

”Coming Up Jesusy”

Theologies of Inuit Self
Conversion



Film Clip

From: "*The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*" (1:37:37 - 1:42:18)

A film by Zacharias Kunuk and Isuma Productions

Available at: <http://www.isuma.tv/fastrunnertrilogy>

Siqqiqtiq

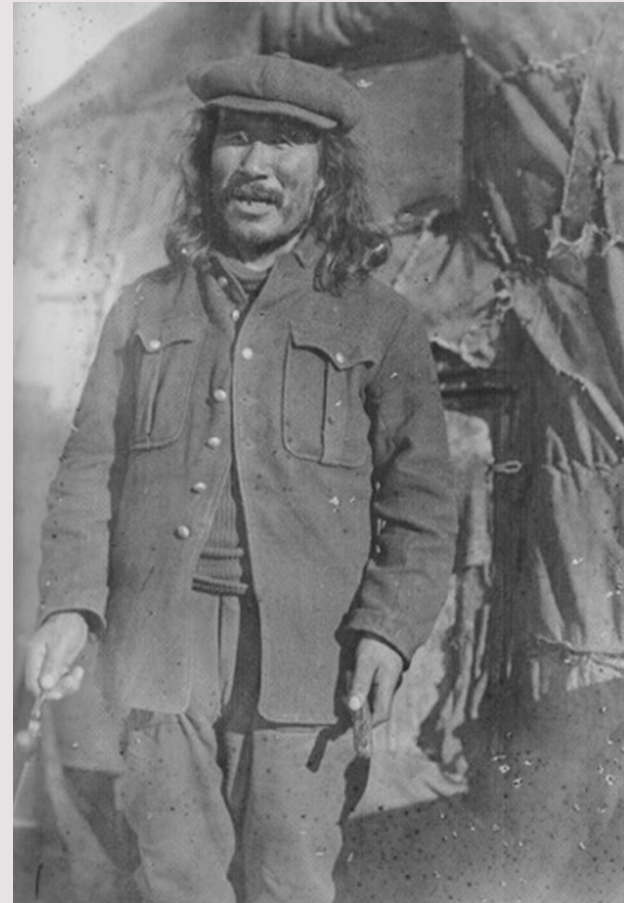
Elements of *siqqiqtiq*:

- All the iglus and sleds were flying white flags
- Every person was greeted by a handshake when they arrived (even dogs)
- All meat went to Umik and he redistributed it
- Umik was keen on exchanging spouses
- Each person confessed their sins
- They then ate seal heart and lungs saying "This is my body"
- They drank caribou blood out of a ptarmigan heart saying "This is my blood"
- Then they were Christians



Umik

- Known to be a shaman
- Father of Nuqallaq - arrested, tried and convicted for killing Robert Janes - spent time in Stony Mountain Penitentiary



Siqqiqtirniq definition

- Translated in the the film clip “Siqqiqtiqpunga” as “I cross over”
- Much more technical than that: refers to a caribou coming down a hill and crossing onto the sea ice
- Invokes the core opposition in Inuit thought between things of the land and the things of the sea, the twain shall never meet.

Critical Transformations

Siqqitiq was a critical transformation in Inuit life:

- 1) Normally men and women did not eat together
- 2) Key: the core taboos around eating, especially of organ meats, that underlay the shamanic system were overturned
- 3) In addition, the mixing of foods from the land and sea was overturned

