Chapter 1

Introduction

This is Kaniuekutat's book. In the fall of 1993 Kaniuekutat, at the age of 73, sat down with his grandson, Thomas, and me in order to record his story. He wanted to tell his descendants about his own life, but even more so about Innu culture. Kaniuekutat was greatly concerned about the possibility that the young Innu may lose their traditional culture and the skills necessary to make a living as hunters in *nutshimit*, in the country. He was afraid that future generations may ultimately lose even their language, and that they would no longer dream Innu dreams.

This is not an autobiography in any ordinary sense. Kaniuekutat wanted to convey a message: the Innu must take care of their language, their culture and their traditions. Hence, the pages of this book are filled with the voice of Kaniuekutat giving his version of what it is like to be an Innu hunter, and a personal account of the problems and distress that have followed from sedentarisation and village life. Kaniuekutat invites us to see Innu society and culture from the inside, the way he lives it and reflects upon it. Generally speaking, in our world today it is more important than ever that 'we', whoever that 'we' is, are willing to understand and to take the perspective of 'the other', whoever that 'other' is. Kaniuekutat is surely enmeshed in a social and cultural heritage, but he also reflects upon this heritage and how it influences his own position and life-opportunities.

It follows that this book is for the Innu, and for a wider non-Innu readership that Kaniuekutat also wanted to reach. Furthermore, it is my hope that it will reach readers with professional interests.

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How the book came about

The material for this book is based on fifty-two hours of tape-recorded sessions of Kaniuekutat talking in Innu-aimun. Kaniuekutat had practically no knowledge of the English language, and as my knowledge of the Innu language is limited, Kaniuekutat's grandson, Thomas, who participated in most of our sessions, gave me crucial help in following the stories as they unfolded. My original plan was to have the interview tapes transcribed into written Innu-aimun so that they could be used in the Innu schools, and only afterwards have the text translated into English. However, as it proved impossible to find an Innu person in Utshimassit (Davis Inlet)[1] who was able to transcribe the tapes in Innu-aimun, they were transcribed, translated and written in English in one process by George Gregoire who was himself a close friend of Kaniuekutat.

Initially, I had thought that I would structure the conversation more in the shape of an autobiography. However, it rapidly became clear in our first session that Kaniuekutat saw this first and foremost as an opportunity to record his account of Innu life and traditions, as well as his concerns for the present and future state of affairs. A significant amount of what Kaniuekutat tells us is prompted by my questions, and also by questions from Thomas, so that our sessions had the character of being a conversation. However, quite often Kaniuekutat came to our sessions with an idea of what he wanted to record, whether it was a myth or how the Innu lived in the past, for example. Our sessions therefore turned out to be much less structured by me than I had first intended. Kaniuekutat spoke to Thomas, to me, and to future generations of Innu. It seemed quite clear to me that he shifted his target from time to time. Sometimes he clearly addressed Thomas or me, while he at other times addressed future generations of Innu in general by giving detailed accounts of how the Innu lived in the past, the tools they used, the skills they had, and so on.

1. There are two places with the name Utshimassit (Davis Inlet) in close proximity to one another. One was the site of the Hudson's Bay Company store and mission and served as a summer gathering place for the Innu. This location was abandoned in 1968 when the Innu moved to the new Davis Inlet on Iluikoyak Island. To avoid confusion, the older, pre-settlement Utshimassit will be referred to as 'old Davis Inlet' in parentheses in the first occurrence in every paragraph throughout this book. In contrast, the new settlement location will be referred to as 'new Davis Inlet' in parentheses in the first occurrence in every paragraph. Nowadays, the Innu call the older location 'Uipat Utshimassit', literally 'Old Days Utshimassit'. Utshimassit comes from the diminutive form of *utshimau* meaning 'HBC clerk' (J. Mailhot, P. Armitage and M. MacKenzie Labrador Toponomy Project, Peter Armitage, personal communication).

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In editing the large amount of material at hand, I have deleted most of my questions, except when I have found them to facilitate readability and a better understanding of what Kaniuekutat is saying. The process of editing a large volume of textual material has been very time consuming. Quite a lot of repetitive material has been removed, and I have rearranged sections of the text so that they fit together in a progression that makes sense both thematically and as an evolving story. This is necessary because Kaniuekutat's presentation was oral and stretched over several weeks, and therefore does not have the progression required by a written text. In order to make the meaning clear, I have in a few places altered the structure of sentences or the words used by George Gregoire in his translation.

The reader should note how Kaniuekutat identifies persons and places in the landscape by using names. We will encounter this again and again throughout Kaniuekutat's account. Although I have omitted many names of both people and places, I have included quite a few in order to preserve Kaniuekutat's voice, and to communicate the fact that it generally is an important trait of all Innu storytelling. By thus situating persons, social relations and events in the landscape, the Innu cultivate and map their land. In effect, the land is saturated with experiences, so the Innu read significant parts of their history into, as well as out of the landscape (cf Basso 1996). A notable feature is that a location can change its name if it becomes associated with new people or events, as for example the Innu replaced Ashuapun-shipu with Emish-shipu (Kogaluk River) after the trader who established himself near the mouth of the river.

We should also note the word 'maybe' (in Innu it is '*put*') that appears many times throughout Kaniuekutat's account, as it does in any Innu conversation and discussion. It is a way of hedging one's statement, and is often also used to avoid imposing one's statements or views on others. For the same reason, the Innu tend to say '*muku tshin*', that is, 'it's up to you', when someone asks for advice. These expressions may be seen as reflecting the unpredictability of their natural environment, and also the relative personal autonomy of the individual in Innu society (see Henriksen 1973).

My relationship with Kaniuekutat goes back to 1966–68 when I, as a student of anthropology, did my first fieldwork among the Innu (see Henriksen 1973). At that time the Mushuau Innu who traded out of Utshimassit (old Davis Inlet) counted no more than 148 persons, and I got to know all of them. They were still living in tents all year round, and for two full winters I lived in their tents as I travelled with them in the interior of Labrador hunting caribou. Although I did not live in

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Kaniuekutat's tent, I got to know him quite well as we often happened to be members of the same hunting camps, and therefore also travelled and hunted together.

Between 1975 and 1976 I spent a year in Utshimassit (new Davis Inlet) working on Innu land claims, hired by the Naskapi-Montagnais Innu Association (later renamed Innu Nation). My wife and I built a small cabin (3 x 4 metres), where we lived. Whenever I was away from Utshimassit attending meetings, Kaniuekutat would, without prearrangement of any sort, regularly come with his snowmobile in order to dump firewood in front of our cabin, and make sure that everything was well with my wife. A good friend he was, not only to me, but to many Innu. He was a gentle man with a good sense of humour, and with a laughter that was never far away. He was very concerned about the future of Innu society, and also, as we will see from his own account, with the way the Innu were treated by White institutions.[2] Yet, he did not take leadership, neither in the community at the coast nor in the hunting camps in the interior. I believe the major reason for this was his non-assertiveness. Kaniuekutat belonged to the generation that, with a few exceptions, did not speak any English. In spite of that he could have, as others of his generation did (as we will later see), run in elections for the Band Council. However, his whole orientation was towards the land and the animal spirits,[3] and not towards the encompassing and powerful White society, although he was concerned with its effects on Innu society. Kaniuekutat's close friend, Philip Rich, did have some command of English and was several times chief in Utshimassit, which, we may note in passing, had increasingly less relevance as soon as the Innu's lives as hunters started to unravel.

