# NOTE TO USERS

# Towards an Understanding of Tradition in Cree Women's Narratives, Waskaganish, James Bay.

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June 2004

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts.

*Your file Votre référence*
*ISBN: 0-494-06508-7*
*Our file Notre référence*
*ISBN: 0-494-06508-7*

**Abstract**

This thesis examines the ways in which Cree women of Waskaganish, James Bay use and understand the concept of tradition in narratives about their lives and changes in their community. The fieldnotes of anthropologist Regina Flannery, completed in the 1930's, serve to orient this research, and provide a starting point for discussion.

As northern communities continue to adapt in the face of social and economic changes, cultural categories such as tradition have concurrently undergone re-evaluation. It is argued here that the meanings of tradition have become more complex as Cree women adjust to their changing environment.

It is demonstrated that tradition is used as a narrative tool in descriptions of the past, and a means by which women can discuss change and the future of their community. In addition, tradition currently occupies a significant symbolic space in women's individual cultural identities, and is incorporated in daily life in various ways. Furthermore, tradition has also become an important component of Cree political discourse. Finally, it is apparent that tradition remains a contested category among women themselves, and dissent exists as to the future transmission of traditional practices, language and values.

From this analysis, tradition emerges as a nuanced term that has a number of conceptual modalities. It is suggested that a more comprehensive grasp of complex concepts such as tradition is made possible through the prioritization of personal narratives, and the exploration of the ways in which individuals utilize, comprehend and expand on cultural categories.

**Résumé**

Cette thèse examine comment les femmes Cris de Waskaganish (Baie James) utilisent et comprennent le concept de la tradition dans les récits de leur vie et des changements de leur communauté. Les notes de terrain de l'anthropologue Regina Flannery, complétées dans les années 30, servent à orienter cette recherche et donner l'impulsion de départ pour la discussion de cette thèse.

Alors que les communautés nordiques continuent de s'adapter aux changements sociaux et économiques, les catégories culturelles comme celle de la tradition sont parallèlement réévaluées. Nous argumentons ici que la signification de la tradition se complexifie avec l'adaptation des femmes Cris à leur environnement.

Nous démontrons que la tradition est utilisée comme outil narratif dans les descriptions du passé, et comme moyen par lequel les femmes peuvent discuter du changement et du futur dans leur communauté. Par ailleurs, la tradition occupe un espace symbolique significatif dans l'identité culturelle individuelle des femmes et s'incarne dans leur quotidien de diverses manières. De plus, la tradition prend une place considérable dans les discours politiques. Enfin, la tradition demeure une catégorie contestée pour les femmes elles-mêmes en ce qui concerne les questions de la transmission future des pratiques, de la langue et des valeurs traditionnelles.

La tradition émerge de cette analyse comme un terme aux significations nuancées, déployant plusieurs modalités conceptuelles. Nos résultats suggèrent qu'une analyse approfondie d'un concept aussi complexe que la tradition est facilitée par la considération première des récits personnels, ainsi que l'exploration de l'utilisation, la compréhension et l'élargissement des catégories culturelles par les individus.

## Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for the support provided by a number of individuals and institutions that have made this research endeavour possible.

I would like to thank all the residents of Waskaganish who shared their time and thoughts with me. I would also like to extend specific thanks to the Waskaganish Band Council for allowing this research, to Jim Chism of the Cultural Institute, as well as to the Murdoch family for their generous hospitality.

I thank Regina Flannery for the use of her inspiring fieldnotes. I am honoured to have met with her in person, and have the unique opportunity of discussing her life's work.

At McGill, I am especially appreciative of the guidance of my supervisor, Toby Morantz, who has seen me through every step of this process with dedication, sensitivity and enthusiasm. I am equally grateful to my thesis committee, Carmen Lambert and Colin Scott, for their careful feedback on ideas and drafts.

I owe tremendous thanks to the all the 2002-2004 members and directors of the Centre for Society, Technology and Development (STANDD) for their support both financially and personally.

