Secularization and Social Control in Alaskan Eskimo Culture: Shifting from Fear/Power to Honor/Shame

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I. Introduction

The shamanistic roots of the Alaskan Eskimo\(^1\) culture are well-attested in contemporary ethnographic literature. An orientation to shamanism is generally a basic training requirement for any Westerner seeking to minister in the Northern indigenous context. Nevertheless, after years of ministry with the Eskimo people, it seems to me that this traditional focus on the supernatural dimension does not accurately represent the “heart” of modern Eskimo culture. The “spirit world” of their ancestors is rarely a major motivator in the day-to-day actions of my Eskimo students. That said, it is clear that my own Western approaches are often equally ineffective as motivators. I remember quite

\(^1\) The term “Eskimo” is controversial in international circles, but less so in Alaska, where it has developed a technical meaning that includes both the Yu’p’ik and Inupiat people groups. The term “Inuit,” as preferred in Canada and Greenland, excludes the Yu’p’ik peoples of Alaska and Siberia. When asked about their own preference, the individuals interviewed and surveyed in this study took pride in their “Eskimo” identity and preferred this nomenclature. Since this study will include both the Yu’p’ik and the Inupiat people groups of Alaska, the term “Eskimo” will be used throughout as a regionally-accepted and preferred term to jointly designate both groups. (Lawrence Kaplan, “Inuit or Eskimo: Which Name to Use?,” Alaska Native Language Center <https://www.uaf.edu/anlc/resources/inuit-eskimo/> [Accessed 4 December 2017].)
clearly when a student abruptly left my office mid-conversation after I communicated a bit too bluntly regarding some poor academic decisions. Though I attempted to provide personal motivation by appealing to the individual sense of reward and punishment, the student simply perceived accusations against their character, and chose to save face by leaving the room. I was left to wonder, “What am I missing in Eskimo culture?” As educators, and even more importantly as ministers, it is crucial that we understand the historic and contemporary orientations of the culture in which we serve. We must realize that the Eskimos’ approaches to such issues have not remained static over the years, nor have they simply adopted the individualistic Western framework oriented around personal guilt and innocence. Diachronic study of Alaskan Eskimo culture suggests that the influence of Western secularization has caused a shift from a predominantly Fear/Power orientation towards a greater emphasis on Honor/Shame.

A. Theological Framework

The concepts of Fear/Power, Honor/Shame, and Guilt/Innocence as tools for understanding and evaluating culture were introduced to missiological circles by Roland Muller. Through his work in Middle Eastern culture, Muller realized that his efforts to explain the concept and effects of “sin” using the traditional European paradigm of guilt and innocence were falling on deaf ears. As he studied his host culture more deeply, he “discovered that Arabs were living in a worldview where the paradigm was shame versus honor.” Muller takes a predominantly theological approach in his argument, looking to Scripture for a more nuanced understanding of sin. He proposes that the Fall of Humanity

\[2\] Roland Muller, Honor & Shame: Unlocking the Door (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2000), 46.
in Genesis 3 resulted not only in guilt for the human race (which is the traditional Western understanding), but also in shame and fear. Applying this theological understanding to the concept of culture, he suggests, “Down through history and across the world, these three emotional reactions to sin became the three basic building blocks that exist in all cultures today. Some cultures have more of one than another, but all three are present in all cultures today.”

More recently, Jayson Georges has taken up Muller’s argument and refined it for broader missiological application. While Muller’s work focused predominantly on application to the Honor/Shame-based Muslim culture, Georges’s work focuses on application to all three culture types. Georges provides a helpful and succinct definition for each culture type, which will be adopted for the present discussion:

(1) guilt-innocence cultures are individualistic societies (mostly Western), where people who break the laws are guilty and seek justice or forgiveness to rectify a wrong, (2) shame-honor cultures describes collectivistic cultures (common in the East), where people shamed for fulfilling group expectations seek to restore their honor before the community, and (3) fear-power cultures refers to animistic contexts (typically tribal or African), where people afraid of evil and harm pursue power over the spirit world through magical rituals.

Georges follows Muller in his approach, viewing these three categories through a theological lens with a view towards contextualizing the gospel for each “culture type.”

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3 Muller, 18-19.
4 Muller, 19.
B. Anthropological Framework

Though speaking extensively about culture, neither Muller nor Georges make significant effort to ground their ideas in anthropological theory. Several times, Muller mentions “anthropologists and sociologists” that have observed these dynamics at work in human culture, but he does not cite any such studies directly.\(^6\) This is excusable given their theological emphases, but due to the anthropological focus of the present discussion, this is an important connection to make. Georges considers the anthropological perspective in a bit more detail, seeing the concepts basically as socio-economic forces. He argues, “Guilt, shame, and fear are the moral emotions that socio-economic groups use to organize the distribution of resources between people.”\(^7\) While he provides helpful examples as to how these concepts contribute to a group’s economy, it is difficult to conceive of these dynamics as primarily economic developments. In his more recent publication on the topic, Georges (with co-author Mark Baker) takes a different anthropological track, describing the difference between guilt/innocence and shame/honor orientation using terminology of what anthropologists would label “social control,” focusing on “acceptable behavior” and the “result of violations” rather than economic rewards.\(^8\) Indeed, many contemporary anthropologists tend to understand all three of these concepts—shame, guilt, and fear—as mechanisms of social control.