It was especially with Kaniuekutat and Philip that I worked on Innu place names (toponyms) and many of the travelling routes and on other information about the land use patterns of the Innu. In 1982 I spent two summer months with Kaniuekutat, his family and several other Innu

2. The term 'White' refers to an ethnic category consisting of people from Europe or whose ancestors originated there. I recognize that contemporary Canadian society is increasingly multi-ethnic and that the 'face' of the society has changed dramatically over the last several decades. In this context, 'White' is used as a gloss for non-Aboriginal people in general.
3. I will throughout the text use the term 'spirit' for all the beings that the Innu endow with special powers. 'Spirit' is therefore a label of convenience for a variety of other-than-human beings. I am aware that the Innu themselves do not use a single generic term that can be translated as 'spirit', yet I think it is in accordance with conventional anthropological terminology/parlance to use the term 'spirit'. Some anthropologists writing from this area use the term 'animal masters'. I find this usage more problematic than 'animal spirits'.

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families, hunting and fishing in one of his favourite areas, Upatik (Okpatik Island area). In 1991 I spent six weeks in the Upatik area together with my wife and two daughters. As we disembarked from the small aircraft in Utshimassit (new Davis Inlet), Kaniuekutat started the outboard motor without delay, leaving time for us only to scramble on board his boat and off we went into the fjord. We lived in Kaniuekutat's tent together with him, his daughter, Catherine, and two of her children, Protais and Danina. We all helped Kaniuekutat with his commercial fishing of arctic char, which, by the way, gave him only a very meagre income. Then, in 1993 (while I was in Utshimassit on an assignment from the Economic Recovery Commission of Newfoundland and Labrador), Kaniuekutat, Thomas and I sat down with the tape recorder. In addition, I returned to Utshimassit several times after Kaniuekutat's death in connection with the Voisey's Bay mining project.

Geography, social organisation and core values

Within the space of four decades the Mushuau Innu have lived in three different communities, that is, Davis Inlet, which became the 'old Davis Inlet', new Davis Inlet (Utshimassit), in which my conversation with Kaniuekutat took place, and the present community called Natuashish. These are all located within a radius of a few kilometres. Approaching the territory of the Innu by sea or by air, one is struck by the beauty of the land. Even from the small aircraft that service the community one can see seals and whales in the waters off the coast, and among the numerous islands and in the bays and fjords that indent the land. A trained eye aboard the coastal boat that runs in the open-water season can sometimes spot the Canada Goose and various ducks that flutter their wings and take to the air, forming long, waving necklaces of moving birds in the sky.

The outer islands are barren, while the larger islands closer to the land may be heavily wooded by black spruce. The mainland forest reaches down to salt water, only to recede towards the top of the highest hills and mountains. Travelling inland from the coast along the rivers in canoes or on the river-ice in winter, one finally reaches the Barrens (*mushuau*) of the interior of Northern Labrador. Here is where the Innu usually hunt caribou. The Barren Grounds constitute the heart of their homeland and the reason why they call themselves Mushuau Innu, the Barren Ground People. Their favoured area may be located on the map by drawing a wide circle that includes an inland stretch of Mushuau-shipu (George River), Kameshtashtan (Mistastin Lake) and Ashuapun. We will see in Kaniuekutat's account that this area gains virtually a mythical quality,

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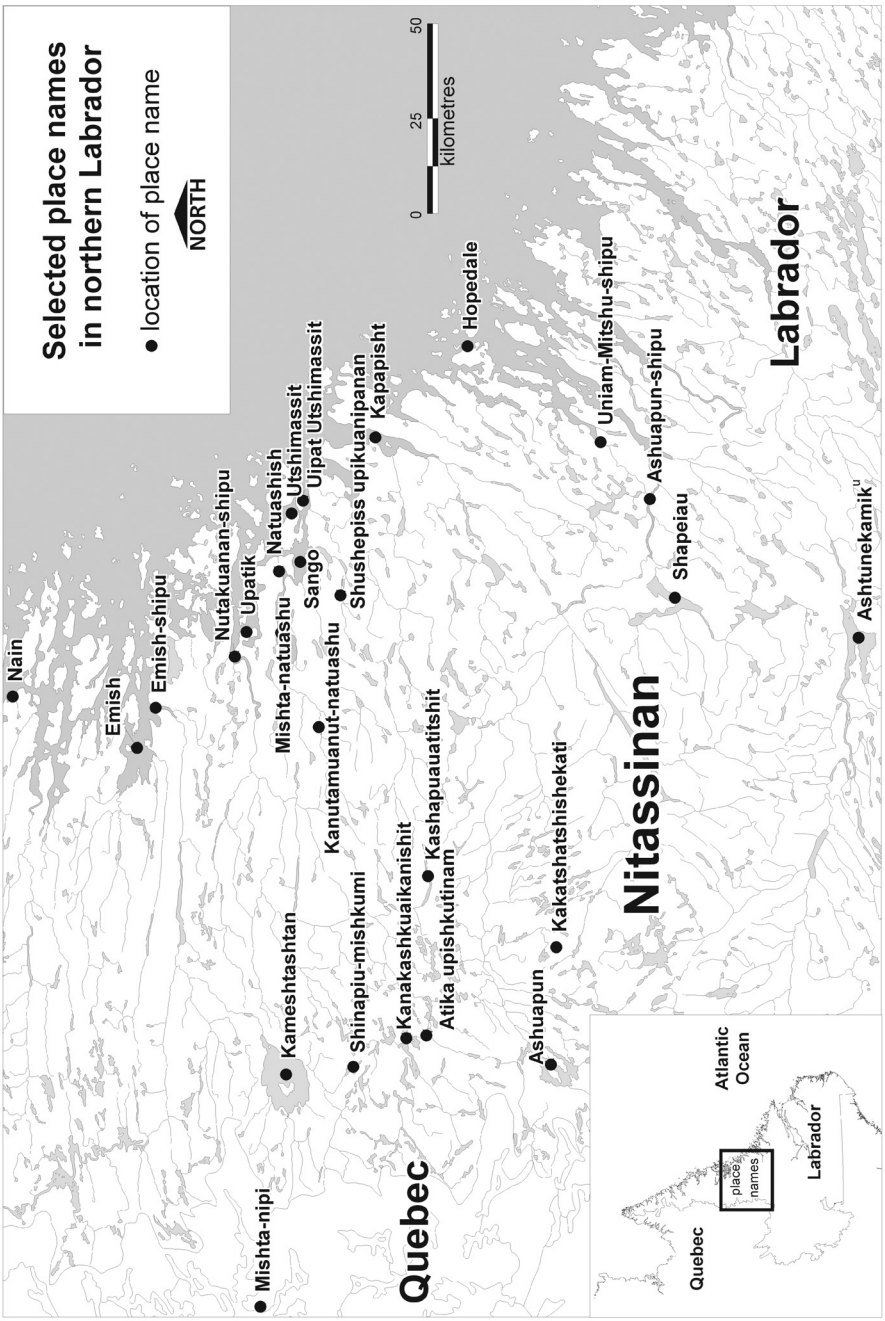

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and it was here, closer to Ashuapun, that I spent much of the two winters with the Innu. Entering this area, I remember well how the row of dogsleds stopped so that the parents could point out the markers of the route to their children and take in the beauty of their land. It is indeed a special experience to stand on a hilltop in the Barrens in the winter overlooking a white, rolling mountain plain filled with thousands of caribou using their hoofs to get to the lichen underneath the crusty snow while packs of wolves are waiting for the right moment to chase. Then, suddenly, the wolves make their thrust and the huge herd of caribou transforms itself into a moving carpet over the white landscape. But only a few moments later the wolves stop their pursuit and the caribou immediately resume their grazing. In this physical environment one can hear from a long distance the clicking sound from the hoofs of the caribou as they run.

These parts of the hunting territory of the Innu consist mainly of barren mountains and rolling plains broken up by numerous lakes and rivers. Throughout this exposed landscape, widely scattered patches of conifers are found in protected river valleys and on a few sheltered hillsides. Here the Innu erected their tents, while the daily hunting activities took place in the wind-swept Barren Grounds. When on the move, the Innu travelled swiftly from one stand of forest to the next, as they were dependent upon trees for the construction of their tents and wood for their stoves. The winters were cold, with temperatures often dropping to -40 and -50 degrees Celsius in the interior. The lowest temperature I recorded during my first fieldwork was -65 degrees Celsius. With its dry air, the climate of the hunting grounds in the interior can be characterised as arctic.

