

# Contrary to Nature: Inuit Conceptions of Witchcraft

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The omission of witchcraft from the programme of the history of religions proceeds by tacit agreement. The omission is, of course, a result of theological wishful thinking that refuses to acknowledge the social fact that witchcraft and Satanism are integral, minority components of the Christian religious tradition. In the last century, the prejudice of the pulpit was secularized as an academic dichotomy between religion and magic. If the fallacy of the dichotomy has since been recognized, the underlying ethnocentricity has not been addressed. A distinction is now tacitly made between socially licit and illicit magico-religious practices. Providing only that they are socially licit, magico-religious practices are "holy"; and historians of religions have been astonishingly—in some cases, alarmingly—agile in their discoveries of holiness even in such practices as human sacrifice. By contrast, socially illicit magico-religious practices are passed over in embarrassed silence, as though they were not part of the historical record.

Anthropologists ordinarily define witchcraft from a sociological perspective in terms of socially illicit magico-religious practices. Because functionalism is used to show that witchcraft is socially beneficial despite its illicit status, the anthropological reduction of witchcraft is apologetic in function. Moreover, it neglects the underlying problem. Definitions of witchcraft as socially illicit magico-religious practices presuppose that cultures have criteria for differentiating some magico-religious practices as licit, but others as illicit.

The present contribution to the phenomenology of witchcraft will depend for its data on the traditional conceptions, rites, and folklore of witchcraft among the Inuit (Eskimo) of Canada and Greenland.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the inadequacies of ethnographic literature preclude extension of the discussion to the Alaskan and Asiatic Inuit, beyond acknowledgement of the fact that witchcraft was traditionally practised by them.<sup>2</sup> Again, it is impossible to

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<sup>1</sup> The only previous essay on the topic, Petersen's "The Greenland Tupilak" (Petersen 1964), addressed only part of the topic in part of the area of its distribution.

<sup>2</sup> Nunivak I. (Lantis 1946, 201, 252); Lower Yukon and Kuskokwim (Nelson 1899, 428f.); Little Diomedes I. and Asia (Hawkes 1928, 141 ff.); St. Lawrence I. (Murphy 1974, 65 ff.); Pt. Hope (Rainey 1947, 279); North Alaska (Spencer 1976, 309 ff.).

assess the extent to which the Inuit witchcraft complex consisted of mistaken beliefs that other people practised witchcraft.<sup>3</sup> However, most of the data derives from informants who had either practised witchcraft or been taught how to do so.

A phenomenological definition of witchcraft may be obtained through recognition of its position within Inuit religion. Like many native North Americans, the Inuit epitomized their religion in the concept of balance.<sup>4</sup> The Polar Inuit understood religion to have the function "to keep a right balance between mankind and the rest of the world" (Rasmussen 1929, 62). "We observe our laws in order to keep the world up, in order to keep the earth in balance. For the powers which we do not know must not be offended" (Rasmussen 1938, 68). The Netsilik Inuit expressed themselves similarly: "We are careful about the forces that keep mankind and the earth in balance" (Rasmussen 1931, 500). The idea of balance implies that human endeavour has its counterweight in the mysteria immanent in the world.

Inuit religion may consequently be divided into three main sections. Traditional observances, consisting of both requirements and prohibitions, surrounded the hunt and the disposal of animal remains, human birth, menses, and death. Most of these observances were incumbent on women. Furthermore, there were amulets to ward off malicious ghosts and other spirits, magic songs to accomplish various ends, minor sacrifices in propitiation of various numina, and feasts of different sorts. All of these measures were prophylactic in purpose, since they were designed to maintain the balance of the world. Together with religious experiences and folklore, these measures comprised the religion of Inuit laity.<sup>5</sup>

When sickness, famine, or mishap occurred, the Inuit turned to those among them who knew the remedial measures that had to be taken in order to restore the balance of the world. The *angakut* of the Inuit have been called sorcerers, magicians, conjurers, devil-doctors, witch-doctors, jugglers, charlatans, frauds, humbugs, and other unpleasant names. Kroeber

<sup>3</sup> Carpenter (Carpenter 1953) and Hippler (Hippler 1973) have studied the persistence of the fear of witchcraft among the Aivilik band of Iglulik Inuit, despite the extinction of the practice of witchcraft in post-contact times.