\(^6\) Muller, 18.

\(^7\) Georges, 29.

For example, Grunlan & Mayers explain, “Every society has norms by which its members are expected to live. But in no society are the norms always followed by everyone. Therefore, all societies have mechanisms for social control.”

They go on to identify laws (an example of Guilt/Innocence orientation) and public ridicule (an example of Shame/Honor orientation) as examples of such mechanisms. Bailey & Peoples go into even greater detail in their discussion of social control. They identify “gossip, scandal, and ridicule” (i.e., “Shame/Honor”), fear of “supernatural sanctions” (i.e., “Fear/Power”), and “legal punishment” (i.e., “Guilt/Innocence”) as the three primary avenues of social control in the world’s societies.

Granted, Grunlan & Mayers and Bailey & Peoples both demonstrate a thoroughly functionalist approach to the question: the dynamics of guilt/innocence, fear/power, and shame/honor exist in human cultures because society needs a way to influence and control the behavior of individuals. Muller and Georges, on the other hand, tend to understand these dynamics as the results of humanity’s choice to sin against her Creator. At the very least, this understanding of how contemporary functionalist anthropologists frame these concepts will facilitate the application of anthropological ethnographies to the discussion at hand. Approaching the question from the perspective of relational realism, value may be found in both approaches. If we follow Enoch Wan in understanding culture as “The

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context/consequence of patterned interaction of personal Beings/beings,\textsuperscript{12} then the dynamics of Guilt/Innocence, Shame/Honor, and Fear/Power can be understood both in terms of their effects on human-to-human relationships (as emphasized by Grunlan & Mayers and Bailey & Peoples) as well as human-to-divine (as emphasized by Muller and Georges).

Having established the theological and anthropological framework, the question at hand can be understood more clearly: What methods of social control tend to dominate in contemporary Alaskan Eskimo culture, and how do these differ from those used in times past? Or, to use theological terminology, how does the contemporary Alaskan Eskimo tend to experience the effects of personal and societal sin, and how does this compare to past generations? To answer these questions, a diachronic approach will be employed to evaluate how the forces of secularization and Westernization have influenced Alaskan Eskimo culture over time. The study will begin with an analysis of the “old ways,” or the Eskimo culture at the point of contact with European civilization, using oral histories that have been preserved by Native elders, as well as anthropological reflections on those histories. The ramifications of that contact as a secularizing force will then be considered, followed by an evaluation of the present-day culture using a combination of first-hand ethnography, quantitative survey, and observations made by other anthropologists.

II. “The Old Ways”: Social Control through Fear & Power

Considering once again the three culture types as defined above, the Yup’ik and Inupiat cultures of Alaska would seem to fit most naturally into the third category, “Fear/Power.” Muller and Georges both identify fear of the supernatural as a fundamental characteristic of animistic cultures and “tribal” societies, which would presumably include the Alaskan Eskimo. An evaluation the Alaskan Eskimo culture at the time of European contact is necessary to confirm this hypothesis.

The lack of written history in Eskimo culture prior to European contact complicates this task of diachronic anthropology, but does not render it impossible. Although there exist no written accounts of the culture from an insider perspective, two types of material do exist that will enable the present study: first-hand oral accounts that have been passed down generationally, and second-hand observations made by Western anthropologists.

A. Oral Traditions

The oral traditions represent important primary source material that should not be overlooked or discounted by Western scientific methodology. Though previous generations of scientists may have regarded such accounts unreliable or unscientific, recent years have seen a strong effort to record and preserve these traditions for future generations. Many contemporary Inupiat and Yu’pik elders have painstakingly recorded and written down the stories relayed to them by their own parents and grandparents, providing us with a glimpse into the culture of that day through the eyes of cultural

13 Muller, 43; Georges, 11.
insiders. These oral traditions will be used to develop an understanding of the cultural orientation of the Eskimo at the point of European contact. Only after a picture of the culture is allowed to emerge from these first-hand stories will this picture be compared with observations from Western anthropologists.