While travelling in their hunting grounds, the Mushuau Innu often met Innu people from Quebec, especially from Sept-Îles, and Cree from the Eastern shores of Hudson Bay. Kaniuekutat says that they were no strangers to each other; they shared what they had, like tea, tobacco and flour. One of the places where people used to meet was south of Ashuapun, a place called Kaketshatshekatshi, meaning 'high cliffs'. Kaniuekutat's father came from Uashkaikanish (Fort Chimo) in Ungava Bay, while his first father-in-law came from Uapamekushtu (Whale River) which drains into the same bay.[4]

4. There is considerable confusion with respect to the geographic location of Uapamekushtu, a place name based on the Innu word uapamek^{u}, meaning 'white whale, beluga'. The confusion is centred on two rivers in northern Quebec with names related to whale – Grande rivière de la Baleine (Great Whale River), which drains into Hudson Bay, and Rivière à la Baleine (Whale River), which is sandwiched between Rivière Caniapiscau and Mushuau-shipu (George River), and drains into Ungava Bay.

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'Utshimassit was not the only place where people sang with the drums', says Kaniuekutat:

> The elders from Uashat [Sept-Îles] sang with the drums too. Every Innu elder used traditional drums. Some Innu from other territories may have a culture that is a little bit different from ours, but they have the same traditional way of life. The language may be a little bit different, but we have no problem understanding each other. No matter where the Innu come from, what language they speak, they are not strangers to each other, and food is shared with every Innu person. In the country, the Innu are like one family. If one family had tea and tobacco, they had nothing to hide, but gave away what he had. This is the way Innu used to live in the country.

The land of the Mushuau Innu has been a land distant from the infrastructure of southern Canada. Even the coastal community of Utshimassit (new Davis Inlet) and their new village of Natuashish, are only accessible by small airplanes and by boat in the summer. Although the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) established trading posts within their territory, the Mushuau Innu remained more or less out of reach of the Company. For several reasons the HBC abandoned the idea of turning the Mushuau Innu into fur trappers (see Davies 1963; Williams 1963; Henriksen 1973). Firstly, the land of the Mushuau Innu is not very productive with regard to fur-bearing animals. Secondly, the caribou was by far the most important food resource, only supplemented by other game animals, of which the black bear and the porcupine were the most important, and also by fish and ptarmigan. The Mushuau Innu quickly discovered that trapping furs for the HBC could not be combined with hunting. If they were to procure furs of any significant amount, it did not leave them time enough to get the caribou they needed to feed their families, since the HBC could not provide the necessary food supplies the Innu needed to substitute for the lack of hunting. Thirdly, and of central importance, were all the social and ritual activities that were connected with hunting this magnificent animal, as well as the way in which it was cosmologically framed. The caribou played a pivotal role in the culture and social life of the Mushuau Innu. It was through hunting, lavish sharing of meat and hides, and the making of beautiful moccasins, snowshoes and other products that men and women gained prestige and renown.

The caribou live in herds, usually varying in size from a few individuals to several thousand animals. They migrate over vast distances to find seasonal pastures and to reach traditional rutting and calving grounds.

When the Innu hunters approached a herd, moving with the wind in their face, they shot an animal standing in the outskirts of the flock. The animals immediately tried to identify the danger before they started to move. The hunters then systematically shot the animal that took the lead,

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making the herd move in a circle. In this way they could shoot some fifty caribou. However, to the chagrin of Kaniuekutat, today many young Innu will chase the caribou on their snowmobiles, which are less efficient and spoil the taste of the meat. Before the introduction of firearms, the Innu used bow and arrows and spears. They built coral-like structures across the landscape which funnelled the animals towards the waiting hunters. A major event was when the George River caribou herd made its yearly crossing of the northern end of Mushuau-nipi (Indian House Lake), which is an enlargement of the Mushuau-shipu (George River). Here, the Innu speared the swimming caribou from their canoes, making it possible to kill a substantial number of animals (see Henriksen 1973: 7–16).

The Innu constituted a small population of hunters in a vast territory. However, crucial parts of this territory were shared with other Innu groups, as well as Inuit, and later also settlers. Until this day the Innu have had a successful adaptation to their natural environment. They did not deplete the stock of the animals and fish on which they depended, however, the natural environment and their adaptation to it did not given room for any increase in population size. As hunters, the Innu were not able to accumulate and store food and material wealth of any significant amount. Hence, their demography was subject to the fluctuations in the number of animals, especially the caribou, so that the size of the Innu population was adjusted to the bottom level of the caribou cycle, that is, when the number of animals was at its lowest. Still, the Innu experienced starvation periodically. We now know that the number of caribou in the George River herd fluctuates, and that it can fluctuate quite dramatically. Thus, around 1916 the Mushuau Innu were forced to move to the coast seeking food and assistance from the White merchants as the caribou did not appear at Mushuau-nipi (Indian House Lake) as they used to (see Henriksen 1973: 13). However, it is likely that they not only changed their migration route, but that the herd was near the bottom of a cycle. When I did my first fieldwork in the 1960s, the herd was on the increase, and has since reached close to three-quarters of a million animals; it is the largest caribou herd in the world.

Some basic features of the social organisation of the Innu follow from their adaptation. In order to encounter the migrating caribou and also find other game animals, the Innu had to be highly mobile. When the hunters still travelled with their families and found a sizable herd of caribou, they tended to congregate in large hunting camps with as many as twenty households. When searching for caribou or when there were few and scattered animals to be found, the hunting camps usually consisted of only two or three households. As will become clear from Kaniuekutat's account, the hunters always tried to keep each other informed concerning their whereabouts.

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The changing composition of hunting camps militated against permanent leadership. When a person initiated a hunting trip or moved his household and other people followed him, then he was *utshimau*, the 'first man', and he was the leader as long as the particular venture lasted. The mobility and autonomy of the individual hunter and household was also made possible by the sharing economy of the Innu, which meant that any individual or household could join any camp, regardless of kinship connections, and still be provided with meat (Henriksen 1973: 40). The Innu were obliged to share the produce of the hunt with every household in the camp regardless of the relationship between the giver and the receiver. That is to say, having received meat from other hunters on previous occasions, a person was henceforth obligated to share with the original giver just as he or she was obligated to share with *everyone else* when they had anything to share (Henriksen 1973: 41). One can say that there was a principle of universal sharing.

In order to understand the sharing economy of the Innu of Kaniuekutat's generation, we must keep in mind the cosmological grounding of their hunting society, where the relationship between humans and animals was societal and moral. The produce of the hunt, that is, the meat of animals and fish, was in a sense 'sacred'. It had to be consumed in the right manner and it could not be converted into money. (sea mammals and saltwater fish were not subject to the same codes.) Hence, when the Inuit in Nain, the community immediately north of Utshimassit (Davis Inlet), started commercial hunting of the caribou in order to sell the meat on the market, the Innu said that they could never do that because the caribou spirit would become angry. Through Kaniuekutat's account we learn that not showing the animal spirits proper respect means that the spirits will withhold the animals. Hence, the produce of the hunt was not subject to exchange, and could certainly not be turned into a commodity. Since it had to be shared and consumed according to conventional rules, what the hunter and his wife could do with it in terms of individual strategies was very limited. One way of using the meat was to be lavish when sharing it out, and to use the opportunity to boast of oneself and to let oneself be celebrated as a skilful and generous hunter. To boast of oneself and others, and the reciprocal celebration of feats and generosity were prominent features of social life in the hunting camps. Consequently, a skilful hunter would be generous in sharing out the produce of his hunt and would thereby gain prestige. We will be able to glean examples of this from Kaniuekutat's account. Yet, there were times when one wanted to secure food for one's own family and therefore would want to keep rather than share the meat. Such may have been the case when the meat in the camp was in short supply or

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when a skilful and lucky hunter gave meat day after day to another family whose hunter and provider was considered lazy. There was, then, a basic, latent ambivalence of sharing versus having (see Henriksen 1973).

