock.

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". . . the Eskimo type," says Murdock, "included all societies with Eskimo cousin terminology and no exogamous unilinear kin groups" (Murdock, 1949, p. 227). Since "Eskimo cousin terminology" is pre-defined as the calling of female cross cousins and parallel cousins by the same name while differentiating them from sisters (Ibid., p. 223), the Nunivagamiut fail to qualify in "Eskimo type." Their cousin terminology is of "Iroquois type."

Do the Nunivagamiut have "exogamous unilinear kin groups"? Lantis reports that "surrounding the individual, surrounding the biological family, there was the lineage, a social as well as biological continuum from generation to generation" (Lantis, 1946, p. 239). However, "lineage" seems to mean descent of property rather than of kinship. The heritage centered about a concept meaning "specific power, amulet, charm, magic helper", which could be worn if contained in material form, or memorized or absorbed if not. Some of these "inogos" could be obtained from a shaman for pay, but "most of his inogos were inherited; not necessarily the actual bit of ivory carving or the sperm-whale tooth, but the right to use a whale's tooth or a carving of a flounder. . . . A man communicated to his children (both sons and daughters) an astonishing quantity of secret knowledge, all of which contained power, and he handed on to his sons a few actual things pertaining to the inogo animals. The child got no such amuletic material from his mother. . . . One man volunteered the information that not only the members of a man's immediate family but all his distant cousins related to him through his father sang the same hunting songs" (Lantis, 1946, p. 239). Exogamy is clearly indicated in the following: "Regarding marriage of two people having the same inogo animals, the old folks were rather puzzled. All concurred that there was no rule against such a marriage, like rules forbidding marriage between brother and sister or between aunt and nephew. But all felt that it probably would not happen. It was not likely to occur, that was all" (Ibid).

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This curiously suggestive combination of patrilineal inheritance with similarly oriented marriage rules does not seem to extend to the kinship terminology. Murdock (1949, p. 59) insists upon a distinction between transmission of property rights and principles of descent; hence, we may not exclude the Nunivagamiut from other bilateral Eskimo groups.

If the Nunivagamiut follow an Iroquoian cousin terminology but are bilateral, what of residence, the third determinant in Murdock's classificatory list (Murdock, 1949, pp. 225-226)? Lantis describes this as temporarily matrilocal. "Since the women were required to be together in small close units more than was required of the men, it was a good thing that matrilocal residence was the rule, at least temporary matrilocal residence" (Lantis, 1946, p. 161). The degree to which this practice was carried out is also indicated. "Following the marriage, the young man just stayed on in the girl's village if he was from another settlement, as was true frequently. If his family lived in the same village, he brought his own dishes and clothing to the home of his bride's parents but probably would leave his hunting gear in his

father's storehouse. The rule of matrilocal residence was adjusted to fit circumstances as agreeably as possible. If a family had four sons and one young daughter, one of the sons would bring his wife home instead of going to her village. If the bridegroom did the customary thing and moved to the other village, he probably would use the kazigi to which his wife's father and brothers belonged, but he might use another kazigi because it was less crowded or nearer his wife's house or because some of his own kin stayed in it" (Lantis, 1946, p. 234).

In contrast to the Nunivak situation, matrilocality is reported for neither of the eastern Arctic groups. The Angmagsalik tend to be patrilocal, but like the Copper Eskimos they are also neolocal. Both groups reckon descent bilaterally, with no such stoppage of inherited lore on the mother's side as that reported for the Nunivagamiut. The eastern groups thus bear out Murdock's statement that bilateral kin groups "appear especially common with bilocal residence, though they also occur frequently with neolocal residence" (Murdock, 1949, p. 57). Cousin terminology of course is of "Eskimo type" among both the Angmagsalik and Copper groups. Thus, in two of the critical points discussed so far, there is disagreement between Nunivak and the eastern groups.

Nunivak structure differs in another important respect from that of the eastern groups. In the former, the evidence for a customary avoidance of marriage within the lines of "inogo" transmission indicates some patrilineal extension of incest taboos.

In other respects, still following Murdock's major points, there is agreement between Nunivak and the eastern groups. Aunt and niece terms conform to the same bifurcate collateral pattern in both areas, and clans and demes are absent or unreported. Marriage in both areas is predominantly monogamic, but with polygyny permitted. Perhaps we should mention, however, the vestiges of sororate and levirate among the Nunivagamiut. Lantis reports that "the genealogies do show that in polygyny and polyandry there was a tendency to marry two sisters or two brothers. There have not been enough cases of polygamy within recent generations to warrant any more explicit statement than that" (Lantis, 1946, p. 234).

If our assumptions are thus far correct, we see no reason for inclusion of the Nunivagamiut within either Spier's or Murdock's "Eskimo types" of kinship or social organization except that they do not seem to fall wthin any other. Since insufficient information is available for a close comparison with other western Eskimo-speaking groups, we shall not attempt to make much of Nunivak Island distinctiveness.

In conclusion, it is intended to point out that we may not blandly assume cultural unity between Eskimo-speaking groups. This is becoming evident not only in studies of material culture and archaeology, as the author has pointed out elsewhere, but also is discernible in social studies. Little progress can be made along social lines, however, until more projects such as that of Lantis are carried

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out among the many dialect groups to be found on the coasts of Alaska between Point Barrow and the Aleutian Chain. When more local studies are available for groups neighboring the Nunivagamiut, for the Unalik and Malemiut villages and others, it seems highly probable that a study of kinship systems in the far north may be used as a valuable aid in distinguishing linguistic from cultural boundaries.

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