Finally, I extend my sincere thanks to the strong support network of family and friends in Montreal and around the world who have helped me along the way. Specifically, I must thank Heather and Graham for their faithful listening ears and consistent support. Also, I thank Dave for his reading of drafts, his humour and his company.
A particularly special thanks goes to my wonderful parents, brothers, sister and grandfather for their unfaltering encouragement and love.

Financial assistance for this project was provided by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Northern Scientific Training Program (NSTP), and the McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women, Margaret Gillette Graduate Research Award.

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# Chapter One
# Introduction

## Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of how Cree women of Waskaganish use and understand the concept of tradition in narratives about their lives and change in their community. In addition, it examines how the meanings of tradition have become more complex as Cree women continue to adapt to their changing environment. It is argued here that tradition is now understood to have a number of conceptual modalities, and remains an important part of women's lives today, both as a narrative tool used in descriptions of the past and culture change, as well as a symbolic concept used in the representation of their identity.

The primary data for this research was collected in the community of Waskaganish, James Bay, located in Northern Quebec, Canada, and thus, the findings contribute to a larger body of research concerning the eastern James Bay region in general, and Cree women specifically. During my time in the community, I conducted informal interviews with women, the aim of which was to gather general information about how they talk about their lives and the changes they have experienced in their lifetimes.

As an entry point to this research endeavour, I utilized the notes of Regina Flannery, an anthropologist working in the James Bay area in the 1930's. These are rich with details of Cree material culture, skills, stories and general knowledge at that time, and are notable for being female-centered. My intention had been to bring these notes back to the community of Waskaganish and talk to the descendants of the original women interviewed in an effort to demonstrate how their lives had changed.

It has already been established that the lives of Cree women are materially different from those of their mothers and grandmothers. They have been subjected to many forces of external change. Their successful adaptation to this change and their ability to maintain a continuity and strength of Cree values in the face of this disruption has been well documented. What is interesting to examine, therefore, are the particularities and themes that arise when speaking to women about this change. How do they represent change in their lives? What narrative and symbolic tools do they use?

What substantive and conceptual themes are recurrent, and why are these important to them?

This focus stems primarily from contemporary works highlighting the importance of narrative and oral history as a means of understanding the ways in which individuals conceptualize their lived lives (Cruikshank 1990, Preston 2002[1975]). By speaking about their experiences, individuals reveal those cultural categories significant to them. It was discovered that over the course of sharing Flannery's notes with descendants, and the subsequent conversations about women's own lives and experiences, there was a recurrent use of the term tradition while contradictions arose as to the definitions, manifestations and future of this term. Therefore, as a point of departure, I will be isolating and examining the concept of tradition and exploring the ways in which tradition is understood by the women with whom I spoke: its symbolic weight, how it is used in their narratives of change, and how it is linked to aspects of daily life. What emerges from this analysis is the complexity of meanings and the multiple uses of tradition for Cree women today, and the necessity for a re-examination of this concept and its utility at the local community level.

This thesis will demonstrate that, though its meaning to individuals has multiplied, proliferated and become more complex as a result of lifestyle changes and an inability to live a strictly traditional life spent in the bush, tradition has emerged as an important conceptual tool for women to use in representing themselves as Cree as well as a narrative means by which women can discuss change and the future of their community.

When asked about the lives of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers, tradition was used as a way in which women could speak about 'the old days'; a time when life was spent in the bush, women worked hard, and life was free from the influence of outsiders. Tradition, in the context of their memories and the past, emerged as a representation of a distinct way of life that no longer exists. In addition, women used tradition as a marker against which to measure how life has changed both in terms of material circumstances in the bush and the settlement, and in terms of cultural values. It is argued here that memory is never neutral and recollections of the past are shaped by present historical and social context. Following Seller (2003), it is stated that these memories can be used as a form of 'critical nostalgia' to comment on the present.