<sup>4</sup> By contrast, Hans Mol (Mol 1982, 126) has recently asserted that "the essence of Eskimo religion from the social-scientific point of view is its dramatization of existence and the ever-present lurking breakdown of wholeness, regardless whether that wholeness pertains to nature, society, and the individual or, more often, to all three at once". I am resistant to the concept of "wholeness" which, so it seems to me, is a romantic notion that is currently fashionable in native North American studies. The Inuit were concerned with maintaining their often precarious place within the ecocycle. Unlike Western scientific ecologists, the Inuit did not entertain fantasies of controlling their environment as a whole.

<sup>5</sup> For general accounts of Inuit religion, see: Weyer 1932, Lantis 1950, Birket-Smith 1959, Hultkrantz 1965, Mol 1982.

first applied the term "shaman" in 1900, and "shaman" became standard for academic purposes after Rasmussen adopted the word in the 1920s. Unfortunately, insensitivity and intolerance have remained typical of most Christian missionaries, and today's increasingly Christian population of Inuit have been made ashamed of their heritage through ignorance that shamanism and witchcraft were two separate syndromes in traditional Inuit conception. The traditional circumstance was otherwise. Shamanism was a socially licit and responsible practice that included the detection and annulment of witchcraft. With the exceptions of the training of novices and rare ecstasies for personal reasons, the whole of the Inuit shamanic complex was concerned with the restoration of the balance of mankind and the numina.<sup>6</sup>

The third great division of Inuit religion was the witchcraft complex. Importantly, a magico-religious practice was illicit because it was witchcraft, and not vice versa. In cases when West Greenlanders were entitled to avenge grievances by killing their enemies, it was socially licit to use material weapons, but illicit to resort to witchcraft (Rink 1974, 53f.). H. Rink suggested that "its secret origin and traditional teaching, and not the immediate intention of it in every single case, constituted the evil of witchcraft" (Rink 1974, 53f.); but a review of Inuit witchcraft practices discloses a deeper source of malignancy.

From western Canada to eastern Greenland, dialectic variants of a single term, *ilisineq*, denotes "witchcraft". West and East Greenlanders also referred to *kusuineq*, a single act of "black magic". For them, only the habitual practice of *kusuineq* constituted *ilisineq*. In all Inuit groups, a witch, *ilisitsoq* (plural, *ilisitsut*), might be either male or female, and might or might not also be a shaman. Like shamanism, witchcraft was taught in secret, and payment was made for the teaching. Unlike shamanism, both the practice of witchcraft and the identities of witches were kept secret. When shamans diagnosed illness, famine, or death as results of witchcraft, they attempted to frustrate the witchcraft, before discovering the witch's identity. Particularly if they were also shamans, known witches might be left unpunished, as social outcasts, because they were feared too greatly to be challenged. Otherwise, known witches might be killed with communal approval.<sup>7</sup> East Greenland represents an exception to this pattern. Virtually every East Greenland adult practised at least some *kusuineq*, and special

<sup>6</sup> On Inuit shamanism, see Merkur 1985.

<sup>7</sup> Netsilik (Rasmussen 1931, 299); Caribou (Rasmussen 1930, 50); Iquluk (Boas 1901, 135; Rasmussen 1929, 143); Polar (Rasmussen 1908, 155; Feldstead 1932, 100); West Greenland (Rink 1974, 41; Birket-Smith 1924, 455f.); East Greenland (Holm 1911, 100ff.; Thalbitzer 1941, 606-612).

shamanic seances were held in which known witches were forced, on pain of death, to confess and thereby to abdicate their powers (Holm 1911, 102).

Several types of witchcraft consisted of deliberate violations of the traditional observances of the religion of Inuit laity. Necromancy involving violations of death and burial taboos, was perhaps the simplest practice. A person might take a belonging of an enemy and use it in order to interfere with a grave, while pronouncing the intended victim's name or speaking a magic formula (Rasmussen 1929, 143; Holm 1911, 101). In other cases, parts of corpses might be taken from a grave and brought into contact with the intended victim or his or her belongings (Balicki 1963, 385; Rink 1974, 50f.; Holm 1911, 101; Thalbitzer 1912, 643; Thalbitzer 1941, 612f.). Implicitly, the ghost would seek revenge in the normal fashion for the violation of its mortal remains, but it was intended to be misdirected from the offending witch to the witch's victim.

