

The Kangiq&iniq Project: Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Shamanism and Reintegrating wrongdoers into the community.¹

The Kangiq&iniq Project

In 2000, a workshop, funded by the Department of Justice, was held in Kangiq&iniq to explore to what extent Inuit qaujimajatuqangit might contribute to the solving of social problems in Inuit communities. The project was a follow-up of a series of oral tradition courses on *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* organized by Susan Sammons of Nunavut Arctic College between 1996 and 2000. Students of Arctic College were given the opportunity to interview Elders on various topics of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit*. In these interviews various topics such as law, medicine, religion and cosmology were covered. The interviews showed the richness of this complex cultural tradition of knowledge. Elders emphasized that crucial Inuit values such as respect for animals or sharing of meat were essential to the survival of Inuit culture.

In these courses it became clear that many Inuit elders still preserved much knowledge about shamanic traditions. In the course on the Transition to Christianity with Rachel Uyarasuk from Iglulik and Victor Tungilik from Naujaat, Victor Tungilik was even prepared to give an account of his practice of *angakuuniq* in his younger days. *Angakuuniq* had always been a central part of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* organizing the relations between human beings, the game animals and the deceased. Shamans played an important part in crisis situations making people bring out their transgressions so they could be cured. We wondered whether central values and basic techniques of *angakuuniq* might contribute to solving the social problems that face Inuit communities today.

¹ This text is based on *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Shamanism and Reintegrating wrongdoers into the community*. Eds Jarich Oosten and Frederic Laugrand published by Nunavut Arctic College, Iqaluit in 2002. For more information on the topics and the verbatim accounts of the elders we refer to this book. We express our gratitude to Susan Sammons and Henry Kablalik who strongly supported this project as well as the Ministry of Justice of Canada. We also thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Anna Hudson for providing us the financial support to complete the edition of the two films. Finally, we are thankful to Amélie Breton who edited the films.

Susan Sammons set up a meeting with Alexina Kublu from Iglulik, Henri Kablaalik from Rankin Inlet, Frederic Laugrand from Quebec and Jarich Oosten from Holland and it was decided that this issue should be explored further. Frederic Laugrand and Henri Kablaalik did a series of interviews with elders in the Kivalliq area to explore whether they would be prepared to participate in such a project. The elders interviewed reacted with enthusiasm to the proposal. Ollie Itinnuaq from Rankin Inlet promised to provide a cabin out on the land. That would have the advantage that elders would not be disturbed and could concentrate completely on the topics discussed.

Henry Kablaalik, from Kangiq&iniq acted as co-ordinator of the project. He invited eight elders from different areas: Ollie Itinnuaq, Felix Pisuk, Mariano Aupilaarjuk and Maryanne Tapaqti from Kangiq&iniq, Peter Suvaksiuq from Arviat, Luke Nuliajuk from Uqsuqtuuq, and Jose Angutinngurniq and Levi Iluittuq from Kuugaarruk. Frederic Laugrand and Jarich Oosten acted as facilitators of the workshop. Alexina Kublu took care of the translation and interpretation. Her advice regarding the direction of discussions was often invaluable.

The setting of the workshop was of great importance to its success or failure. It took place at Ollie Itinnuaq's camp. He spent much time, money and energy in preparing the workshop and rebuilt and adapted a cabin for that purpose. The meetings were held in this cabin during the day as well as the evening.

At the beginning of the workshop, the procedures were discussed and approved by the elders. The elders were very much aware of the sensitivity of the issue of shamanism in the community. They emphasized that their words should not be taken out of context.

The general principle of the meetings was that all elders should be allowed all the time they needed to explain their points of view and give an account of their personal experiences with regard to a specific topic.

All interviews were taped and some sessions were recorded on video. Topics were first selected on the basis of shared interests and priorities. Whereas general topics were planned in advance, each day special topics were selected for the various sessions on the basis of the flow of the interviews, the wishes of the participants and issues raised during previous sessions.

For each session on a selected topic, at least two round-tables were proposed in which all elders in turn could present their experiences and views. After each round more extensive discussions did take place in which all elders expressed their views.

During the session, the facilitators only asked questions to trigger the memories of the elders or to develop a few points of interest. The main goal was that the elders would discuss the issues without too much interference.

Elders appreciated the format very much. Some elders taped the sessions themselves to preserve their own records. Collective activities such as games, and fishing helped to retain a good and relaxed atmosphere among the participants.

Many visitors came to the camp, and they were welcome between the sessions. Elders and facilitators agreed that during the sessions interference by outsiders should be kept to a minimum so that the concentration in the sessions would not be broken and the participants would feel free to communicate their personal experiences. Not only did many visitors come to the camp, elders frequently went to the community to visit their relatives or communicate with their families.