Further, it is evident from this research that Cree women are undergoing a process of renegotiation of the significance and relevance of tradition in their lives in the face of change. Though living a traditional life spent in the bush is often no longer a feasible option for middle and younger generational women, they continue to reference the bush and the pursuit of traditional activities as significant elements of their personal well-being and, indeed, to their cultural identity as Cree. Women also emphasize the importance of passing on tradition to their children, in the form of skills and values. There exists, however, some discrepancy as to the future transmission of tradition. Specifically, many elder women display concern as to the shift from a traditional learning environment to a more formalized one, as well as what they perceive as the younger generation's lack of interest in traditional activities, including going to the bush, learning traditional skills and speaking Cree. In addition, many of these women see any interest in traditional activities that is promoted through schooling as largely devoid of those values that formerly characterized these activities. In contrast, many middle generation women are positive that the younger generation is regaining those traditional values and skills that numerous women believe they lost through the residential school experience and the transition period of the mid-late 1900's.

In light of past and recent political developments between the Cree and the province of Quebec, tradition has also taken on a political significance, and has become a highly charged discursive mechanism for defending Cree rights to land and resources, and as part of Cree ideological production. Though I do not suggest here that those women I spoke to had specific political goals in mind during our talks, I will explore the ways in which this politicization at the national level may have affected our interaction at the local level, and I will examine the concept of resistance as related to tradition. Here, I will investigate the concept of tradition as a discourse produced out of relations with the dominant society, and will look at the relation between narrative and discourse. It is evident that in particular contexts, women's narrations of the self, as constituting discursive practices, are subject to the influence of overarching economic, political and social systems.

Within much of the existing historical literature of Native people in Canada, there has been little problematization of the concept of tradition. It is taken most often in its commonsense definition and positivist sense to be a core of cultural traits that has been

handed down from generations, and is negatively affected by change (Kroeber 1948, Shils 1981). More recently however, the concept of tradition has been reexamined, and conceptualized as a more fluid and adaptable notion that can be selectively harnessed to serve particular goals (Handler and Linnekin 1984, Alfred 1995). In this analysis, I will be discussing both the positivist and social constructivist formulations of tradition and arguing that neither extreme is sufficient for a complete understanding of how Cree women use and understand the term. Rather, I will be drawing on both formulations as well as Preston (1999, 1999a) and J. Scott's (1985) theories in an effort to provide a discussion of how Cree women use and understand the concept of tradition. For my analysis, therefore, tradition must be understood as a concept that has a number of conceptual modalities; it can be adaptable, yet maintain fidelity to a distinct Cree heritage and culture, and thereby embodies both continuity and change.

Waskaganish: Historical Review

Waskaganish, located south of James Bay, on the shores of Rupert Bay, is one of the nine communities that make up the Cree Nation (*Eeyou Istchee*) in Quebec. Initially known as Charles Fort, later Rupert's House, and now by its Cree name meaning 'little house', Waskaganish has the historical legacy of being the location of the first Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) trading post established in 1670 (Preston 1989:313). However, this site and its surrounding areas were known first and primarily to the Cree as a seasonal gathering place, where families met in the summer months to catch up, relax and fish in the local Rupert River, after a winter of separation spent in the bush. At the time of European contact, the Cree economy was subsistence based, with hunting, trapping, and fishing being the primary subsistence activities.

Historical analysis of this early contact period, from approximately 1670 to 1870, has demonstrated that, generally speaking, the Cree were active participants in the fur trade, and exchanges were mutually beneficial for both parties (Morantz 2002:18). It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that the Cree began to face major challenges to their autonomy and survival as a hunting people. With the increase of outsiders into the region came the outbreak of epidemic diseases that swept through the James Bay area in the late 1800's. Added to this devastation was the onset of a period of starvation that has been called "the singularly most important event for the Crees in this