Analogous practices depended on violations of the rituals surrounding the hunt. A piece of sealskin might be placed in a person's path, while magic words were spoken (Boas 1907, 517; Thalbitzer 1912, 643). The hairs of a dead dog might be placed in a person's boot-soles and kayak (Thalbitzer 1921, 427). A person might be fed the neck part of a seal while the bones were still in it (Thalbitzer 1941, 615). In all cases, disease would result, implicitly because the animal's ghost would seek vengeance.

Witchcraft practices that were intended to spoil a hunter's luck typically combined necromancy with violated animal ceremonialism. The witch might take part of a hunter's catch, such as a bit of skin, blubber, or meat, and place it in a grave (Birket-Smith 1924, 456; Holm 1911, 101; Rasmussen 1931, 299; Rink 1974, 50f.; Thalbitzer 1941, 613). Alternatively, part of a corpse might be smeared against a hunter's weapons (Holm 1911, 101). In either event, game animals would avoid the hunter because their souls cannot tolerate graves or anything connected with death (Rasmussen 1931, 299).

Another type of witchcraft depended on the closely related practice of amulets. In ordinary circumstances, Inuit animal ceremonialism aims to cause the departure of the slain animal's ghost, lest it turn malicious and seek vengeance. By contrast, an amulet depends on preserving the link between an animal's remains and its ghost, while acquiring the latter as a helping spirit.<sup>8</sup> The amulet ideology is indicated in a tradition from Repulse Bay in the central Canadian Arctic that tells of a man who prepared arrows

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<sup>8</sup> Nunivak (Lantis 1946, 200); North Alaska (Rasmussen 1929); Netsilik (Rasmussen 1931, 269); Iglulik (Boas 1901, 159; Rasmussen 1929, 150); Baffin I. (Boas 1901, 143; Boas 1907, 485); Labrador (Hawkes 1928, 135f.); West Greenland (Rink 1974, 52; Birket-Smith 1924, 447f.).

from caribou-antlers in a special fashion which made the arrows impossible to extract once they were embedded in his enemy's flesh (Boas 1907, 550 f.). Because the use of antlers for arrows did not violate animal ceremonialism, it was only the special preparations that constituted the witchcraft.

The Inuit have an extensive belief in the magical efficacy of words. A *serrat* (plural, *serratit*) is a magical formula of traditional character and is regarded as spiritual property. A parent may teach it to a child. Otherwise a *serrat* must be bought or traded for another. A *serrat* whose function was to cause harm—e.g., to kill, or to cause disease—could be directed against a victim by repeating the latter's name when pronouncing it. In at least many cases, no further activity was necessary in order to perform witchcraft.<sup>9</sup> A variant practice involved the mere thinking of evil against an enemy (Stefansson 1913, 295 f.; Stefansson 1921, 413 f.). Here the thinking of words substituted for the speaking of words. The breath-soul was the effective agency of witchcraft in both events (Merkur 1983).

A further type of witchcraft consisted of stealing a person's soul. The symptoms of soul-loss that were attributed to witchcraft include paralysis, insanity, disease, and death.<sup>10</sup> It is unclear whether witchcraft through soul-theft was a practice reserved for shamans, but there are several references that shamans performed this act by means of their shamanic powers.<sup>11</sup> Presumably, they sent their helping spirits to steal the victims' souls on their behalf.<sup>12</sup>

A remarkable instance of shamanic activity was witnessed by the missionary Petitot. Once, when Petitot had offended a shaman, the shaman went into a trance, angrily waved a stick surmounted by a ball in a ritual, circular motion, and chanted violent commands to his helping spirit. The shaman gradually worked himself up into a frenzy that was intermittently attended by momentary convulsions. To Petitot, he seemed to have assumed the identity of his spirit. When he broke his ceremonial wand, he seized his knife and flourished it before the missionary. By now the other Inuit present had become infected and taken up the shaman's chant. They seized their knives and beat them against their thighs and left palms in

<sup>9</sup> Netsilik (Rasmussen 1931, 291 f.); Caribou (Rasmussen 1930, 50); Iglulik (Rasmussen 1929, 163 f., 200 ff.); Polar (Holtved 1967, 176); West Greenland (Rink 1974, 50).