Fred Savok was an Inupiat pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church who lived from 1922-2009. In 2004, he published *Jesus and the Eskimo: How the Man of the Sky Brought the Light to My People*. The book consists of stories relayed to him by his parents, John and Lily Savok, who were children when Westerners first arrived in their region. John and Lily’s parents were some of the first Alaskan Eskimo to convert to faith in Jesus. Savok’s work is quite insightful to the discussion at hand, since his stories span at least four generations, providing first-hand insight not only to the ancient role of the shaman in the Eskimo culture, but also to how the message of the Gospel was first understood by the Inupiat.

The themes of fear and power permeate Savok’s writing to the core. His story begins in the days of his grandparents, prior to European arrival. Of these days, he writes:

> Prior to the coming of the belief in Christianity and the importance of Jesus, Eskimo culture was under the influence of the Anatkut (Shaman). Some Anatkut believed they received their power from above, while others got their power from the darkness, from below. These Anatkut had power over the people because they were the keepers of the taboos. The taboos were never to be broken otherwise people would suffer the consequences, even to death.\(^\text{14}\)

This fear was not a distant theoretical concept for Savok’s family, but was central to their identity and personal experience. He shares how his maternal grandmother, Qutleruq,

became all-too-acquainted with the violation of supernatural taboo at a young age. Qutleruq’s father had recently become seriously ill. The shaman was invited to the home, where he performed a ritual that resulted in healing several days later. However, the healing came with a strict warning from the shaman: no one in the family was to make any sort of braid, or the father would die immediately. Several weeks later, as she was playing with her friends, Qutleruq noticed a commotion in the village nearby:

The poor girl did not need to be told. She knew what happened. She had killed her father by braiding grass. The half-finished work of grass fell slowly down from her hands to the sand below. She froze with fear, looking toward the qasgi [men’s hall]. Slowly and fearfully, Qutleruq started walking toward the qasgi. She felt so weak from fear that she could not run.15

The emphasis on fear in his grandmother’s story must be noted. Summarizing the entire ethos of the day, Savok writes, “So the poor Eskimo lived in constant fear. Fear of death seemed to lurk just outside the door of each humble home.”16

In addition to the piercing account summarized above, Savok identifies many other ritual taboos through the stories that he tells. Women must isolate themselves from the community for several days during childbirth, and in the event of stillbirth, all clothing must be burned.17 A baby could be caught in a dipnet upon delivery as a good omen to provide physical strength.18 Eating unripened salmonberries would cause a person to die in sleep that night, and “seeing the eggs in the nest of a certain snipe would certainly cause

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15 Savok, 20.
16 Savok, 19.
17 Savok, 31.
18 Savok, 32.
a relative to die.” Functionalist anthropologists could presumably identify reasons for each of these taboos, as will be duly noted shortly, but for the present time, it is important to let the oral history speak for itself. As Savok summarizes, “To an average Eskimo’s life situation, fear permeated his whole life to the core.”

A person might, at this point, take issue with Savok’s portrayal, noting his occupation as a Christian pastor and his own semi-acculturated perspective. Would this not certainly taint his understanding of his ancestors’ experiences? It is necessary here to meet Savok on his own terms. He emphasizes the importance of the oral tradition that he is passing on, and his own loyalty to represent this history accurately:

Since the Eskimo did not have a written history to pass on from generation to generation, their ability to retain information was fantastic. Retelling a long story exactly as told, after hearing it only once, was not hard for many...And I have prayerfully decided to portray these true-to-life happenings as best as I know how in story form. Undoubtedly, some segments of truth and activities will differ from other Native authors. Although the basic truths about Eskimo culture are the same, how we express those stories in a difficult language of English is the blame for sure.

The discussion now briefly turns to another of these Native authors that Savok acknowledges.

The writings of Harold Napoleon, a Yup’ik author who provides prophetic critique of his own cultural heritage from a more sociological perspective, demonstrate much the same “fear/power” orientation that emerges from Savok’s portrayal. Napoleon uses the Yup’ik word *yuuyaraq* to describe the “old ways,” which he translates as “the way of being a
human being.” 22 This unwritten law, he writes, “outlined the protocol for every and any situation that human beings might find themselves in... It outlined the way of living in harmony within this spirit world and with the spirit beings that inhabited this world.” 23

Expanding on this spirit world and the principle of yuuyaraq, Napoleon echoes many of the same themes that arose in Savok’s work:

Even so, animal and human spirits wandered the earth, as did monsters and creatures of the deep and the underground, good spirits and evil spirits (alangrut) that either helped or caused havoc, even death, for humans and animals alike. Every physical manifestation—plenty of food or famine, good weather or bad, good luck or bad, health or illness—had a spiritual cause. This is why the shamans, the angalkuq, were the most important men and women in the village. 24

Notably, though Napoleon avoids the emphasis on fear that pervaded Savok’s portrayal, the theme of power is just as evident. Correct behavior for the Yup’ik, like the Inupiat, focused on appeasing the spirits and gaining power.