period" (Morantz 2002:109) because of its drastic, demoralizing effects. In the 1920's, Waskaganish experienced a serious dwindling of beaver stocks.[1] In an attempt to curtail this period of suffering for the Cree, a beaver preserve was started in 1938 on the Pontax River in surrounding Waskaganish territory by HBC manager James Watt (Morantz 2002:165). This beaver management scheme was endorsed by the Crees, and spread to other areas in the James Bay region as a means of excluding white trappers, but mostly permitting the conservation of the beaver population (Marshall et al. 1989:19). By 1940, the beaver stocks had rebounded to a level where the government-regulated preserves could then be opened, and quotas assigned to hunters (ibid). However, during this time of suffering, hunters and their families had become more dependant on government relief payments to continue to hunt and acquire the now necessary imported tools and food staples such as flour. Concurrently, social assistance rose over the years and federal and provincial government control of community life increased. Indian Affairs' policies of the 1950's were simultaneously characterized by attempted assimilation in the form of imposed schooling, and the promotion of hunting and self-sufficiency through the limited hiring of Cree in the industrial sector (Morantz 2002:207). The effect of such contradictory and confused policy-making was consistently to the detriment of the Cree people, and resulted in the undermining of the Cree way of life and cultural institutions.

In sum, during the early years of contact, subsistence harvesting of animals remained the primary economic activity and remained central to the Cree lifestyle. However, as seen above, the twentieth century and the establishment of social policies, such as schooling and healthcare, substantially altered the Cree way of life. In the 1940's, well over ninety percent of Crees lived in the bush for most of the year (La Rusic 1970:130). By the 1970's, only half of the Cree population obtained their primary income from bush living. The sedentary half of the population came to rely on wage labour and/or federal aid programs for income (ibid).[2] The locus of 'home' gradually changed from the bush to village settlement (Preston 1986:245). The population no longer lives in

[1]The coastal James Bay communities such as Waskaganish were the most affected by this dearth of animal resources; inland communities, such as Mistasini, fared better at this time (Morantz 2002:51)

[2] It must be kept in mind that LaRusic's figures are based on data taken from the whole of the James Bay Cree area, including the more southern communities which were closer to the industrial sector and were more heavily involved in forestry and mining. Fewer people from Waskaganish were involved in wage labour than in LaRusic's main study area – Waswanipi.

scattered hunting groups, but is now largely concentrated in permanent communities from which hunters make trips to the bush for subsistence food harvesting and for fur trapping.

In 1975, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) was signed between Quebec and the Cree, marking the end of a two year long court case in which the Cree fought for the land rights to their traditional hunting territories. The JBNQA instituted Cree–run local and regional governments and an Income Security Program (ISP) in an attempt to guarantee that hunting and trapping remained a financially viable way of life. To be eligible for this guaranteed income, the participants must spend a minimum of 120 days in the bush pursuing hunting activities (Niezen 1993:515). It has been well argued that this program has strengthened a regional sense of community for the Cree and has aided in promoting and maintaining essential cultural values attached to bush living (Feit 1982, Scott 1982, Salisbury 1986). In addition, legal action against Hydro-Quebec brought the Cree together as a unified Native nation, one which is among the strongest politically in North America. Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, the Cree continued their opposition to Hydro-Quebec and their negotiations with the provincial government in efforts to retain economic viability, political autonomy and cultural distinctiveness. In February 2001, the Cree and Quebec signed the 'Paix des Braves', a 3.6 billion dollar deal which promises a 'new nation-to-nation relationship' between the two parties, as well as increased management by the Cree of their own economic and community development. The agreement also allows Hydro-Quebec to build its 1,280-megawatt hydroelectric projects on the Eastmain and Rupert Rivers, part of the controversial James Bay power development plan (www.gcc.ca).

Research setting

The portion of Waskaganish territory designated as Category 1 land[3] is comprised of 784.76 square kilometres, with the surface area of the territory and the rights attached to it defined by the JBNQA (Waskaganish Band Council 2003). Local administration is

[3] Under the JBNQA, Northern Quebec was divided into three different territorial zones. Category I land refers to land surrounding villages and towns that is reserved for the exclusive use and benefit of the Cree, Inuit or Naskapi. Category II lands refer to public lands with hunting, fishing and trapping rights exclusive to Native people, and Category III lands refer to public lands with rights to Native people for hunting, fishing and trapping without a permit and at all times subject to the conservation principle (www.menv.gouv.qc.ca). Therefore, although Waskaganish is officially classified as Category I land, residents recognize and make use of a larger territorial area.

controlled by the Waskaganish Band Council, under the direction of Chief Robert Weistche.