<sup>10</sup> Lower Yukon (Nelson 1899, 422); North Alaska (Spencer 1976, 310 f.; Mackenzie (Stefansson 1913, 56, 295); Copper (Jenness 1970, 95); Netsilik (Balikci 1970, 233 f.); Iglulik (Boas 1901, 135, 159; Boas 1907, 512).

<sup>11</sup> Netsilik (Rasmussen 1931, 299); Iglulik (Rasmussen 1929, 143 f.); Polar (Rasmussen 1908, 156; Freuchen 1961, 224; Malaurie 1982, 61 f.).

<sup>12</sup> I have found only a single instance of witchcraft through spirit intrusion, and Stefansson (Stefansson 1921, 439 f.) convincingly suggests that the shaman's activity was inspired by Western sailors' notions of magic.

rhythm with the chanting. At last, as the shaman's knife passed only an inch from Petitot's face and the other Inuit were on the verge of attack, the missionary, who, in his own words, had 'remained calm, cold, unmoved, even contemptuous', touched the shaman gently but resolutely and said 'Look, that's enough'. Feigning indifference, Petitot turned to read a book. The shaman's nerve broke. He abruptly stopped chanting, lost control of his helping spirit, and was instead possessed by it for some minutes until his trance ended (Petitot 1981, 63 ff.). This shamanic feat, mesmerizing others into committing murder, is among the types of interpersonal control that the Inuit classify as a form of witchcraft.

Over half of the ethnographic literature on Inuit witchcraft pertains to creatures called *tupilak* (plural, *tupilat*). Deriving from the verb 'to harm', the noun means 'harmful being' (Petersen 1964, 78). It was not necessary to be a shaman in order to fashion a *tupilak*, but esoteric instruction was required. Petersen offered several possible points of contact with other aspects of Inuit religion. Most convincing was his link between the *tupilak* conception and the amulet (Petersen 1964, 88). Something more was also involved, however.

The Inuit of Pt. Hope, on the northern Alaskan coast, used the term *tupitkaq* in reference to ordinary amulets that were worn on the body or on the clothing (Rainey 1947, 272).

The Inuit of the Mackenzie River delta, in western Canada, have a tradition concerning an old couple who fashioned polar bears out of the blood of slain polar bears.<sup>13</sup> The artificial bears functioned as pets, hunting on behalf the couple (Jenness 1926, 42). The conception here is intermediate between an amulet and a *tupilak*.

The Copper Inuit, in the western part of the Northwest Passage, employ the term *tupilek* to refer to a shaman's helping spirit (Jenness 1970, 191).

The Netsilik, in the eastern part of the Northwest Passage, may make a bear out of snow and bring it to life by placing bear's teeth in its mouth. The artificial bear will then cause disease, accidents, or even death to occur to the enemy of its maker. A variant describes the manufacture of a *tupilak* from a bear's skull (Boas 1901, 153; Boas 1907, 517; Rasmussen 1931, 288 ff.; Balikci 1970, 234 f.). Another variant pertains to snow men (Boas 1907, 507). A further Netsilik variant is a partial account of the actual witchcraft practice, rather than its popular conception. Shamans might make a doll out of lamp-moss or a snow-beater. The doll was placed inside a bag. A magic formula was pronounced. The bag was struck, and something

<sup>13</sup> The myth may intend bears made of snow; the Greenlanders considered snow to be "the blood of the dead" (Petersen 1964, 84).

inside it would move about 'just like a dog'. Struck twice more, the bag disappeared and the doll ran off. It had a human or a canine head, and sometimes the legs of a caribou (Birket-Smith 1945, 138). A further account asserts that a tupilak is an evil spirit, round in shape and filled with blood, that can cause sickness (Balikci 1970, 226). The description presumably reflects laity's view of seances in which a shaman will destroy a tupilak that only he can see and later display its blood on his knife and clothes. The shaman's own understanding is probably indicated in a further variant. Shamans engaged in witchcraft could use very small human souls, about 5 centimetres in height, to cause misfortune and death. They gave instructions to the souls and sent them to enter their victims' bodies (Balikci 1970, 198).