An important feature that contributed considerably to the success of the workshop was that most elders were related to each other. This facilitated a relaxed context, which allowed the elders to discuss difficult issues quite deeply relying on their own personal experiences.

Angakkuuniq, shamanism

Shamanism is a topic that has long been suppressed in Inuit society. The elders strongly felt that it was an essential part of the Inuit tradition. The topic inspired them very much and they were in favour of exploring various aspects of shamanism further. A wide range of topics on shamanism was discussed in the workshop, such as initiation, *qaumaniq* or shamanic enlightenment, *tuurngait* or helping spirits, and *irinaliutiit* or powerful words.

All elders in the workshop had recollections of the practice of shamanism. They emphasized that they had never practiced shamanism and that they were Christians. They pointed out that shamanism had always played an important part in preserving social order. They stressed the need to retain what was useful from the shamanic tradition in modern society and were prepared to combine useful shamanic practices with their Christian beliefs. Itinnuaq stated:

“Being an *angakkuq* can be helpful, just as prayer can be helpful. Both have their usefulness, both can work. The *angakkuuit* and the ministers both pursue good.”

The elders were well aware that combining shamanic and Christian traditions is a controversial issue. They did not want to proceed too quickly and agreed that everything should be more deeply considered. Aupilaarjuk stated:

We don't want to bring back everything from the past, but we should bring back some things. We need to bring back the things that were good. I'm not trying to eradicate Christianity, but we need to put it together with the good aspects of *angakkuuniq* if we are to really follow the Inuit way of life.

The elders also pointed out the inherent dangers of shamanism. In the past, there was also much fear because of shamans. Nulijuk stated, “The *angakkuuit* would *tirliaq*, try to kill each other. They did not have to be together. They could see each other even if they weren't in the same place.”

The elders agreed that people should stop considering shamanism as a diabolical or an objectionable practice, and acknowledge that it has been very useful and might still be very useful. They explained that it had been very powerful in the past; it allowed their ancestors to survive, and it could still be used in desperate situations. Elders explained that while you can hide things in a confession to the priest, you can't do so with the *angakkuq*, because of his *qaumaniq* (enlightenment): Itinnuaq stated, “An *angakkuq* is capable of getting all wrongdoings out. It is a very heavy task, being an *angakkuq*.” Thus *angakkuuit* played an important role in discerning the causes of wrongdoings and setting out remedies to deal with them.

Angakkuuit also might play a part in preventing suicide. They disclosed bad things and thoughts and could heal and cure. Itinnuaq emphasized that the healing power of shamanism has to be acknowledged. He said, “Being an *angakkuq* does not shorten your life if you are trying to help others. An *angakkuq* needs to think, and to search for the right answers.” The elders think that shamanism and Christianity are, to some extent, compatible.

The beliefs and practices of shamanism reflect values with respect to people, animals, and the land. The importance of these values should be acknowledged. Itinnuaq stated, “We have

been talking about following the Inuit way and leading good lives. Now that we have Nunavut, I think we need to get together more. The young people should hear more and more about these things.” In this respect elders share a responsibility: Itinnuaq went on to say, “Elders are also to blame because we are not talking to our young people as much anymore.” Elders do not just envisage a return to the past and stressed the importance of keeping their religion: Itinnuaq emphasized, “When we have a belief, we don’t change it, we hang on to it. We stay with it. I think we should tell our young people this.”

All elders agreed that passing traditional knowledge on to the younger generation was of great importance. Shamanic traditions should be preserved so that they can contribute to the health and well-being of the communities.

The practise of Qilaniq

Qilaqtuq or *qilaniq* is a method of lifting a person or an object with a belt: if the person or object is heavy the answer to a question is affirmative, if it is light, the answer is negative. But other techniques of divination were also integrated in rituals and games. In the past *qilaniq* was frequently practiced but according to many researchers it was never seen as a powerful shamanic technique.

Descriptions of *qilaniq* go back as far as the 16th Century. George Best, one of Martin Frobisher’s naval officers accompanying him on the Northwest Passage voyages (1576-78), described the practice among the Inuit of Baffin Island:

These people are great enchaunters and use manye charmes of Witchcraft. For when their heads do ake, they tye a great stone with a string unto a sticke, and with certaine prayers and wordes done to the sticke, they lifte up the stone from the ground, which sometimes with all a mans force they cannot stir, & sometimes againe they lifte as easily as a feather, and hope thereby with certain ceremonious words to have ease and helpe (Best in Stefansson 1938: 127).