With regard to food-sharing among the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe), Hallowell writes that 'It is demonstrable that one of the most potent motivations in food-sharing and hospitality is apprehension or fear of sorcery. Food-sharing is an act of self-defence against possible aggression, for sorcery is a potential danger that is always present, it is necessary to be constantly on the alert' (Hallowell 1974: 102–3). Although I will not exclude the possibility that a person who refused to share food may have felt threatened, since people were able to use their powers to sanction him, I have no evidence that this was the case among the Innu when it came to the sharing of food. However, I repeatedly observed that people sent their children, or even the anthropologist, to ask other households for candles or other store-bought goods. The explanation they gave for not going themselves was that they were afraid (*nikushtau,* 'I fear him/her'). I believe that they were afraid, thinking their request may provoke anger, which again could provoke harmful use of spiritual power since the Innu could hardly refuse such a request. Hence, anger was dangerous.

The sharing economy of hunting and gathering societies has generally been regarded, and rightfully so, as a way of ensuring food for a hunter and his family should the hunter be struck by illness or death (see, for example, Hallowell 1974: 103). In the small-scale society of the Innu it fostered a great degree of interdependency that included all members of the society. Underpinning this interdependency was also the cosmology and ritual practices that made the hunting luck of any individual dependent upon the proper behaviour of all the others – men, women and children – such as proper handling and consumption of all the produce of the hunt. Regardless of whom it was who made the animal spirits angry, all the Innu would experience the consequences when the animal spirits withheld the animals.

There was another inherent dilemma in Innu culture, namely that of autonomy versus interdependency. On the one hand, they stressed equality, independence and autonomy; on the other hand, they had a form of leadership whereby the poorer hunters were followers of the better ones. Indeed, I observed hunters who travelled into the Barrens without a rifle, depending on others for caribou meat and hides. One had the choice, for the sake of company and security, to follow a good hunter who took the lead as the 'first man' (*utshimau*), or to take the initiative oneself and hope that other hunters would follow – thereby enjoying the value of autonomy and the prestige that followed from being a leader

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(Henriksen 1973: 51–54). All matters concerning travelling and leadership were strongly characterised by competitiveness. Most of the men would like to have taken leadership of hunting trips and when the camps were on the move. They also competed amongst themselves about who could travel the fastest, that is, cover the longest distance in the shortest possible time. However, these patterns may have been somewhat different before the advent of rifles. When the Innu hunted with spears and bows and arrows they would in certain periods be in greater need of collaboration, and hence may have had stronger and more permanent leadership in order to coordinate their hunting strategies and efforts (see Henriksen 1973: 9). Yet, although there have been changes in Innu technology and to some extent also in the social organisation of the hunt, there was, beyond doubt, a continuity of core values such as the centrality of the caribou hunt and the competition and prestige associated with sharing and generosity – all supported by their cosmology and social and ritual practices. Although the George River caribou herd fluctuates in numbers, it increased steadily for many decades making it possible for the Innu to maintain their adaptation as hunters.

However, after the serious slump around 1916 the Innu came to appreciate staying at the coast during the summer – utilising the coastal resources as hunters and fishers, at the same time as they could obtain goods from the store. This consisted of basic supplies such as cotton material for their tents, thin sheets of iron from which they made their stoves for the tents, ammunition for their weapons, and so on. In terms of food, it was mainly flour, baking powder, tea, lard and salted pork fat. This is what they brought with them when they travelled inland in early fall. Yet, their overall contact with the Euro-Canadian society remained minimal. Although they did some commercial fishing of salmon, arctic char and cod in the summer, and a few acted as guides for White fishermen in the summer, there were no year-round salaried jobs.

Due to their geographical isolation, which is amplified by the absence of any over-land transportation system, and the central importance of caribou, the Mushuau Innu remained relatively independent. Making use of new technology that became available, such as rifles, dogsleds (adopted from the neighbouring Inuit), motor boats and snowmobiles, they still maintained their adaptation as hunters with their main focus on the caribou, both as a material resource and as the social and cultural hub. Although one Innu hunter received an old snowmobile from the missionary in the winter of 1967–68, all the hunters had dog teams that transported them and their families into the hunting grounds every winter. Of course, significant changes did occur during the historical development of their society, but there was always sufficient continuity

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in the evolvement of their culture and social system to secure the identity of the individual and his or her relationship to fellow Innu.

As we will learn from Kaniuekutat's account, he and a number of other Mushuau Innu explored what it was like to live a more sedentary life by moving into the Innu community of Sheshatshiu near Goose Bay. Most of them, including Kaniuekutat, found it dismal and unattractive and returned to Utshimassit (old Davis Inlet) in order to continue their life as hunters of the Barrens. Still, the Innu could certainly have tied themselves more firmly to the attractions represented by the store and the health services provided by the missionary in Utshimassit by taking up a year-round residency in the coastal community many decades before they did. Instead, they chose to continue their exploits in the Barrens, remaining in the country for at least three-quarters of the year. Why was this? It seems to me that the answer lies in the core values of Innu culture and society, such as sharing, generosity, competition and prestige, and how these were set in motion and consummated through the hunting of animals, and especially the caribou. In other words, what is demonstrated here is the enormous dynamic force of culture and social values in giving direction to social change. I have used the word celebrate to denote the way that central Innu values were played out in societal interaction, and I have argued that these celebrations were a prime mover, a generating force in their society as I encountered it in the 1960s (Henriksen 1993a). Both the manner and style of celebration, and its dynamic force generating distinct socio-cultural patterns, are related to the fact that Innu society could be seen as one reference group in which all the Innu joined in managing the same values (see Henriksen 1973, 1981). How did the Innu celebrate each other and the values and standards by which they judged each other? Most conspicuously, they celebrated each other in connection with specific actions, as when a hunter returned to the camp and everybody crammed into his tent to hear him relate every detail of his hunt. They celebrated each other for speed in travelling, for their hunting skills and any other feats which they could relate. Both men and women were celebrated for their workmanship when making snowshoes, moccasins and other products. Not surprisingly, then, boasting of oneself and others is allowed amongst the Mushuau Innu. Another precondition for this celebration to take place was the ability of the Innu to listen, and not interrupt an account except by questions in order to prompt the storyteller to give further details until he or she had finished. This is the life that pulled the Mushuau Innu into the Barrens every fall, and which they missed so strongly after they settled into houses in the 'new' Utshimassit.

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The clearing of the site for the 'new' Utshimassit began in the summer of 1967, and gradually over the next couple of years the houses were built for the Innu, the missionary, teachers, and storekeeper. By 1970 the Innu were settled into the new community – a move that came to be a turning point in their history. We may ask why they chose to settle into the community and why this became a turning point in their history. First of all, they envisaged houses with running water, toilets and other modern conveniences which they had seen in the house of the missionary and the storekeeper. (What they got was more like small, badly insulated shacks without water and toilets.) The new community saw the construction of a much bigger store, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) station, a power plant and an airstrip. A Band Council was founded, and the community received government funding for a number of positions in the administration of the band, as well as of a number of projects aimed at increasing the health and welfare of the Innu – all of which implied the creation of a number of jobs. A nursing station and a school building were erected for the Mushuau Innu for the first time, both of which catered to needs that the Innu themselves professed. With these two latter institutions thoroughly established and with hired personnel in the community, the Innu were told that if they did not send their children to school they would not receive various government transfer payments, such as old age pension, and family allowance. At the same time the snowmobile became more easily available. The end result of these events was that the Innu quickly replaced their dog teams with snowmobiles, making it possible for the men to make swift hunting trips into the Barrens, and return to their families with caribou meat. The population increased from 140 in 1965 to 651 in 2006. There has also been a rather dramatic increase in the number of White people in the community. In 1965 there was one Catholic priest, a storekeeper and his family and a settler store clerk. Today there are, amongst others, a store manager, teachers, nurses, police constables, social workers, and construction workers.