According to the missionary Turquetil, the Caribou Inuit, who dwell inland west of Hudson Bay, made a tupilak with the head of a bear, the body of a wolf, the wings of birds, the tail of a fish, etc. Life was given to the artificial monster, which was then sent after a victim (Turquetil 1929, 64). Rasmussen noted, however, that the conception was less significant among bands dwelling further inland. Tupilat were there rumoured but neither fashioned nor seen. According to rumour, a tupilak could change size, from that of a fox to that of a caribou, and vice versa. It breathed fire that caused people who saw it to become blind. It would attempt to attack a village, but a shaman's helping spirits would chase, kill, and eat it. The only shaman who claimed to have seen one described it as having a human head with a dog's snout, a hairy body, and the legs of a fox (Rasmussen 1930, 60).

Late nineteenth century data on the Iglulik, on the western shores of Hudson Bay, indicate variant conceptions of the tupilak. It might resemble a bear. It might instead resemble a walrus with human head hair. Amulets were used by laity to drive a tupilak away, but a shaman might send his helping spirits to kill it. The tupilak's blood became visible at the end of the invisible combat (Boas 1901, 153; Boas 1907, 506 ff.). Further information concerns snow men that laymen both built and cut to pieces with knives after shamanic seances. The term *tupilak* pertained to the spirits of the snow men (Boas 1907, 512). In the 1920s, Rasmussen found that the practice was obsolete. The term *tupilak* had come to denote an evil spirit. However, witchcraft conceptions had apparently influenced the conception of evil spirits. A tupilak could not come into existence on its own, but it could instead be created by a shaman. A tupilak could cause game to vanish in the district, and anyone other than a shaman who saw one would die. However, a shaman in seance might engage in a battle with a tupilak that only he could see. He used a snow knife made from walrus tusk, and always

attacked by holding the knife in his left hand. After the battle had ended in victory, the shaman displayed his hands, which were covered with the tupilak's blood (Boas 1907, 508; Rasmussen 1929, 143 f.).

The witchcraft practice had disappeared still earlier on Baffin Island, where Boas found that the term *tupilak* was applied to a human ghost under certain conditions. Should the death taboos be violated, a ghost could not go to an afterlife realm and consequently turned malevolent, seeking vengeance against those whose taboo violations condemned it to wander the earth. Such a ghost was called a tupilak and caused heavy snowfalls, misfortune, sickness, and death. When a tupilak was discovered, all the local shamans held a common seance in which they stabbed the tupilak with their knives. Their purpose was to cut away the impurities that had attached to the ghost through the taboo violations. The shamans thus released the ghost to proceed to the afterlife realms. Their knives, which were covered with blood, were shown to the laity in witness of the combat (Boas 1901, 131). The Baffin Islanders simultaneously conceived of this same type of tupilak as a human ghost that had violated taboos during its mortal life and was now undergoing purgatory in the Sea Mother's house on the sea bottom, prior to its entrance into the paradisaal netherworld (Boas 1974, 590). The idea of purgatory was, of course, the result of syncretism with Christianity.

In the conception of the Polar Inuit, in northwestern Greenland, a witch made a tupilak out of the bones of various animals, which were covered with turf and clots of blood and brought to life by means of a magic song. A tupilak would attack the witch's enemy while the latter was at sea, either by capsizing his kayak or by allowing itself to be harpooned and killed. A person who killed a tupilak would lose his strength and become a cripple. A famous case late in the nineteenth century involved Tateraq, who harpooned a seal only to discover that it had human chest bones and other bones from various animals. Tateraq soon fell ill and later became paralyzed. His father, the shaman Sorqaq, lost considerable public esteem, and the manufacture of the tupilak was popularly ascribed to Sorqaq's rival, the great shaman Kritlaq, who had led the immigration of Baffin Islanders in 1856–59 (Rasmussen 1908, 155 f.; Freuchen 1961, 224 f.). By the 1960s, the witchcraft practice was extinct (Holtved 1967, 176). However, the legend of Tateraq lived on as the belief that a witch who was not killed in the proper ceremonial manner would be reborn as an animal that resembled a seal-walrus that had been made by a witch. A hunter capturing such an animal would become sick and later be paralyzed (Maurie 1982, 61 f.). Apparently, the Polar Inuit employed the tupilak conception to explain freak, malformed animals that hunters occasionally killed.