The population of Waskaganish currently numbers approximately 1700 people (Institut de la statistique Quebec, 2001). The settlement is situated on a series of sand-capped clay terraces on the south bank of the Rupert River, and, over time, development of the community has moved away from the waterfront and uphill to higher terraces. Houses were built in the community by Indian Affairs beginning in 1949, and some of these original structures still stand to form the centre of the residential area. Fanning out from these buildings are progressively larger and more modern houses, connected by gravel roads and footpaths.

There are a number of commercial enterprises in the community, including oil and gas distributors, the Auberge Kanio-Kashee Lodge, the Northern Store, post office, arts and craft store, Jacob's Restaurant and Wavies eatery located in the Lodge. A Bank of Montreal services the financial needs of the community. These enterprises are staffed largely by Cree residents, with the exception of the Bank manager, and a Lodge employee. Other facilities provided in the community include: a health clinic, with medical and dentistry services; a police station; a day care centre, which is slated to expand in the coming years to accommodate the growing young population (currently children age 0-14 years make up 35% of the population – 600 of 1700 - (Institut de la statistique Quebec 2001) ; a local community radio station, which provides tri-lingual (Cree and occasional French and English) programming to the region; Anglican and Pentecostal churches[4] ; the Wellness Centre, and the Gathering Place, which includes a gymnasium where the majority of community events, such as weddings, feasts, meetings, are held. There are two schools in the community. The Ecole Winnibekuu [5] School was constructed in 1983 to provide education at the primary level and was soon extended to provide high school classes as well. In late 2002, construction was completed on the new

[4] It should be noted, however, that Waskaganish is home to a number of different religions. Other practitioners include: Baptists, Traditional Spiritualists, as well as a Catholic priest who holds services at his home/chapel. At this time, the majority of residents identify themselves as Pentecostal. The Pentecostal revival in Waskaganish began in the early 1970's and spread very quickly due to its strict tenets banning the consumption of drugs and alcohol.

[5] *Winnibekuu* refers to the Cree word meaning 'coastal'. Waskaganish's Cree population has historically been designated as 'Coastal' as opposed to 'Inland', a distinction based on whether ancestors lived, hunted and trapped along the coast of James Bay or among the river systems of the inland forests . However, now the population includes descendants of both Coastal and Inland Cree. For more information on the 'Inland'/'Coastal' distinction, see Francis and Morantz 1983.

school in the community, the 'Annie Whiskeychan School', which took over responsibility for the primary levels. I was fortunate to witness the official opening of the new school upon my arrival in Waskaganish at the end of May 2003. The event was attended by the majority of the community and was cause for great celebration and pride.

Why Waskaganish?

I decided to base my research in Waskaganish, in part, due to the fact that the community is presently engaged, in association with the Cultural Institute researcher Jim Chism, in a family history project. Genealogies are reconstructed and relations are documented using HBC, church and band records, and supplemented with resident input. This genealogy project allowed me to identify those members of the community whose relatives were interviewed by Flannery and learn more about the kinship linkages within the community.

Further, I chose Waskaganish because I had initially believed that this community had received far less attention in recent years from theorists interested in socio-cultural change compared to those communities more directly affected by hydro-development in the area such as Chisasibi (see Jacobs 1993, Niezen 1993). However, it quickly became apparent to me that Waskaganish has seen its fair share of researchers and consultants in the past, and has most recently been subject to an influx of outsiders due to a variety of factors including: a newly improved all-season paved road leading to the James Bay highway, the increase in Canada-wide publicity advertising the fully equipped Kanio-Kashee lodge and guided eco-tours around the area, and - not least - the signing of the 2001 Paix des Braves agreement with Quebec that has given the official 'go-ahead' to EM1-A and the Rupert River Diversion. These proposed, and now approved, hydro projects have necessitated a series of currently on-going environmental assessment projects, with southern researchers stationing themselves in the community for months at

a time, often without much extended contact with community members. This distancing can result in the confusion of residents as to researchers' goals or intentions.[6]