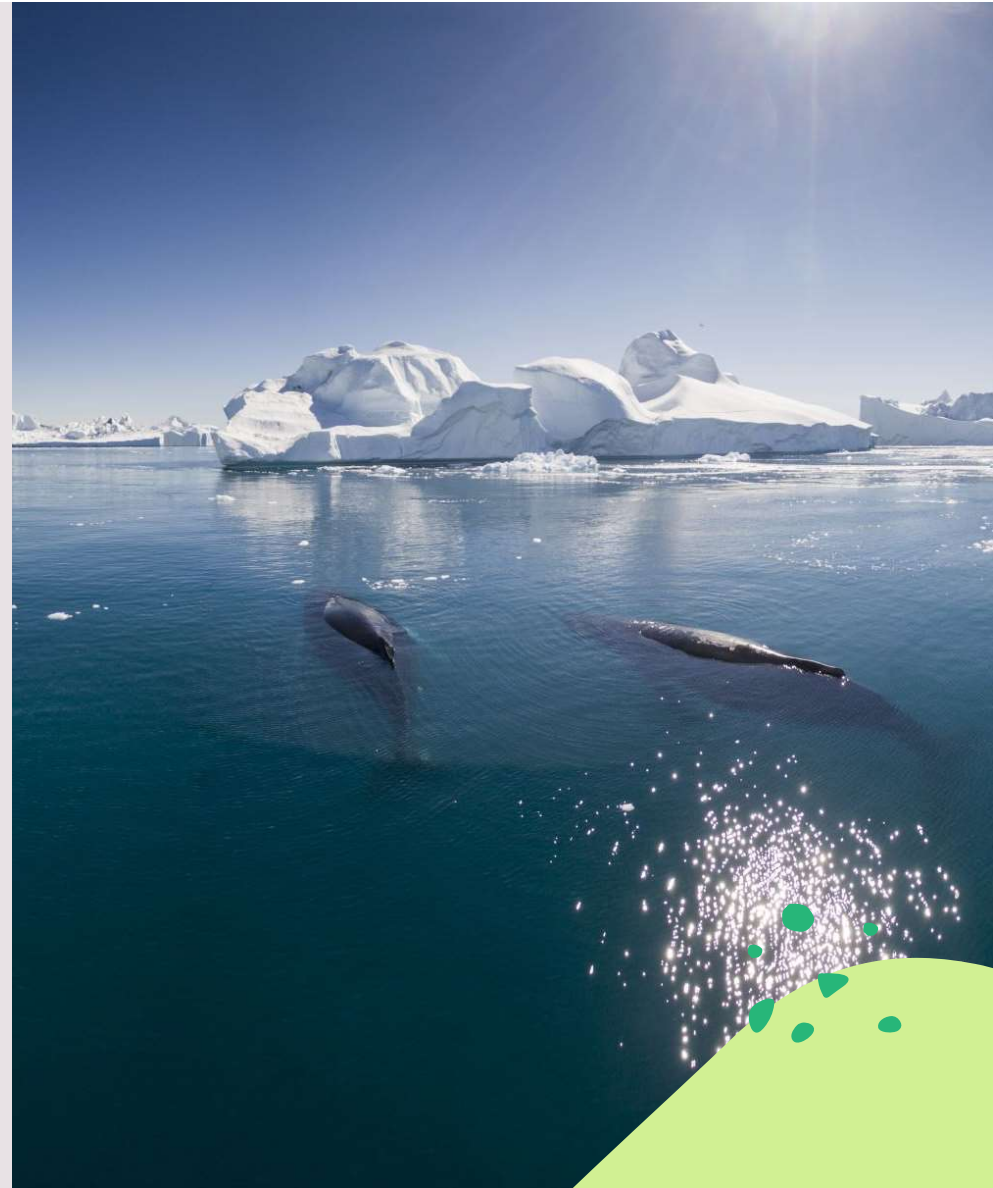
Questions

- 1) Historical Context?
- 2) Why communion not baptism?

Historical Context 1

No question in my mind that the material conditions were behind the change:

- 1) Collapse of the whaling industry
- 2) With this the undermining of the understandings surrounding the Mother of Sea Beasts
- 3) With both of these the undermining of the power of the shamen



Edmund Peck (Uqammaq) opens mission in Cumberland Sound in 1894.

First 3 baptisms in 1902.