However, there were several snags associated with the government decision to settle the Innu on Iluikoyak Island and the pragmatic response of the Innu in terms of their adaptation. In the short-lived all-male hunting camps, the ritual and the social excitement of the caribou hunt was diminished to some extent. Especially detrimental was the flimsy quality of the snowmobiles, which broke down frequently. Given the high cost of these machines, and the great difficulties in getting spare-parts, the hunters were soon left stranded in the community. The use of alcohol increased significantly, and by 1975 the social conditions had severely deteriorated. The Innu expressed in many ways the sentiment that they missed the long-lasting hunting camps in the country. At the

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same time many Innu stated a concern with what they experienced as a distressing dilemma. On the one hand they needed to take their children into the country in order for them to learn Innu culture, and the skills and specialised vocabulary associated with their life as hunters. On the other hand, they were quite aware that their children would need to go to school in order to learn the English language, mathematics and other skills necessary to cope in the future – a future many felt would be very different from their own life experience. As one Innu said, 'I don't understand anything of what is going on in the community. I don't understand anything about myself when I'm here. I can only understand myself when I'm in the country because I know the country and how to make a living from it.'

These events created so much ambiguity and frustration that the Innu were soon set on a destructive course with an excessive consumption of alcohol, substance abuse, suicides, child neglect and family violence, and all of the physical health consequences thereof, such as high rates of obesity, diabetes, sexually transmitted diseases, and so on. So severe were the conditions that on one of my visits to Utshimassit (new Davis Inlet) in the early 1990s, the young chief told me that the Innu were all afraid that they were killing themselves off. Kaniuekutat's worry about the future generations and their knowledge of Innu culture should be seen against the backdrop of this downward spiral of physical and psychological health. I will return to this in the last chapter.

In this severely troubled community, Kaniuekutat stayed sober but deeply disturbed. This book, then, is Kaniuekutat's way of accounting for Innu culture and way of life as he experienced it from childhood until he died in 1994 at the age of 74. It is a story filled with love and affection for the life that he and his fellow Innu led in both material and spiritual communion with the land and the animals in Labrador, but also the sadness and grief that filled his last twenty-five years after the Innu had moved into houses in the new community of Utshimassit (new Davis Inlet) on Iluikoyak Island. It is also a story of the ever-changing relationships of exchange and power between the Innu and various representatives of the encompassing Euro-Canadian society, notably the settlers, the church, the school and the institutions of law enforcement. What has happened to the Innu and their society since the move into houses and the new village around 1970 is of concern both to Kaniuekutat and me, and I will look at some dimensions of these developments in the last chapter (see also Henriksen 1973, 1993a, 1993b, 2003). Humans are social beings who cannot live a meaningful existence without being members of a society; what gives meaning to life for the individual is intimately and in multiple ways related to the kind of culture and society of which the individual is a

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part. Hence, when the community and society comes under stress, so does the individual.

Cosmology and ritual

In order to comprehend Kaniuekutat and his Innu world, we must think of him operating simultaneously in the realm of the natural environment, where he acts practically and strategically in order to survive as a hunter, and in the spiritual realm of cosmology and ritual which is, the way Kaniuekutat sees it, of no less significance for his physical survival. A non-Innu person with basic knowledge of hunting and the necessary strength and stamina to follow Kaniuekutat on his hunting trips would understand his practical actions. Yet, while Kaniuekutat moves through the physical landscape, he moves simultaneously in the cosmological realm, through which he interprets every event. His interpretations may have crucial bearings on what we can call his practical action. However, let me hasten to add that any person, no matter what his or her cultural background is, interacts with the natural environment on the basis of that background, which may have elements of what we call a cosmology, or a philosophy of how the environment is to be understood. This is what Hallowell calls 'the culturally constituted behavioural environment' (Hallowell 1974: 86–89), referring to the fact that we as human beings not only utilise our cultural baggage to interpret and act in the environment, but that our culture and social circumstances are always an integral part of the environment within which we act; and, surely also, as we act we alter and reconstruct the cultural, social and material aspects of our behavioural environment.

Thus, the geologists, engineers and other Euro-Canadians who work for the mining company in Innu territory at Emish (Voisey's Bay), contextualise the natural environment in terms of ideas of private property (that are legally codified), and they see opportunities for resource harvesting in terms of large global markets. The non-Innu hunter, hunting caribou or any other animal, would on one level see the same animal as Kaniuekutat does, but on another level, as will become clear through Kaniuekutat's account, see a very different animal. At the basis of the European view lies the Christian idea that human beings are supreme and in command of the animal kingdom.

The difference could not be more striking. The Innu have an animistic religion, which means that Kaniuekutat (and his generation of the Innu) lived in an animated world. As we shall see, the animals are spirited, and each species has its master spirit. The sun, trees, winds, thunder and

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lightning, and many other objects in the environment are spirited. Even some rocks and certain human and animal body parts are spirited and can talk. In Innu cosmology humans do not have a supreme position vis-à-vis the animals. According to their cosmology the animals and the Innu spoke the same language in the distant past. As the Innu see it, their survival in the pre-settlement period was dependent upon them showing respect to the animals and their master spirits. Their religion, with its cosmology and rituals, is an integral part of the behavioural environment of Kaniuekutat, also when he hunts.

In the first chapter we learn that the young boy Kaniuekutat is mystified. How is it that his father manages to find and kill animals? One day there is nothing to eat, the next day his father brings home a whole caribou. It is quite obvious from the way Kaniuekutat tells his story that he as a boy – at least as he sees it from the distance of his old age – understood that there was more to it than a combination of fortuitous circumstances and his father's technical skills as a hunter. Gradually he learns that it is a question of communicating with the animal spirits through dreams, hunting songs, offerings, the telling of myths, divination such as scapulimancy, and rituals such as *makushan* and the shaking tent. In all their doings the Innu must demonstrate their respect for the animals. Through such means the hunter activates his relationship with the animal spirits so that the animal gives itself to the hunter. Hence, as we will see, Kaniuekutat says that 'The elders always found a way to find animals'. It seems reasonable to infer that their cosmology and its associated rituals instilled in the Innu a confidence which they well needed in their demanding physical environment.

The most frequently held of all the rituals was that of *makushan*, involving the long bones of the caribou. Here, all the members in a hunting camp, adults as well as children, were invited into one tent in order to eat the raw marrow which was cut into pieces and mixed with the skimmed fat of the boiled bone splinters. The Innu term for the marrow and the fat is '*pimi*'. The essence of *makushan* is to show the animals and the animal spirits the respect they demand if the hunters are to be given animals in the future. In effect, the Innu are accountable to the animal spirits whenever their decisions and actions have consequences for the animals. *Makushan* is a communal meal from which nobody can be excluded. Hence, it confirms the inclusiveness of the group and the obligation to share the produce of the hunt. A more detailed account of *makushan* is given in Chapter 7 (see also Henriksen 1973).

A fascinating aspect of Innu cosmology is the many instances of transformation which we find in Kaniuekutat's account – the most typical being transformations from human beings to animals or from animals to

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human beings. A good example is the myth of the young Innu man, Kauitatikumat, who marries a female caribou and goes to live with the herd (Chapter 3). There are many other examples of crossings between categories, such as between sexes (which we will encounter in Chapter 5). The passage between categories is so common, and seems to be so significant in Innu cosmology that we can talk of a principle of transformation (see Speck 1977 [1935]). I see the numerous instances of transformation in Innu cosmology as related to a crucial element in the repertoire of hunting techniques that the Innu have, namely the ability to see the surroundings the way the animal sees it. This is, of course, based on an enormous amount of observation and knowledge transmitted from one generation to the next.