It is evident that Waskaganish can no longer be classified an isolated community. The population has long been subject to the inquisitiveness of outsiders, be they academics, government consultants, or tourists, and many residents have participated in studies, interviews and surveys. I believe that the women of Waskaganish are at an interesting juncture in their history. They are poised in time at the beginning of new developments on their lands, and are uncertain as to what this development will mean for themselves and their families. Most are aware of the devastation other communities have experienced due to development, but are positive about promised increase in employment opportunities for their children. Additionally, many are aware of the struggles of the Cree Nation, and that the Cree are now established players on the national and international scene. As I will demonstrate below, this awareness of outsiders, and the sensitivity to what might be called, a 'project of representation' was evident among several of the women I spoke to and in the ways in which they referenced and used tradition. This is not to imply, however, that the information was constructed or that the experiences that these women shared with me were any less real or meaningful to them. This is simply to say that, in my analysis, I will attempt to be as sensitive as possible to the interactive process involved between myself, as a 'researcher' and 'represent-er', and those people with whom I spoke.[7]

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[6] In fact, the Cultural Institute where I habitually worked in the early morning was also being used as an office by two Hydro-Quebec workers who were engaged in a tagging project in order to determine the spawning habits of white fish in the Rupert River. This particular project was meeting with resistance in the community, as was expressed at a Hydro-Quebec plenary session attended by residents and government representatives. Community members objected to the methods being used to catch and tag the fish; it was thought to be disruptive to the animal, and they were not clear on why such actions were being taken. I was later told by a community member that he initially assumed I must be a hydro-researcher because of the shared office space. Over the course of my research, it was interesting to uncover some residents' first impressions of my place in Waskaganish. One informant remarked to me that upon our first encounter, her thoughts were "white-face, young woman.... teacher or government worker" and then as soon as I started to seem interested in 'cultural things' it was "white-face, questions... anthropologist". (M)

[7] Here I look to Adam's (1997) response to Peacock's (1995) musings on the tendency towards autobiography rather than research in interpretivist/postmodern ethnographies. She states that such a tendency can be avoided through careful contextualization of the anthropologist's gaze, with a view to making guarded, but necessary, conclusions.

Methodology

Over the course of my four week stay in Waskaganish[8] I met with sixteen women of various ages for informal interviews. It was my proposed intention to limit my interviews to descendants of those women to whom Flannery spoke in the late 1930's, and I had worried that finding these women might prove to be difficult. However, this was not the case. As I spent time with the genealogical records of Waskaganish, it was apparent that a great number of people could trace their heritage back to one, or even two, of the original five women interviewed. In addition, as people became more familiar with what I was doing in the community and that I had information about particular elders, they would often approach me to tell me that they were related to these individuals, and were, therefore, very interested in what their ancestors had to say. This interest in Flannery's notes formed the starting point for many of my interviews and set the tone for the type of themes that were discussed during my conversations with informants, such as: the 'old days', lifestyle change, changes in material culture, details of particular traditions and their modifications, and impressions of their own lives and those of their mothers, grandmothers and daughters. While the specific content and direction of each conversation was unique to each individual, all participants covered these general topics.

The setting for these interviews differed. What I judged to be the most 'successful' interviews, i.e., those during which the women were seemingly the most comfortable and open to lengthy description and interaction, were those that were the least structured by formal interviewing norms. It was these encounters, whether they be a day spent in a cooking tent, an evening around a dinner table, a sunny morning spent on a hillside, or an afternoon plucking (or, in my case, attempting to pluck) geese, that proved to be the most valuable and enjoyable for both myself and the women who graciously shared their time with me.[9]

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[8] I am aware of the limitations put on my research due to the relatively short duration of my stay. However, I have attempted to take the time frame of my work into account when conducting my analysis by limiting my conclusions to those women I spoke to, and making only tentative suggestions as to their larger generalizability.