Angmalik declares he has met with Sedna and received new instructions on how to live in 1902 - at Kekerten Peck and Bilby go to counter Angmalik's claim and when they return to Blacklead the Inuit there ask to be baptized

Inuk woman, Pudlu, found to have been teaching Christianity to the camps along Davis Strait

Meanwhile in Cumberland Sound

Mission closed in 1908 when whaling station closes but missionaries continue to visit every summer until 1919

Killapik, Tulugarjuaq, and Naullaq left in charge to continue preaching and teaching

Killapik goes to Kimmirut, Lake Harbour, in 1909 to help with the new mission there - later transferred to Southampton Island

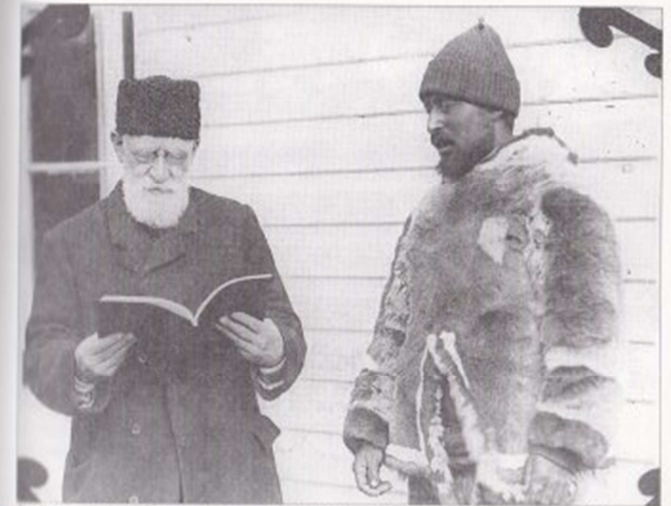
Naullaq never mentioned in the missionary accounts but is remembered by Inuit



Séance de prière à l'extérieur avec le Rév. E.J. Peck, circa 1919 ? (photo de G. E. Mack, Archives photographiques Notman, Musée McCord, MP-0000.597.185).



Le Rév. E.J. Peck et des Inuit de la mission d'Umanarjuaq le 5 septembre 1903 (ACG/GSA A. PA 048034).



Le Rév. E.J. Peck et un Inuk, circa 1919 (photo de G. E. Mack, Archives photographiques Notman, Musée McCord, MP-0000.597.278).

Roman Catholic Missions

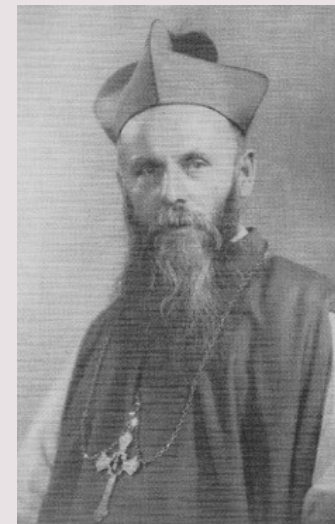
Begin in 1912 at Chesterfield Inlet,
Igluligaarjuk by Arsene Turquetil, o.m.i.

First conversions in 1915 after miracle
of Ste Therese de Lisieux

Spreads northward towards Igloolik
where it meets up with Anglican
missions

Westward to Pelly Bay (Netsilik area)