B. Anthropological Analysis

Looking back on the “old ways,” contemporary anthropologists have tended to agree with this assessment. Placing these oral traditions within the functionalist framework that has tended to dominate Western anthropology, the dynamics of fear and power are understood as elements of social control. Steve Langdon, for example, describes taboos similar to those acknowledged by Savok and Napoleon:

Women were trained in the skills of tanning, sewing and food preparation; wives observed many taboos and rituals to assist their husbands’ hunting. These included a broad range of activities such as cutting skins at certain times, eating certain foods


23 Napoleon, 5.

24 Napoleon, 8.
or looking in certain directions. It was thought that if those taboos were broken, then bad luck would befall the husband’s hunting efforts.\textsuperscript{25}

Norman Chance theorizes about the anthropological “function” behind these religious beliefs, suggesting they could “be called upon to ‘explain’ a temporary loss of food supply: a kin member had broken an important taboo or an evil spirit had driven away the game.”\textsuperscript{26}

Chance elaborates further on the role of power in ancient Inupiat society:

Essentially, the Eskimo perception of the universe was one of internal harmony of the elements in which various natural and supernatural forces were neutrally disposed toward man. By means of ritual and magic, however, the Eskimo could influence the supernatural forces toward a desired end, be it controlling the weather and food supply, ensuring protection against illness, or curing illness when it struck. The power to influence these events came from the use of charms, amulets, and magical formulas, observance of taboos, and the practice of sorcery.\textsuperscript{27}

These anthropological perspectives help affirm what has been inferred from the accounts of the cultural insiders, Savok and Napoleon. Working from a functionalist framework, they propose that the supernatural perspective served to help the Eskimo make sense of life and govern individual behavior in a harsh setting that was often beyond their physical control.

\textbf{III. The Secularizing Force of Westernization}

As demonstrated through the oral traditions from Eskimo elders, and corroborated by contemporary anthropological study, the predominant orientation of the Eskimo culture at the time of European contact was that of Fear/Power. Though the discovery of Alaska by the Russian Empire in 1741 brought a limited degree of European influence to Eskimo

\textsuperscript{25} Steve J. Langdon, \textit{The Native People of Alaska: Traditional Living in a Northern Land} (Anchorage: Greatland, 2002), 75.


\textsuperscript{27} Chance, 58.
regions, Russia’s economic interests lay primarily in the resource-rich regions to the south, inhabited by the Unangan, Sugpiaq, and Tlingit peoples. The worldview of the Alaskan Eskimo cultures remained largely unaffected by Westernization until the United States’ purchase of the territory with the Treaty of Cession in 1867, and the gold rush and whaling industry that developed shortly thereafter. As the new colonizers sought to bring the region under their economic and political control, the federal government mobilized missionaries not only to evangelize, but also to “civilize” the inhabitants of the new territory. Christian missionaries were the primary agents of cultural change among the Eskimo, but it will be argued here that it was not the gospel message that brought the most profound changes to the Eskimo worldview of Fear/Power, but rather the secularizing influence of the modern European worldview.

A. The Gospel and the Eskimo Worldview

The Christian message itself was not incompatible with the ancient Eskimo worldview. As Georges has argued, the themes of fear and power are critical threads in the Scriptural gospel story. A clearly-presented gospel message would not cause the Eskimo to abandon their beliefs regarding the power of the spiritual world, but would rather affirm their existing worldview by acknowledging the existence of an all-powerful, loving Creator who offers salvation and deliverance to His people from the power of the evil spirits that seek to harm and enslave them (Genesis 3:15, Col. 2:15).


29 Georges, 42-43.
Indeed, the testimony of Fred Savok’s grandparents demonstrates that this was the exact effect that the gospel message had when it was first presented to them. He recounts how his grandparents first encountered the gospel through the Evangelical Covenant missionary David Johnson in the late 1800s. Intriguingly, the local shamans had been speaking for some time about a “‘very powerful light’ coming from the South” that was “much stronger than their own.”30 Shortly prior to the encounter with Johnson, Savok’s grandfather Egaq had himself had a dream along these lines:

He saw a man dressed in white descending and stopping about three feet off the floor in their igloo. “I am the Father of All People,” said this person dressed in white. “Soon all people will hear about me.” And that was all the unusual person said.31

As Egaq and his wife Qtleruq puzzled over the meaning of this vision, Johnson and his Inupiat interpreter, Uyarak, passed by their cabin on dogsled and stopped to pay them a visit. That night, after a hospitable meal, the visitors shared the gospel message. It is interesting to note that Savok records the message as being presented in clear Guilt/Innocent terminology:

The Egaqs heard for the first time that there were bad things, called sins, in their hearts. But that God in His love for people sent His Son, Jesus, who can wash bad things away from their lives for better living.32