In the late eighteenth century, Niels Egede recorded that some West Greenlanders had seen:

an Angekok (shaman) sitting at the beach, and he had a half sleeve, which he packed with hair, nails, grass and moss, and he furthermore mumbled over it, and when he had gone away, they went there and saw that the half sleeve began to crawl, and when they had run away, out of fright, the Angekok came at once saying: go forth and become a Tupilek i.e. a ghost! and it immediately jumped into the water; this they thought he sent out, when he wanted to take the life of someone (Birket-Smith 1924, 456).

In this instance, the shaman employed sleight-of-hand to demonstrate his power over a tupilak. The laity regarded the tupilak as an animated, material being, but the shaman considered it to be a spirit.

In the late nineteenth century, the West Greenlanders maintained that witches might make bears and reindeers that they sent to destroy enemies. However, the term *tupilak* was reserved for the more common conception of an artificial creature, serving the same function, that was made from various animals' parts. A tupilak could assume the shape of any of its components (Rink 1974, 53f.; Rink 1905, 285f.). In addition to the animal bones and skins, a piece of the clothing of the intended victim, or a piece of game that had been caught by the intended victim, was incorporated into the tupilak. The tupilak was brought to life by means of a magic spell. It was then given nourishment. The witch seated himself on a rock on the sea shore, concealed his face, and then dangles the tupilek between his legs. This makes it grow, and when it has attained its proper size it glides away into the water and disappears (Nansen 1893, 285). It subsequently attacked its intended victim at sea.

Petersen noted some early traditions tending to suggest that a tupilak would head northward to an afterlife region in the polar wastes, once its commission had been completed (Petersen 1964, 84). Like the Polar Inuit, the West Greenlanders would conceptualize a freak, malformed sea animal, not as an abnormal, natural creature, but as a tupilak (Petersen 1964, 91–100).

The East Greenlanders alone among Inuit groups were more devoted to witchcraft than to shamanism. Every adult practised at least some *kusineq*, and witches were more numerous than shamans. Most shamans were witches as well. Due to their richness, the ethnographic data on the East Greenland tupilak can be treated here only summarily. As elsewhere, a tupilak might be made from the bones of a single animal or, more commonly from the remains of several animals of different species. A complete skeleton had to be reconstructed. Turf, moss, or seaweed leaves might be used for flesh; an old bed skin, a kayak sleeve, or an old mitten for skin. A

bit of clothing or part of the catch of the intended victim was incorporated in order to direct the tupilak. Once the materials were collected, they were assembled in the vicinity of water, by using only the thumb and the little finger of the right hand. The joints were put together by blowing (a technique also used in shamanic healing). Once the complete tupilak was assembled, a series of magic songs was sung in order to animate it. It would waken to life in a weak and hungry condition. As a result, it would gain strength by suckling on the sexual organ of the witch, male or female. The witch would then tell it the name of its victim, and it would go on its way. It could assume the shape of any of its constituent animals, but it was always very thin and lacking in blubber. It would have no further food until it killed, after which it would feast on its victim's entrails (Holm 1911, 100, 102f.; Thalbitzer 1912, 642ff.; Thalbitzer 1921, 485ff.; Rasmussen 1938, 160ff., 164, 170f.; Petersen 1964, 74f., 81).