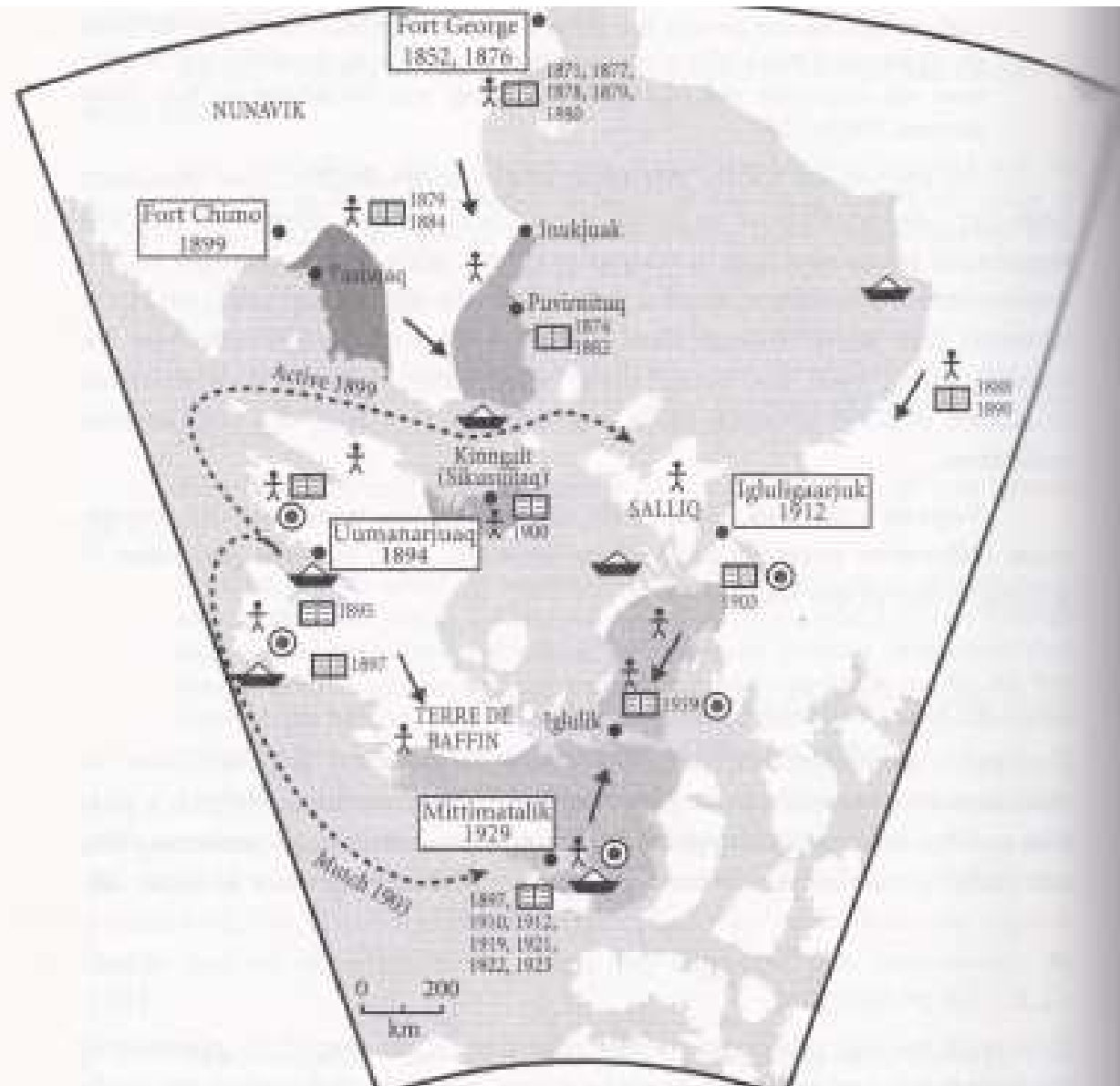
Missionaries in Pond Inlet in 1929 find
they have been outflanked by the
Anglicans and so move south to Igloolik



Spread of Christianity from Cumberland Sound and Igluligaarjuk

Peck sent Gospels and Book of Common Prayer with whalers to distribute at Pond Inlet and Fullerton Harbour in 1903, 1904.

Tuni brings message from RC mission north as evidenced by an ivory crucifix at Igloolik.



“Coming Up Jesusie”

Akumalik moves from Cumberland Sound to Pond Inlet in 1919 and begins teaching his understanding of Christianity

Declares that his daughter is having a “Jesusie baby” since she has never had sex

Asks Captain Munn for the meaning of Trinity

Akumalik’s movement was probably part of the widespread *siqqiqtiq* that was moving up the Baffin Coast and now propelled to Igloolik

Umik (with his son Nuqallaq) brought the movement to Igloolik



Theologies: Confession

Regular part of both Roman Catholic (auricular) and Anglican (communal, public) practice.

After Augustine focused less on deviation from the Law and more on moral failures.