However, as he retells his Grandparent’s response of faith to the message, it is clear that they understood and processed the message in terms of their own Fear/Power perspective:

As the days went by, the couple dwelled less on fear, but more on anticipation of a better life. God’s stronger power surely must be true, they reasoned...Although the

30 Savok, 55.
31 Savok, 56.
32 Savok, 58.
Egaqs had not, as yet, realized it, they had become slaves to the Savior. Slavery to Satan and superstition was left behind.\footnote{Savok, 59-60.}

Savok’s grandparents, and to some extent their broader Inupiat culture as a whole, had been supernaturally prepared for the arrival of the gospel message, and as they internalized it and discussed it among their own people, the theme that was consistently emphasized was God’s power to deliver them from their fear:

The Egaqs were often asked to relate their experience and knowledge of the power stronger than that of the Shaman. Constant fear of the Devil and the Shaman were the driving force to embrace the more powerful force of freedom. Naturally, the Shaman opposed the spread of the Good News.\footnote{Savok, 74.}

So the gospel message was presented to the Eskimo using Guilt/Innocence terminology, but was accepted and culturally processed from within the existing Fear/Power framework.

Contemporary anthropologists have noted and affirmed this continuity between the ancient Eskimo worldview and the worldview of the Bible:

The belief in many devils is not only an aboriginal residue, but is actually in perfect conformity with the version of Christianity now presented to these people. Several missionaries in the region preach of the physical existence of devils. Furthermore, the Eskimo believe that shaman's helping powers were real spirits and, by implication, that the shamans actually performed the feats they claim.\footnote{Chance, 59-60.}

Chance argues that some continuity can and should be seen between the shamans’ ceremonies of yesterday meant to ensure a good hunt, and the contemporary prayer services in the Christian church that have replaced them.\footnote{Chance, 40.} In this sense, the Eskimo can
still be said to rely on supernatural power for success in the hunt, but the source of that power has shifted from pleasing the spirits to entreating the Creator. In the evaluation of anthropologist Dorothy Jean Ray, Jesus’ power over the spirit world gave Him the status of “super shaman” in the eyes of the Inupiat of the late 1800s.37

B. Secularization and the Eskimo Worldview

It was not the arrival of the gospel message itself that brought a cultural shift away from Fear/Power orientation. Rather, it was the secularizing influence of Western culture that caused this shift. Of course, to be clear, it was frequently the very same missionaries who brought the gospel in one hand, and a secularized worldview in the other. The federal government viewed the missionary enterprise as an effective means of “civilizing” her new inhabitants, and provided funding to establish schools to educate Eskimo children and new economic opportunities such as reindeer herding to encourage a transition away from the nomadic subsistence lifestyle.38

The missionaries and government agents also brought new diseases. These epidemics wrought havoc on Eskimo communities and accelerated the secularization process. In what Native elders remember as the “Great Death,” over 60% of the population was decimated in the early 1900s, and entire communities were erased from the map.39 Napoleon paints a chilling picture that highlights the powerlessness of the shamans to counter this new-found threat:

38 Jorgensen, 344.
39 Napoleon, 10.
Soon whole families were dead, some leaving only a boy or girl. Babies tried to suckle on the breasts of dead mothers, soon to die themselves. Even the medicine men grew ill and died in despair with their people, and with them died a great part of Yuuyaraq, the ancient spirit world of the Eskimo.40

As Napoleon tells it, it was this widespread cultural trauma that, more than any other factor, brought about the transition away from the Fear/Power framework. The shamans died or were rendered powerless, and agents of Western culture—whether missionaries or schoolteachers—stepped in to fill the void:

The survivors also turned over the education and instruction of their children to the missionaries and the school teachers. They taught them very little about Yuuyaraq. They allowed the missionaries and the school teachers to inflict physical punishment on their children; for example, washing their children’s mouths with soap if they spoke Yup’ik in school or church. Their children were forbidden, on pain of “serving in hell,” from dancing or following the old ways.41

In terms of social structure within Eskimo villages, pastors and schoolteachers effectively replaced the role of the shaman within a few short years.42

Along with Western education and its anti-supernatural bias came Western technology. This, too, had an impact on the Fear/Power dynamic. Chance, for example, discusses the impact of the hunting rifle:

Although the use of the rifle made hunting easier, it...brought into question the validity of the traditional religion by raising doubts about the importance of certain rituals and taboos connected with hunting. This questioning of religion affected the traditional means of social control in that the threat of supernatural punishment for deviation from approved Eskimo practices lost much of its force.43

40 Napoleon, 11.
41 Napoleon, 13.
42 Jorgensen, 345.
43 Chance, 2-3.
Similar effects can be traced through the introduction of medicine, agriculture, transportation, and market-based economics.