In order to enter other forms of existence one has to take off one's human garments (see also Brightman 1993: 98 and Tanner 1979: 137), while animals that may be tempted to transform themselves into humans should take on a human shawl. Taking off clothes makes the human more open and vulnerable to both internal and external powers – thus, also to the transformational powers of the self that is implied in healing, as for example in the steam tent. Another way of entering the domains of other beings is by imitating them. 'Follow me, and try to step in every step I make,' says the caribou girl to the boy who then, according to the myth, 'had no problem walking without snowshoes'. But the myth of Kauitatikumat also deals with the dangers inherent in engaging such power, as one might be trapped in that other reality without being able to return to ordinary human life. In an intriguing article, Willerslev portrays and discusses how the Yukaghir hunters of Siberia transform themselves by imitating and identifying with the animals they hunt, and how they may imitate the animals so thoroughly that they risk never being able to return to a human cloak, thereby loosing their human identity (Willerslev 2004: 634–35).

To consume what other kinds of people or beings consume is also a kind of imitation or mimesis and may have transformative power. For example, among the Tsimsian, the idea that 'To consume what another being consumes is transformative' is prevalent (Cove 1987: 272). But consumption of a substance is not only mimesis, or imitative, it is also the consumption of the transformative force that is embedded in the substance. We recognise this in many different traditions. In New Guinea people may become affiliated to another lineage by eating produce from its soil (Strathern 1972). In the Holy Communion in Christianity the bread and the wine is transformed by the blessings of the priest into holy substances (the flesh and blood of Christ), which again transform the person who consumes it. In the myth of Kauitatikumat it seems that the

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caribou also eats caribou meat; for example after the breeding season the old caribou ate cooked dried meat before he started to eat reindeer moss (lichen). Also, in *makushan* and in burning offerings the animals eat their own flesh. The transformative effect is that the animals reproduce themselves by eating their own fat or meat.

Ideas of transformation seem to be prevalent in many hunting cultures, as for example the Yukaghir hunters of Siberia just mentioned. It is beautifully illustrated in the film of the Kung (Bushman) hunters, *The Great Dance: A Hunter's Story*. Following an animal which they have wounded with a poisoned arrow, they read and interpret the tracks to understand what has happened to the animal. And do they not only interpret verbally what they see, on the basis of the tracks left in the sand, they imitate with their own bodies the movements of the wounded animal. Hence, in a sense they become the animal, or the animal takes up residence in them. In another scene, the expert runner runs hour after hour in pursuit of a springbok. Again, he interprets, from the tracks left by the animal in the sand, what is happening with the animal and how it reacts to its pursuer. While he is running the hunter tells us that he must become like the animal, and that he must start to see and think like the animal. That implies, for example, that the hunter must see himself the way the animal sees him in order, finally, to come close enough to kill it with his spear.

Lévi-Strauss (1966: 37), in arguing that many peoples have a 'science of the concrete', writes that 'The natives themselves are sometimes acutely aware of the "concrete" nature of their science and contrast it sharply with that of the whites' (and here he quotes Jenness 1943: 540):

> We know what the animals do, what are the needs of the beaver, the bear, the salmon, and other creatures, because long ago men married them and acquired this knowledge from their animal wives. Today the priests say we lie, but we know better. The white man has been only a short time in this country and knows very little about the animals; we have lived here thousands of years and were taught long ago by the animals themselves. The white man writes everything down in a book so that it will not be forgotten; but our ancestors married the animals, learned all their ways, and passed on the knowledge from one generation to another.

We learn from the myths of the Innu that their ancestors also married the animals, and that the animals and the Innu talked the same language. Detailed knowledge of the animals is of course of immense importance to all hunters, as is also the kind of empathy it takes to see the environment the way the animals see it, and the ability to imitate the movements of animals. It therefore seems reasonable to expect that transformations between animals and human beings should be a major theme in the cosmology of societies where hunting is the main system of

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production. The principle of transformation between animals and human beings may therefore be the prime source of the more general flux with regard to the crossing of categories in Innu culture.[5] It is through the hunter's or animal's own will and efforts that the transformations can be undertaken, and can be seen as an expression of a powerful dynamic in Innu culture. Kaniuekutat says that he can bring forth animals by dreaming them, and that the hunters can bring forth animals by telling a myth or by performing a ritual. Hence, myths and rituals are not only representations of Innu society and the social order, but have a transformative, life-creating force or power in themselves (see Handelman 1990; Kapferer 1997).

Indeed, throughout his account Kaniuekutat addresses the multiple and interconnected relations between all kinds of beings and how they are infused by the relative distribution of personally attained spiritual power. Every now and again in his account, Kaniuekutat hints at the process, continuing throughout his life, in which he gradually discovers the meanings and mysteries of what it means to be a human being, an Innu. Vital to any Innu person was the question of power: to what extent one has it, and the strength of other people's power that may harm or benefit you. The power of dreams, hunting songs, myths, the shaking tent and other ritual activities were essential in interaction with people and animals. We will see that the question of power remains of profound concern to Kaniuekutat to the very end of his life. He remains undecided when it comes to the question of how much power he commands. We will later see that when the Mishtapeus[6] (personal spirits) of a deceased shaman approach him and offer him their spiritual power, he is afraid and he refuses to accept them.

At the same time as spiritual power was of such crucial significance in the lived-in-world of the Innu, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what it is. Power is certainly transformative; it has the ability to induce change. Without power one cannot accomplish transformation. As I just noted, dreams and myths were powerful in that they could bring forth animals,

5. Related to this, it may be interesting to note with what ease the Innu can take any object at hand to turn it into something else which they are in need of at the moment. Thus, they will cut pieces from a blanket to replace mittens that have been damaged by being held too close to the fire when cold hands demanded that the mittens be dried – which in turn meant finding new ways of keeping warm with a smaller blanket during the night. A steel trap may be turned into a knife, etc. In other words, the Innu are not locked in the categories of objects and their respective functions (see Henriksen 1973).
6. 'Mishtapeu' singular. Innu nouns are made plural throughout this book by adding 's' at the end, following English-language grammatical convention.

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as could rituals and hunting songs. The power of hunting songs was also a life force that comes to an end should a hunter sing all his hunting songs. Kaniuekutat tells the story of the old man Atika who died because he sang all his hunting songs. Kaniuekutat also used his power to save the life of a baby by giving it part of his own life. 'This is how it works', says Kaniuekutat.

Although all Innu had some spiritual power, the shaman had more of the same kind of power than others, which meant that all the Innu shared the same notions of power and how it works. This is crucial if we are to understand Kaniuekutat's experience of his own power, as well as the role of the shaman in Innu society. This is well demonstrated in the shaking tent performances as Kaniuekutat describes them. The shaking tent was made out of four or six poles that stand upright, slightly converging towards the top so that the structure has a conical shape. A wooden hoop was inserted half way up the structure as well as at the top, connecting the standing poles and leaving an opening through which the spirits could enter. The covering of the tent was made out of the hides of female caribou. It was erected inside a much bigger tent, where the audience, constituted of the members of the hunting camp, sat. When everything was ready the shaman entered the shaking tent where he began to drum and sing, and soon the tent started to shake, and the audience could hear the voice of the spirit-helper of the shaman, Mishtapeu. All kinds of spirits could enter the shaking tent and the audience could hear them. It is like singing says Kaniuekutat. Mishtapeu acted as an interpreter so that the Innu could understand what they are saying. Through his performance, through his drumming and singing, the shaman probably entered a psychosomatic state where he intensely experienced the arrival of the spirits, and was also able to see far away, find caribou and to travel in the world of the spirits. The description of a shamanistic performance quoted by Hallowell (Hallowell 1942: 74) in the 1930s by a shaman from the Salteaux society is strikingly similar to the account given by a Norwegian anthropologist who has been an apprentice of a modern Sámi shaman (Müller 2006, personal communication). I mention this in order to underline the reality of the experience in spite of the distance between the two in time, and, not least of all, in their respective cultural contexts. In both instances the shamans stressed the intensity and realness of their experience. Many years later, as an old person who had converted to Christianity, the Salteaux Indian shaman said to Hallowell that he had not deceived him when he told of his shamanistic experiences. Through the myths and through their dreams and hunting songs the members of the audience all had their experiences of being in contact with the spirits, and most frequently with