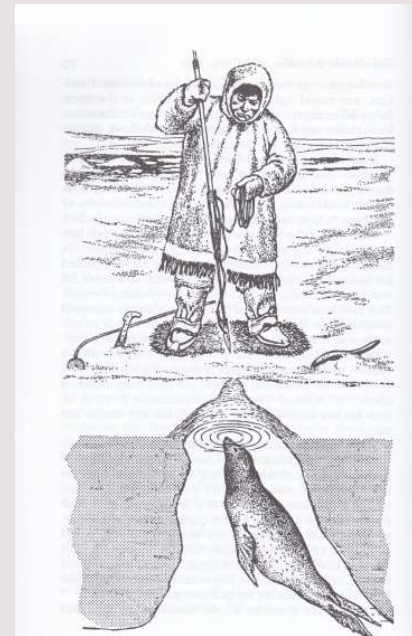
Regular part of shamanic practice. On the advice of their helping spirits shamans would see the various offences and name them. A person would then confess they had done it. The community would then pronounce "tauvva" "enough".

Focused on the breaking of specific taboos.

Theologies: Eucharist - Take

“On the night that he was betrayed,
Jesus took the bread” 1 Cor. 11:23

Bread - the ordinary food of everyday
life (except not for Inuit!). On this
occasion, special unleavened bread.



Theologies: "to be Inuit is to hunt seals"

- Seals (natsiq) are the food of everyday life
- Seals, like all animals, are sentient sociable beings who are aware of their surroundings and of the actions and thoughts of the hunters
- Seals choose to offer themselves, as a self-sacrifice, to the hunters of pure thought and motivation
- Seals came from the mutilated fingers of the "mother of sea beasts" Nuliajuq (Sedna) who continue(d)(s)(?) to control them
- Seal breathing holes can be liminal spaces where hunters encounter spirits



Theologies: Bless

“and when he had given thanks” 1 Cor.
11:24a

Recognizing the gift from God and
asking God to set it aside.

After the seal is brought onto the ice it is given a drink of fresh water. Seals are said to be thirsty. In the same way when a guest arrives they are right away given a drink of fresh water (today tea).

The hunters gather round and, taking care not to spill blood on the ice, cut out the liver and some fat and share it among the hunters. They then close up the seal to take it home.

Theologies: Break

“he broke it [the bread]” 1 Cor. 11:24b

The Fraction: the bread is divided up to be shared among the participants.

Jesus’ body is broken on the cross and through this the Spirit is poured out.



The seal is taken home whole and cut up and distributed by the women.

In cutting the seal, the women release the seal’s spirit so that it can come back as another seal.

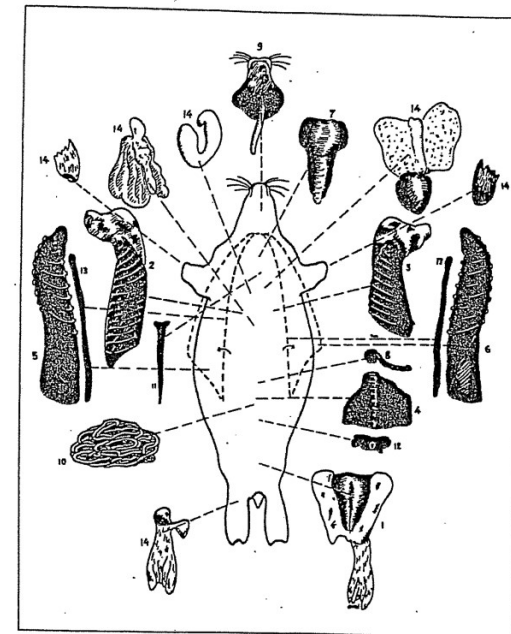
Theologies: Eating/Sharing

“Do this in remembrance of me” 1 Cor.
11:24c

The broken bread is distributed
among the members of the
community with the words, “This is my
body”.