So it was not the gospel message itself that prompted the Eskimo to transition away from their traditional means of social control. Though it did prompt a reevaluation of their historical taboos, life was still very much understood to take place in a spiritual realm, and the Fear/Power dynamic remained central for the earliest believers. Rather, it was the increasing secularization of the society—brought about through the death of the traditional leaders, the implementation of Western education, and the implicit anti-supernatural bias strengthened by Western technology—that prompted the traditional means of social control to change.

IV. Contemporary Culture: Social Control through Honor & Shame

As the “old ways” passed away and a secularized worldview began to take root, one might assume that the traditional mechanisms of social control would simply be replaced by Western ones. In terms of Muller’s three cultural “building blocks,” the Fear/Power dynamic would then be replaced by the Western emphasis on Guilt/Innocence. Human behavior would no longer be governed by supernatural spirits or a supreme deity, but rather by an individual sense of “right” and “wrong” and a desire to conform to internal moral codes and external public laws. However, an evaluation of contemporary Eskimo culture reveals that this is not the case.

A. Shame and Honor in the Old Ways

The secularization of Eskimo culture did not cause a widespread transition to the Western orientation of Guilt/Innocence, but rather “uncovered” and brought into
prominence another dynamic of social control that had always existed beneath the surface.

Though the earlier analysis of oral history and anthropological studies has identified Fear/Power as the primary dynamic of social control in early Eskimo culture, it is important to note Muller’s word of caution:

We must be careful, however, not to try and fit each culture or worldview into one specific category...all three building blocks are present in all cultures and worldviews, but how much of each one is present, determines the actual type of culture that emerges.44

He goes on to make a specific suggestion about the indigenous cultures of North America, suggesting that they often consist “of elements of both shame-based and fear-based cultures.”45 This is consistent with the observations of anthropologist Paul Hiebert, who identifies strong elements of both Fear/Power and Shame/Honor in what he calls “small-scale oral societies.”46

Returning to the sources consulted earlier, it is clear that an “undercurrent” of Shame/Honor complimented the dominant value of Fear/Power. This is illustrated again through the story of Qutleruq, who had killed her father by breaking the taboo against making braids. The result of her actions was ostracism from the community: “Qutleruq was now an outcast, labeled a ‘murderer.’ Yes, labeled as such, even by the whole village. The verdict given by a mother’s authority was final. It has been spoken.”47 Qutleruq struggled

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44 Muller, 16.
45 Muller, 20.
47 Savok, 21.
with this brand of shame throughout her life. It later caused her to be rejected by her mother-in-law as a source of bad luck:

Like any other mother who loved her children, Egaq’s mother could sense the turmoil in her son’s life. She, too, after this length of time, learned to love her daughter-in-law. But the fear of breaking rules of superstition was stronger. After the second baby came and died, she encouraged her son to leave his wife who was still in the snow shelter. This would be the quickest way to solve problems coming their way. Surely, the outcast in their family was the source of it all.\textsuperscript{48}

In Qutleruq’s story, the dynamics of Fear/Power and Honor/Shame are seen to be working hand-in-hand: honor and shame were observed by the community in order to avoid supernatural consequences.

Anthropologists affirm this communal orientation. Survival for the Eskimo depended not only on supernatural power, but also on connectedness to other human beings through a widespread network of kinship for support and mutual sustenance:

Under this arrangement, all Eskimo who called each other by real or fictive kinship terms assumed a relation of sharing and cooperation (the extent of obligation depending on degree of distance from ego), and were seen by outsiders as being responsible for the actions of the entire kin group. Feuds occasionally arose between these groups and when the conflict resulted in murder, retaliation required the joint action of the appropriate kin members.\textsuperscript{49}

Status and face in the community were nearly as important for survival as spiritual power and influence. Sharing, caring, and hospitality were of paramount importance, and thievery and dishonesty were the greatest transgressions; “Any Eskimo found with the bad habit of either one was known by people in several communities. Distrust of such a person among

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{48} Savok, 32.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{49} Chance, 49.}
the honest and truthful was, in itself, enough punishment and warning to others.” These are clear examples of Shame/Honor values as defined earlier.

As the forces of Western secularization removed the dynamic of Fear/Power, this secondary orientation towards Honor/Shame has risen to the surface, and now operates as the primary dynamic of social control in rural Eskimo society. Napoleon relies heavily on shame-based language to describe the effects of the cultural transition upon his Yup’ik people. He argues that the death of the “old ways” brought a great sense of communal shame:

The survivors seem to have agreed, without discussing it, that they would not talk about it. It was too painful and the implications were too great. Discussing it would have let loose emotions they may not have been able to control. It was better not to talk about it, to act as if it had never happened, to nallunguaq. To this day nallunguaq remains a way of dealing with problems or unpleasant occurrences in Yup’ik life. Young people are advised by elders to nallunguarluku, “to pretend it didn’t happen.”