A tupilak might attack its victim in any of several ways. Most frequently, it assumed the shape of a sea animal and allowed itself to be harpooned. Because the bladder at the end of the harpoon line would magically adhere to the kayak, the tupilak would drag the kayak and its man down into the sea when it dived. The kayaker's corpse would later be found to have blood in the corner of its eyes, due to the kayaker's terror at the sight of the monstrous creature. Under other conditions, a tupilak was invisible. Only a shaman could see it. Moreover, he could see a link, invisible to laity, that stretched from the tupilak to the witch who had made it, as though it were a line or cord. A layman who saw a tupilak would immediately die of fright. Once a tupilak had done its harm, it ceased to exist (Rasmussen 1938, 159, 165, 170).

A tupilak could be killed only rarely, and only by a shaman. During the seance, the laity could see the shaman attempt to harpoon the tupilak in mid-air. The harpoon would shatter into fragments on impact, but reappear whole immediately that the shaman touched it once more. The harpoon had bits of the tupilak's feathers and flesh on it. However, in the end only a shaman's helping spirits could kill a tupilak. The spirits of falcons and hawks were favoured for the task, and they positively enjoyed eating the creatures (Holm 1911, 100f., Thalbitzer 1921, 487ff., Rasmussen 1938, 128f., 160, 164f., 167f.).

If a prospective victim had sufficiently powerful amulets or magic formulae, a tupilak might be afraid to attack him or her. As a result, the tupilak eventually became so hungry that it would turn against its maker and kill him instead. Failing to kill, a tupilak might drive its maker insane (Rasmussen 1938, 165, 169f.). The manufacture of a tupilak was done in secret, but it was often an open secret (Petersen 1964, 76). A person slowly succumb-

ing to an increasingly severe illness was thought to be under the attack of an invisible tupilak. If a shaman disliked the person, he or she might diagnose the patient as a witch who had made a tupilak that had turned against its maker. In such a case, the patient would be plagued by his or her neighbours until he or she confessed real or imaginary acts of witchcraft during a seance held for the purpose. With each confession, the power of witchcraft was lost. Consequently, each confession deprived the tupilak of power, and the person healed (Holm 1911, 102; Rasmussen 1938, 128; Petersen 1964, 76).

Noting the discrepancy between the visible, physical forms that a tupilak may assume and its otherwise invisible, metaphysical character, Petersen postulated that the conception has undergone historical development (Petersen 1964, 73 f., 86 ff.). In my own view, Petersen has been misled by the esotericism of the topic. Several East Greenland informants have provided first person accounts of the manufacture of tupilak (Thalbitzer 1912, 642 ff.; Thalbitzer 1921, 485 ff., Thalbitzer 1941, 613 ff.; Rasmussen 1938, 163 f.). Evidently, the manufacture of a tupilak was an important rite. Indeed, one shaman used to put tupilak in the water torrents that came down the mountains during the springtime melting of snow in order to provide them with mobility (Holm 1911, 101). When compared with the ideology surrounding the manufacture of amulets, the meaning of the rite becomes implicit. A tupilak binds together, as a single being, the spirits of a variety of different animals that would otherwise not cooperate with each other. I suggest that the physical binding of the bodily parts is a ritual precondition for the metaphysical binding of the spirits. The further aspects of the tupilak conception are consistent with violations of animal ceremonialism. The animals' ghosts seek vengeance and are misdirected by the witch against the intended victim.

As we have seen, all Inuit witchcraft practices depended on conceptions belonging to the religion of Inuit laity and/or the shamanic complex. Whether through omissions or commissions, neglect of traditional religious observances was within the normal course of expectable events. However, the interior logic of Inuit religion also accommodated deliberate practices that similarly disrupted the balance of the world in order to achieve goals that could only be attained in that manner. These deliberately disruptive practices, which comprised the third great division within Inuit religion, were the phenomena of witchcraft.

In most cases, an act of witchcraft depended on a deliberate violation of a traditional observance. Because the witch used a bit of clothing or part of the catch of the intended victim, the ghost that would avenge the breach of taboo was misdirected from the actual violator toward an innocent victim.

Once misdirection is understood to be the intent of acts which, since Frazer, have been misunderstood to depend on a 'principle of contagion', several further matters fall into place. Witchcraft recoiled against the witch whenever it was frustrated in its aims, because the frustration of witchcraft involved the identification of the witch. The secrecy of witchcraft—and the maker of a tupilak concealed his face once the creature was animated—concealed the witch's identity from the avenging ghost as well as from the community. When a shaman or anyone else discovered the identity of the witch and alerted the spirit, the ghost was re-directed against the actual taboo violator. For this same reason, the confession of witchcraft appeased the ghost, as did the confession of any unintentional breach of taboo.