Here is how the shares are cut, beginning with the most important (Figure 2):

1. *Okpat*, the rear portion of the seal, down from the basin that joins the spine. The strokes are transverse. Tail is not included, as it is a part of the skin. Rear flippers are parts of *okpat*, when *nangminerek* are concerned, and are often left on.
 2. *Taomongatok*, all the ribs on the right side and front part of the right side, except the end of the flippers. This piece, second in importance, may be whittled a little for children who want a *sanneraernerk*.
 3. *Aksat'olik*, the place where the upper arm grows. It corresponds to (2), but is on the left side of the seal, except the last five ribs.
 4. *Kuyak*, the last four ribs on the left side, including the end of the spine, but not the last vertebra.
 5. *Sannerak*, the right side of the belly, cut from top to bottom where cartilage joins the bony part of the ribs.
 6. *Sannerak iglua*, the left side of the belly.
 7. *Kongoserk*, neck and upper spinal column.
 8. *Tamuaniark*, a mouthful. Two vertebrae and a rib above *kuyak*.
 9. *Naik'ok*, head.
 10. *Innaluark*, intestines. Often only a part.
 11. *Tunnerdjuk*, breastbone.
 12. *K'amnerk*, the last vertebra near the basin. This is separated from *kuyak*.
 13. *Sanneraernerk*, slices from the flank. Small, long and thin pieces sliced from ganglion down to pieces (2) and (3). These slices are for the children and are hence called *nutark'ab aitjunga*, gift to the children, and also, *nutark'ab aitjuta*, something that makes children go home. No matter what the original meaning, the distribution of *sanneraernerk* has one good result. It eventually provides more room in the igloo already overcrowded with seal and women.
 14. *Netjerta*, the share of the one who has killed the seal. All the viscera of chest and abdominal remnants, stomach, dorsal membrane, and often a part of the intestines. The skin, front flippers and, sometimes, one of the rear flippers are included. When the seal is a *ngak*, large adult male, the skin is often cut on both sides to make two pieces. The back skin is used as leather for boot soles.
- The fat is cut up as follows:
Naark and its *iglua*, belly fat cut in two.
Awat and its *iglua*, two pieces from the flank.
Three *K'ittark*, middle pieces.
Two *K'ittayark*, small pieces of the above.
Orksoetuyark, pieces of fat received as shares.
Irksaenir, fat from the back



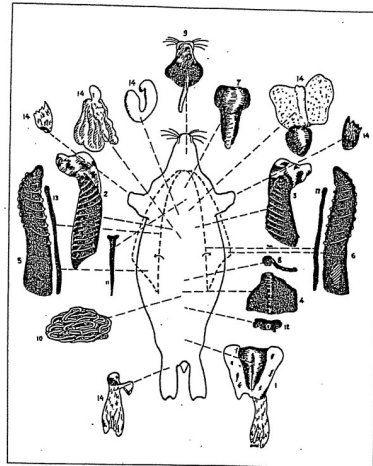
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The fat is cut up as follows:

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- Orkasuyurk*, pieces of fat received as shares.
- Irksanatin*, fat from the back.



- In the same way that the seal offers its body as food to humans, humans must share the food amongst themselves
- Sharing food is an obligation among Inuit - if a person does not have food one must share with them

Theologies: Conclusions

The action of the Eucharist directly parallels the movements around the consumption of seals.

In the same way that the seal offers itself in sacrifice for humans, and through the breaking and distributing of its body the spirit is poured out to create new life; Jesus offers himself in sacrifice for humans, and through the breaking of his body in the bread and on the cross, the spirit is poured out giving humans new life.

This is why the Eucharistic action becomes the central figure in the process of conversion to Christianity.

Why not baptism?

Evidence that Inuit knew about Baptism at the time - especially since it was in the Anglican Prayer Book and some Inuit had already been baptized in Igluligaarjuk and Cumberland Sound.

Among other things, baptism involves the giving of a (new) name. Names (atiit) have a particular valence for Inuit since they come from the "name soul" of the recently dead entering into and forming a child. The child, thus, is the dead ancestor reincarnated. This simply would not work as a ceremony of conversion.

Umik did baptize people later: using fresh water found lying on top of the sea ice.



Thoughts/Questions

- 1) How does the recognition of this reading of the Eucharist force us to rethink our own understanding of the Eucharist, its theologies, and most especially its contextualization?
- 2) How does the Inuit (and wider Indigenous) understanding of the sentience and agency of animals force us to rethink our theologies of ecology and the environment?

Two very important books