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the animal spirits. Hearing Mishtapeu and the spirits talk in the shaking tent confirmed and added intensity and depth to their own personal experience. The shaman and the audience constituted a community of understanding and lived experience, and made the shaking tent a central institution in Innu religion.[7]

As noted above, Innu myths and rituals had a transformative, life-creating force or power in themselves. This was certainly the case also with the shaking tent, where the shaman, as a conjurer, not only made the spirits come, but also entered into a dialogue with them through the medium of Mishtapeu. A major objective of all the rituals and conjuring techniques was to bear influence on the spirits so that they would give the Innu what they needed, yet at the same time confirming their respect for the spirits and their demands. Notwithstanding their knowledge of procreation, as hunters the Innu had somehow to deal with the existential question that in order to live they must take life, and that the life they took must somehow be replaced. In contrast to herdsmen and farmers, the hunters had no control over the reproduction of the animals that they depended upon. On the level of myth and ritual the question was solved by a view of life and death where the very same animal that is killed is regenerated. This is established intriguingly in the myth about the young man who marries a female caribou (Chapter 3). It is also demonstrated in many of the burning offerings that we find in Kaniuekutat's account. The hunters could, for example, make an offering to a deceased hunter, asking him to give them all the animals that he killed during his life. Thus, regeneration of life and transformation of life-forms were central in Innu cosmology and in their lived-in socio-cultural world. This dynamic, (re)generative force in Innu culture was also expressed through the construction of the shaking tent. With the round opening in the top and the female caribou skins used for its wall, the shaking tent itself may be likened to the female reproductive organs.[8]

Appropriately, Innu religion is primarily concerned with life in this world, and less with existence after death. This is reflected in statements by Kaniuekutat where he says that while Jesus is in heaven, the animal spirits are all here in this world:

> They are not like Jesus. Jesus is probably in this world too, but we never see him in person, not like Katipenimitak [the caribou spirit]. People can see Katipenimitak and the spirits of

7. For a discussion of the shaking tent and Mishtapeu among the Cree, see Preston (1975, 2002) and Tanner (1979), and see Speck (1977 [1935]) and Vincent (1973) for the Innu.
8. This interpretation was suggested to me by Bruce Kapferer (personal communication).

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> the black bear, porcupine, fox and fish. But you don't see Jesus here on earth. When I die, I don't know where I'll be going; maybe God will take me into heaven. I don't know if there is God or maybe not, because I never see God here on earth. Katipenimitak is *here* on earth.

Innu religion is a this-worldly religion also in the sense that it reflects the often unpredictability and vicissitude of events in the behavioural environment. It seeks to explain and to a certain extent manipulate the variable, and sometimes inhospitable, natural environment from which they make a living. Hence, the importance of transformation and the osmotic boundaries between categories, and of power and conjuring. I see a connection also between these aspects of their world view, of their cosmology, and the character of Kuekuatsheu (the wolverine), the trickster whom we will meet a number of times in the myths. The movements and behaviour of Kuekuatsheu are difficult to predict. He is the creator of the world, but yet often seemingly without any control over his own actions. In his own way he reflects the creativity which is required by a hunting people in a demanding environment, and he crosses what categories there may be of human behaviour. He is clever, but also a fool, he is good, but also bad, hence reflecting and caricaturing in many ways the nature of an ordinary human being.

Kaniuekutat says about Kuekuatsheu, the wolverine, that 'He is crazy, but also very clever.' That is characteristic of the trickster figure – a figure that we find in myths in many cultures around the world. This is how Paul Radin summarises the trickster:

> Manifestly we are here in the presence of a figure and a theme or themes which have had a special and permanent appeal and an unusual attraction for mankind from the very beginnings of civilisation. In what must be regarded as its earliest and most archaic form, as found among the North American Indians, Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being. But not only he, so our myth tells us, possesses these traits. So, likewise, do the other figures of the plot connected with him: the animals, the various supernatural beings and monsters, and man. (Radin 1972: xxiii)

From Kaniuekutat's account it seems quite clear that his own religious allegiance is with his Innu religion and not with the Christian belief system. Yet, as we will see in the chapters to follow, there are also some areas where there is a convergence in belief held by Kaniuekutat and some White people with a Christian faith. This is likely due to Kaniuekutat's inclination to accept some of the Christian ideas, which, on a deeper level, may be due to certain similarities between the two

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cosmologies. For example, although Kaniuekutat refuses to see any similarities between *makushan* and the Holy Communion (see Chapter 16), it seems to me that both rituals, in addition to the obvious similarities of the partakers eating the flesh of a spirit or divinity, have transformative power. Furthermore, as far as I can ascertain, there are no concepts in Innu religion comparable to the Christian ideas of God or the Devil. Nevertheless, as we will see, Kaniuekutat, at a time when he was in hospital with a life-threatening disease, came to believe that he had a devil in his chest. In fact, the x-ray technician pointed to the Devil in the x-ray picture, and later a Catholic priest came to exorcise the Devil through quite an elaborate ritual. The ritual was successful and Kaniuekutat could later return home. While he was sick, one of the local nuns also assured Kaniuekutat that she was regularly praying for him. Underlying these convergences of the two systems of belief is an underlying idea of good and bad power. In Christianity the good power ultimately emanates from God while the bad power emanates from the Devil. In Innu religion, although power can be used for good or bad purposes, it does not have a dual source.

Some readers may find it strange that the myths appear as part of Kaniuekutat's narrative about his life and that they may seem to break up his own story in a way. Yet this is the way Kaniuekutat insisted it should be. The myths were central in the process of acquiring the cosmological and ritual knowledge that was needed to function as an Innu hunter, and were thus part of his behavioural environment. From his earliest childhood Kaniuekutat listens to the elders telling the myths, and the myths become part of the context in which he experiences his everyday life as a child, and later as a hunter connected to other Innu and to the animals. But, conversely, everyday life and experiences give meaning and life to the myths. While the myths certainly belong to a collectively maintained repertoire of stories, Kaniuekutat vests them with meaning conveyed from his personal life experiences. And of course he gives his version of them.

The Innu differentiate between myths, *atanukan*, and stories, *tipatshimun* (see, for example, Vincent 1991: 126). *Atanukan* refer to stories from the distant past, when the world was created and humans and animals were not yet differentiated, while *tipatshimun* refer to stories concerning people and events of the more recent past, often involving people who can be identified by name or kinship or other relations (see Vincent 1982 and Armitage 1992). For a similar distinction among the Anishinaabe (Saulteaux Ojibwe), see Hallowell (1960: 26–27). In most cases it is quite self-evident whether it is a story or a myth. However, we may note that Kaniuekutat every now and then says that the people in the myths lived just like the present Innu,

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and that they had all the tools that the Innu have today. In a way he minimises the distinction and the time difference between myths and stories. Referring to the myths, he says that 'the stories I'm telling you are exactly what happened in the past.' I interpret this as an expression of the meaningfulness and the truth-value of the myths to Kaniuekutat.