Two witchcraft practices cannot be fitted into this pattern: malicious uses of magic formulae, and malicious uses by shamans of their helping spirits. Because helping spirits were commanded by means of magic formulae and magic songs, the practices shared a common basis in the breath-soul that pronounced the words. Importantly, we need not rely on reconstructions of implicit ideology on this topic.

The term *sila* refers to the air or atmosphere, the collective breath-soul in which all human breath-souls participate. *Sila* is also the numinous source of song and the knowledge of traditional observances. One of the most powerful of Inuit deities, *Sila* commands the winds and the storms. Always conceived as a personification of the idea of the atmosphere, *Sila* is conceived still more generously by Alaskan and Greenland Inuit groups. As the personification of the idea of the physical cosmos, *Sila* is the order or structure informing the cosmos (Merkur 1983).

The natural course of events proceeds, in an Inuit phrase, *sila maligdlugo*, 'according to *Sila*'. It is according to *Sila*, 'nature' or 'the world order', that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, that people are born as infants, grow to maturity and die of old age, etc. Participating in the natural order is a ritual gesture. Because the sun, when seen from the Arctic, moves across the southern sky from left to right, a clockwise motion of the left hand, as when thrusting a knife, is, for ritual purposes, *sila maligdlugo*, "according to nature" (Petersen 1966–67, 262). Ritual motions 'in the direction of the sun' are typical of shamanic practices. For example, an Iglulik shaman who attacks a tupilak with a walrus knife must hold the knife in his left hand, never in his right (Rasmussen 1929, 144).

The contrary, counterclockwise motion, made with the right hand, is *sila agssordlugo*, "contrary to nature", and Petersen notes that the ritual motion occurs in a tale of witchcraft (Petersen 1966–67, 262). Further

instances may be adduced. Petitot asserted that, when the Inuit mesmerized by the shaman were preparing to attack, they "beat their thighs or the palm of the left hand" with their knives (Petitot 1981, 64). In other words, they held their knives in their right hands, preparatory to an attack "contrary to nature". In West Greenland, a person who finds a round hole in his clothes, because a witch has cut a piece to use against him or her, must cut off the piece around the hole, wave it in "the direction against the sun" and throw it away. The witchcraft will then recoil against the witch (Birket-Smith 1924, 456). This reversal of witchcraft presumably depended on bringing the evidence of witchcraft to the attention of the offended spirit; the counterclockwise motion indicated that witchcraft had been done with the missing bit of clothing. Again, in East Greenland, a tupilak is made with the thumb and little finger of the right hand. The left hand is not employed at all (Thalbitzer 1921, 485). Petersen suggests that "the direction of the ritual appears to be decisive for [differentiating] black and white magic" (Petersen 1966-67, 262).

Because counterclockwise ritual motions were specific to witchcraft, the expression "contrary to nature" may be understood to epitomize the Inuit's own appreciation of witchcraft. Whether witchcraft depended on deliberate violations of traditional observances, on malicious uses of magic formulae and songs, and/or on ritual motions, witchcraft proceeded "contrary to nature". Without exception, the rites of Inuit witchcraft were rites of Inuit religion that were made unnatural, or contrary to Sila, through the alteration of one or more features. For this reason, I propose to define witchcraft as special practices, together with the beliefs and folklore surrounding them, that are believed to be innately disruptive of the balance between mankind and the numina.

Because it is contrary to nature, witchcraft is innately anti-social. The disruption of the balance of mankind with the numina is not the private act of the witch against a victim, but a danger for the entire community. It matters not at all that witchcraft may be employed in order to further otherwise licit goals. The purpose of witchcraft can be socially licit; the methods of witchcraft are anti-social. Witchcraft is a contravention of the magico-religious order, an abuse of the metaphysical powers conceived by religion. It is religion used to evil purpose. Neither sacred nor secular, it is distinctly unholy.

### Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a travel grant to attend the Donner Institute symposium.

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