He goes on, discussing how this dynamic has shaped modern Eskimo behavior today:

The survivors were stoic and seemed able to live under the most miserable and unbearable of conditions. They are quiet, even deferential. They did not discuss personal problems with others. If they were hurt, they kept it to themselves. If they were angry, they kept it to themselves. They were lauded as being so respectful that they avoided eye-to-eye contact with others. They were passive. Very few exhibited their emotions or discussed them.

Examining social control among the Eskimo in more recent times, Chance affirms this orientation towards Shame/Honor: “As long as the Eskimo’s economic and social security

50 Savok, 185.
51 Georges & Baker, 52-60.
52 Napoleon, 12.
53 Napoleon, 19.
depends on the assistance and support of others, gossip, ridicule, and ostracism can be quite effective in ensuring conformity to group norms."\textsuperscript{54} These are often applied formally in the context of the village council, and in extreme cases banishment from the community is not unusual.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{B. Contemporary Ethnography & Survey}

In working with Eskimo students over the past six years, my own ethnographic observations support this hypothesis. The Western higher education setting is traditionally very steeped in the Guilt/Innocence framework. The system is built around the concept of individual performance and achievement, rewarding good academic behavior and punishing poor. I have often struggled to involve Eskimo students in group conversation, since speaking as an individual in a group setting causes one to “stand out” in a situation where group conformity is the traditional value. Conversely, when participation \textit{is invited} by the larger group, students are much more eager to contribute. In one such case recently, I asked a student why he chose to address a particularly sensitive racial issue in class publicly. He replied, “My friends asked me to share, and I wanted to honor them.” In cases where class work is not completed on time, students will often choose not to attend class, rather than to admit that the work is not complete. Family emergencies are common occurrences due to the extended kinship structure, and students have frequently accrued extended periods of absence due to the cultural obligation to honor and assist one’s family. All of these observations are examples of a Shame/Honor worldview in action.

\textsuperscript{54} Chance, 65.

\textsuperscript{55} Chance, 69.
An interview with one Yup’ik student confirms this theory further. I asked Eugene how individuals in his hometown of Mountain Village learn how to behave appropriately. Eugene’s responses heavily emphasized the importance of listening to and respecting one’s elders. When I asked him why the elders of the community are so important, he replied, “Because they’re the ones that we view to have the most wisdom and knowledge. We would look to them for guidance and so on…So that is one of the ways we show respect, because they’re the ones that taught us the best hunting grounds and so forth.”

I asked Eugene what happens to people who do not listen, and he replied,

Pride in the village is frowned upon. A proud man is like the wolf that howls too loud. He needs to show that he is just like them, and knows where he comes from...If a person refuses to listen, then we refuse to hear what they have to say.

In Eugene’s experience, correct behavior revolves around respecting elders and conforming to the group. Those who fail to do so lose face and are ignored.

I also asked about the role that the supernatural or spirit world plays in a person’s behavior. Eugene responded with an example, revealing that fear does still play a minor role in social control:

To help kids know when to come home when it’s dark out, we tell them to avoid the northern lights—not to be too loud or mischievous. Otherwise, they will come closer and closer. In some stories, they will play ball with your head, or turn you to stone. Seeing the movement of the lights in the sky then frightens kids to go home. When we get older, we realize these are just stories.

56 Eugene Stevens, personal interview, 13 October 2017.

57 Stevens.

58 Stevens.
In Eugene’s experience, some of the old stories and taboos are still used to teach the children, but the adults do not generally believe these.

During the course of this study, I had an intriguing glimpse of this system in action when I attended the Alaska Federation of Natives convention with Eugene on October 20, 2017. One reason for our visit was that Eugene wanted to purchase an authentic Yupik-style drum at the artisan market. Craftsmen from across Alaska were present to sell their handiwork. Walking through the market, I observed two vendors selling these drums. I found Eugene, who had just committed to purchasing a drum from a third vendor, not having seen the other two. Looking at the drum, I could tell that it was of inferior quality compared to the other two drums I had already seen. As I walked away with Eugene, who was headed to the ATM to get money for the drum, I showed him the other two options. He was very excited about the second option that we looked at. But even more exciting to him was the third option. As we spoke with the vendor, Eugene realized that he was the grandfather of a well-known drummer, Byron Nikolai, who was an acquaintance of Eugene. Eugene ultimately decided to purchase from this vendor. Later, as we continued walking through the market (Eugene with drum in hand), we passed by the booth of the first vendor. The vendor pointed to Eugene’s drum and asked, “So, you found one somewhere else?” Eugene told the story of how he had encountered the grandfather of his friend Byron. Explaining why he backed out of the verbal agreement with the first vendor, he said, “I wanted to honor the grandfather of my friend.” In a Western context, the vendor might have been quite offended by Eugene’s decision to back out of their verbal agreement. The Native vendor, however, seemed to be quite satisfied with Eugene’s explanation. Purchasing from a friend’s grandfather was understood to be much more honorable.
To confirm the results of these interviews and ethnographic observations, I made use of a quantitative survey written by Jayson Georges. This “Culture Test” consists of 25 questions in which respondents choose between three responses, each of which represents one of the three main culture types. I approached several of my Eskimo students, and four agreed to take the survey. The results of the survey confirm the proposal at hand:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Guilt</th>
<th>Shame</th>
<th>Fear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Averages:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37.00%</td>
<td>49.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: “The Culture Test” Survey Results**