Best states that the technique is practised when people have a headache. As in many variants of the technique as described by later observers the head itself is the object that is lifted, there may be misunderstanding on the side of Best. Whereas usually the head is lifted, other objects such as a leg a stick, a snow beater or a stone can also be used. The power of rocks is a recurrent theme. Boas (1888) refers already to the spirits of the stones as powerful *tuurngait* (see also Peck in *Representing tuurngait*). Boas (1907) relates:

When game has been scarce for some time, an angakok will address a boulder, as though speaking to Nuliayoq, asking why the game is scarce. Then the boulder will reply, stating what taboo has been violated. Meanwhile the earth will tremble. There is only one old man now living who is claimed to have this power.

Thus the rocks appear to mediate between the shaman and the earth as well as between the shaman and the sea woman. Usually the technique is applied to a person whose head is lifted, but even today elders are aware of the great a variety of techniques. According to Kopak, an elder from Naujaat,

I can demonstrate *qilaniq*. There are different types of *qilaniq*. There is one that they do with a rock, and there is another one where they tie a stick on an *atigi*, a caribou parka. When someone starts to make fun of me or abuse me, I could use something like a piece of moss or a rock to protect myself. (Oosten and Laugrand 2010: 155)

According to Rasmussen, *qilaniq* was practised not only practised by *angakkuut*, but also by others, especially women. In Rasmussen's account the *qilajuq* first addresses the patient, announcing that he is going to lift his head. When the head become heavy, it is a sign that the *apirsaq*, helping spirit, has arrived. Then he asks the *apirsaq* to reveal the cause of the disease, but before the healing can proceed, the *apirsaq* has to be identified. As the *apirsaq* can only respond by affirming or denying a question, the *qilajuq* has to frame the question in such a way that the spirit can respond. The *qilajuq* therefore should be able to pose the right questions in the language of the *tuurngait*, a specialized vocabulary used by the *angakkuut* in their séances. The helping spirit is usually identified as a deceased person. Apparently this is sufficient identification and the *qilajuq* proceeds to ask questions relating to the cause of the illness. In

Rasmussen's description the role of other participants is limited. They respond to the revelations of the *apirsaq* by exclaiming "taiva&luk, taiva&luk!": "Away with it! Let it be!"

In the late 1970's Ujarak from Iglulik recalled a *qilaniq* performance by Arraq who conducted *qilaniq* by lifting his own leg.

I do remember Arraq performing *qilaniq*. My father and mother had gone to Naujaat shortly after the ice had frozen. Quite a while had passed and they still hadn't returned. Arraq began to get worried about them. Apparently, he thought that it was taking them too long to come back. One evening, when we had finished all our chores, he decided to perform *qilaniq* using his leg to determine whether they were alright or not. The family I was staying with consisted of Arraq, his wife, his mother Nattiq, my brother Nataaq and I. Arraq decided to ask a helper to find out if anything was the matter with Ava and his wife. He tied up one of his legs and waited for his helper, which he called his *apiqsaq*, to come. He said when his *apisaq* came to his leg it would become heavy. When it became heavy, he started asking whether or not the travellers were in danger. His leg would become very light when he would ask if they were in danger. When he ascertained that they were not in danger, he asked it when they would return. When he found out they would be coming back soon, and that they were not in any danger, then he concluded his *qilaniq*. He asked numerous questions to ascertain this information. [...] He tied the thong around the leg the same way he would have tied it around the head. Because he was wearing *kamiik* he didn't have to wear any padding as he would have done if it had been around the head. He used a short thong. He tried to have his leg totally relaxed. At times it would be very hard to lift and at other times it would be very light. Arraq would quite often perform *qilaniq* on the sleeping platform using his leg. When he was finished the *qilaniq*, he would untie the thong. Then he would shake his leg to get it back into shape and he would say, "tauva." I have never known him to use another person when performing *qilaniq*, only his leg. (Saladin d'Anglure 2001: 135-136)

When he interviewed Ava's descendants, Saladin d'Anglure (2001) obtained some more details indicating that the *qilajuq* and the *qilajaq* should not be too close. Iqallijuq from Iglulik even

stated: "Even today, any one of us is capable of performing *qilaniq* even though we are not *angakkuit*, by lifting something using a thong." The technique could not be practised on a namesake as was corroborated by Ujarak, Ava's son, with respect to Arrak, "Even if one of his *avvait* (namesakes) were present, he never used them to perform *qilaniq*. This was probably because he considered them to be part of himself and thought that his *apiqsaq* wouldn't go to them." Clearly the *qilajuq* and the *qilajaq* should not be too close. This was also expressed in clothing symbolism. Ujarak related that his mother Orulo always used caribou socks of her husband or her son, never the head or clothing of the patient (Saladin d'Anglure 2001).

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