This, I think, may be an important clue if we are to understand the importance of the myths to the Innu. The myths, like good fiction, 'embody certain truths of human life in a series of imagined facts' (Hamilton 1908: 1). As Hamilton points out, whereas there is a genuine antithesis between fact and fiction, truth and fiction does not constitute an antithesis. While facts are true, facts and truth are not synonymous. Fiction and myth is a way of telling the truth about some human realities based not only on observed and established facts but on a construction of imagined facts as well. If the myths do not have a message that resonates with human reality, they would not survive over time (ibid.). Similarly, Franz Boas writes that

> there is hardly a single trait of all the mythologies that does not reflect naturally, by exaggeration or by contrast, the ordinary sense-experiences of man. It is only when we deny that these processes are characteristic of the imagination that we are confronted with any difficulty, and that we have to look for the origin of these forms outside of human society. (Boas 1982[1914]: 488)

In Chapter 6 Kaniuekutat tells us that myths are powerful; by reciting a myth the hunter can bring forth animals. In other words, myths are transformative and can be used to create history. 'Myths are important', says Kaniuekutat:

> Some of them really help Innu to find the animals they are looking for. For example, people sometimes use the myth about the boy who marries a caribou woman to find caribou. One person would tell that myth, and the next day they would find caribou. The same with porcupine. If there is no porcupine in the country, some people would say, 'Tell the myth about porcupine. Maybe we will find porcupine.' It happened many times that people killed porcupines, and it came from the myth. After people told myths about the porcupine, they would sometimes kill one of the animals the next day.

As has been pointed out above, a prominent theme in many of the Innu myths is that of transformation and the crossing of categories. Very common is the conversion of humans to animals and animals to humans. Already in Chapter 3 we will meet Kauitatikumat, the boy who marries a female caribou and goes to live with the herd. Another example is the spiritual helper of the shaman, Mishtapeu, literally the 'big man'. He is the central character in a number of myths and has the capacity to transform himself into animals and also to appear in different sizes or heights. Mishtapeu also appears as a helper and instructor of people,

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often children who may have been abandoned by their parents. In his role as helper and instructor he brings excluded persons back to the community and restores the social order. These myths may also be regarded as creation myths in that they disclose that Mishtapeu instructed the Innu how to get animals by making and using the shaking tent and singing with drums. Several myths or episodes of the same myth deal with the trickster figure, Kuekuatsheu (the wolverine), and in one such myth, Kuekuatsheu creates the world as we know it after a great flood.

A number of the stories concern the cannibal beings, Atshen and Meminiteu, and how they are defeated by Innu heroes.[9] Although the contestants use their physical strength and cunning, it is their spiritual powers that are decisive. The hero may be a young man with exceptional spiritual power, or he may be the recognised shaman in the community.

Atshen is a monster, a wild person who killed and ate Innu, and increased in size the more human flesh he or she consumed. The Atshen in the Innu legends is in most respects the same figure as the Atoosh among the Cree (see Tanner 1979 and Preston 2002) and Witiko, or Windigo among the Anishinaabe further to the west (see, for example, Brightman 1993 and Waldram 2004). In Chapter 12 Kaniuekutat will tell us the myth of Meminiteu. There he says that 'Meminiteu was a human being like us. He used to kill a lot of Innu people. He was probably like Atshen.' In Chapter 15 Kaniuekutat tells the story of a man who was one of the Innu and who became Atsheniss (a small Atshen). In other words, it seems that a person, in extreme cases, came to be regarded as a threat to the community and therefore was excluded and even regarded as a 'wild person', or Atshen – a theme that I will return to in the last chapter. Preston (2002: 61) relates a story about a woman who was 'terribly distressed and out-of-control', in which her husband and the community had to find a way to dispose of her (see Chapter 12).

According to the literature, there seems to be some evidence that cannibalism may have occurred among the Innu, Cree, Anishinaabe and other Algonquian-speaking peoples during extreme famines, but never institutionalised (see Brightman 1993: 259–60, 268). It should also be noted that ideas of Witiko and Atshen among such peoples have prompted the idea among anthropologists and other scholars that they had a psychiatric illness labelled 'Windigo psychosis'. The suggestion of such a culturally specific psychiatric syndrome has been thoroughly refuted by a number of scholars (see, for example, Waldram 2004).

9. Stories about Atshen can be either *atanukan* (myth) or *tipatshimun* (stories of events witnessed by contemporary Innu or proximate ancestors). All stories about Meminiteu are *atanukan*.

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While I briefly comment on the stories as they appear in the chapters that follow, my ambition is far from providing an exhaustive analysis of them. Far more important than any interpretations that anthropologists or non-Innu may make of the myths is the challenge they represent to the Innu themselves to analyse, to interpret and to make sense of them in their present-day world, and thereby also use them as intellectual tools to shed light on their current lives.

Innu modernity

The cosmology of northeastern Algonquian-speaking peoples, including the Innu, has been addressed in a number of works (Hallowell 1942; Savard 1972, 2004; Bouchard and Mailhot 1973; Henriksen 1973; Lefebvre 1974; Speck 1977 [1935]; Bacon and Vincent 1979; Tanner 1979; Dumont 1982; Cavanagh 1985; Armitage 1992; Brightman 1993; Gagnon 2003). The reader who is familiar with the ethnography of these northern peoples will therefore recognise the cultural context of Kaniuekutat's narration. However, the cosmologically anchored universe into which Kaniuekutat guides us may be unknown and even astounding to the general reader, and the non-Innu reader may find it hard to fathom the realness of it to Kaniuekutat and the Innu.

Although the cosmology and religion of the Innu seem exotic to some, it does not mean that they are outdated or belong to another evolutionary stage. It is imperative that we do not regard the Innu as belonging to another time. The Innu, including Kaniuekutat and his generation of Innu, are our contemporaries, and we could say that they live in Innu modernity as they grapple with many of the same challenges that most other people of today grapple with. One of the obstacles in the relationship between the Innu and the dominant society is the latter's denial of their coevality, which is based on a deep-seated notion, a master narrative or metahistory, that hunting societies, such as that of the Innu, are anachronistic (see, for example, Fabian 1983: 31; Clastres 1987: 189–90; Wallerstein 1991; Escobar 2004). I dare say that such a master narrative is shared by many members of the North American and European civil society, and nation-state leaders gain legitimacy by appealing, explicitly or not, to various versions of it. It is one that has informed a number of government economic and political policies with respect to the Innu – and that has contributed to the grievous situation reported from Utshimassit (Davis Inlet). An integral part of this master narrative is the taken-for-granted understanding that all peoples will in the end become modern like 'us': that they will 'develop' and become like 'us'. The severe social and

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economic problems reported from Labrador were created at the same time as the master narrative held by the majority population and its government prevailed and was implemented in various ways, such as settling the Innu in houses in a village, demanding that the children attend school, but without harmonising the school year with the yearly hunting cycle of the Innu. Such problems continue to fuel the stereotypes that non-Aboriginal people have of the Innu, and re-confirms their master narrative of socio-cultural evolution. Hence, we are dealing with an instance of a self-fulfilling prophecy on a grand scale.

Considering Euro-Canadian institutions and the master narratives at their base, we must also focus on the church, which immediately struck at the spiritual life of the Innu. Kaniuekutat will tell us how the Innu shaman reacted to the intrusion of the church by putting up a spiritual fight with the missionary. When the missionaries arrived, they came from a society which clearly holds the idea that animism is only one form of many 'primitive' religions which are inferior to the more advanced religions, the peak of religious evolution being the monotheistic religions originating in the Middle-East (see, for example, Cassirer 1962: 108). This is probably ingrained in most people's minds to such a degree that it is difficult, if not impossible to grant coevality to, for example, the animistic religion of the Innu. To some it may appear as 'occult.' It is with conceptions such as these that the missionaries, with the full backing from the church, the state and the civil society, set out to suppress indigenous religions. The Innu relate how a religious ceremony was broken up by a missionary in the report *Gathering Voices: Discovering our Past, Present and Future* (Fouillard 1995: 55–63) (see also Gagnon 2003: 122, 184).

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