Three important implications can be drawn from this data. First, for all four respondents, the “Shame” dynamic scored much higher than the “Fear” dynamic. This supports the hypothesis that has been presented above: the secularization of the Eskimo culture through the removal of the supernatural emphasis has caused it to shift towards Shame/Honor as a more significant mechanism of social control. Second, it is notable that, for the individual who came from an urban community, Guilt scored the highest, followed by Shame. This could possibly be attributed to the greater degree of acculturation that this individual has experienced in his urban upbringing, in which the collectivist values that support the Shame/Honor framework have had less impact. Finally, it should also be noted that the

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59 Georges, 30-32.
fear component has not disappeared completely from the rural population. While in the past this was the primary dynamic of the three, the secularization process has relegated it to the status of an “undercurrent.”

V. Conclusion

Western dominance has wrought a massive paradigm shift within the Eskimo worldview. Through the process of secularization, rural communities that once understood life and controlled society through supernatural power have been forced to give up this guiding principle. Honor and Shame now dominate as the major forces of social control in the rural Eskimo culture. When Europeans arrived with the gospel message, it was quickly accepted and adapted to the Fear/Power cultural orientation. The Eskimo of yesterday found in Jesus the power over evil and fear that their own shamans had long sought and predicted. Sadly, this victory was short lived. As that generation succumbed to epidemic and the “old ways” succumbed to Western secularization, the Shame/Honor framework has now emerged as the primary lens through which contemporary generations understand life.

The missiological task in Alaska remains. While the culture was effectively evangelized by the early missionaries from the Fear/Power perspective, it must in a sense be discipled anew from the perspective of Shame/Honor. This new cultural framework has introduced a host of new questions:

The Eskimo youth is expected to be self-reliant in a physical and supernatural world over which he has little control. He must be friendly even with those people he may dislike. He should maintain a sense of pride but remain modest, be prepared for action but have patience. We may assume that these long-continued frustrations build up impulses toward aggression in the individual. Since others strongly condemn any overt expression of these feelings, the individual simply suppresses
them (that is, they seldom come to his conscious awareness) except during sudden seemingly unexplainable outbursts of temper during which a mother shouts at her children, or a man beats his wife or destroys someone’s property. On rare occasions today, but more frequently in the past, these severe outbursts resulted in murder—or when turned inward, suicide.\(^{60}\)

These “outbursts” have only increased since Chance wrote in 1966, as Napoleon illustrates:

> Tragically, under the influence of alcohol and drugs, the pent-up anger, guilt, shame, sorrow, frustration, and hopelessness often is vented through outbursts of violence to self and others. Such acts, which are difficult for others and even for the sufferer to understand, drive him further into the deadly vortex of guilt and shame.\(^{61}\)

In a sense, secularization has caused this ancient culture to lose an important bearing that it once had through understanding of the supernatural realm. Once freed from the power of fear, the culture now faces the slavery of shame. The gospel offers real answers to the question of shame, just as it offered to the question of fear in the days of Qutleruq and Egaq. The Eskimo church must adapt its methods to address these questions. Modes of ministry that demonstrate and affirm biblical perspectives on honor will help in this regard, as will modes that appropriately address the smothering blanket of shame that so often oppresses individuals and communities. Promoting open, honest communication about the hurts of the past can allow Jesus Christ to heal the shame of the present. “As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame’” (Romans 10:11).

More than this, the Eskimo church should seriously consider its attitude towards the Fear/Power dynamic of old. As has been demonstrated, the ancient worldview of \textit{Yuuyaraq} was in many ways much more compatible with the biblical worldview than the secularism of contemporary culture. Loss of this worldview and the rise of secularism have removed

\(^{60}\) Chance, 78.

\(^{61}\) Napoleon, 15.
an important aspect of social control, and allowed shame to wreak havoc. By finding ways to affirm, celebrate, and critically contextualize the ancient worldview within a biblical framework, the Eskimo church may find a helpful cultural countermeasure against the sense of lost identity and vocation that fuels the shameful cycle of alcoholism, drug abuse, and domestic violence decimating many Eskimo communities today.
Bibliography


Stevens, Eugene. Personal interview. 13 October 2016.