[9] However, it must be remembered that these encounters were by no means 'normal' exchanges. Twelve of the interviews were audio-taped and the rest were hand written. The presence of the tape recorder and notebook (as has been well-documented in other ethnographic studies) ensured that women remained conscious of the task at hand. As is often the case in interviews, many of the most revealing comments by informants are those volunteered in 'off-time', when the recorder is off or a pause is taken. For obvious ethical reasons, however, I believe this information cannot be used.

Each interview lasted a minimum of one hour; many continued for longer. Among the women interviewed, four were elders of the community over the age of 65. These four women had each spent the majority of their lives carrying out a seasonal round of activities that involved winters spent hunting, trapping and fishing in the bush and summers spent in the community. Three of these elders spent time in school, but for each the periods spent at these establishments were less than three and a half years. These three elders spoke English very well; therefore, an interpreter was not used (though the option was presented to them). The fourth woman had not attended any schooling facility and was uncomfortable in English. In this case, her granddaughter acted as an interpreter. The second group of women, and those with whom I spent the most time, was women from what I will term the 'middle generation'. I spoke with ten women between the ages of 40 and 61. Eight of these women had wage-labour jobs based in the community, and two drew income from the Hunters and Trappers Income Security Program. All of these women had attended residential school, but their experiences were varied, and a number of them had returned to the bush for several years after school and before they took permanent jobs in town. I also interviewed two women between the ages of 20 and 25 whose lives can be characterized by having grown up in a post-JBNQA economy and lifestyle. Data pertaining to this cohort is supplemented by my own observations and informal encounters and conversations around the community. However, due to the limited data in the 20-25 cohort as compared to the 'middle-generation' and 'elder-generation', more guarded conclusions regarding this age group will be made.

In addition to these interviews, and pursuant to the suggestions and aid of two young Cree female employees of the Cultural Centre, we formatted my loosely-based questions into a formal written questionnaire. This was simply a trial effort, and was not intended to provide for the bulk of my data. Instead, this joint endeavour served to spark quite an interest in my research among the two employees, who consequently volunteered any information they could about possible contacts in the community. Though two questionnaires were in fact completed, they did not yield the kind of qualitative information that is revealed during a conversationally-based, face-to-face interview, and therefore do not feature prominently in the analysis that follows.

Further, during my time in Waskaganish, I worked towards expanding a genealogical project that was being carried out at the Cultural Centre. Once having

learned of this project, some members of the community would come to the Centre in the hope of seeing their family tree. These visits would often yield new information for the project, i.e., news of a marriage or birth, and also served as an opportunity for me to learn more about families in the community.

Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter provides a historical review of the people and community of Waskaganish, a commentary of why this community was chosen as a research site, and an overview of my methodology.

Chapter Two is an introduction to the life and work of anthropologist Regina Flannery, whose notes inspired this analysis. It includes an overview of her field experience, methodology and data, as well as a discussion of the reactions descendants had to this information.

Chapter Three offers a literature review and a discussion of the theoretical literature that informs this analysis. It begins with a look at the anthropology of women, and a review of literature concerned with the Cree. It continues with a review of narrative and oral historical theory as a means of locating my theoretical starting point. A brief history of tradition in the social sciences will then be given. Following this, I will position this analysis within the theoretical literature debating the conceptualization of the category of tradition.

Chapters Four, Five and Six form the body of my thesis and provide an analytic discussion of women's use and understandings of tradition.

Following these chapters, Chapter Seven will summarize the analysis and provide suggestions for further avenues of research in this area.

## Chapter Two
## Regina Flannery

Introduction to Regina Flannery

Regina Flannery, who later published under her husband's name of Herzfeld, first traveled to the James Bay region in 1933 as an assistant to and student of Father John Cooper (Gardner n.d:92). Cooper was then Professor of Anthropology in the Sociology Department at Catholic University and was interested in historically reconstructing the cultures of 'marginal' peoples (Preston 2002[1975]:269). Flannery's task in the North was to interview Cree women about the 'old ways' and to find out, through women's own words and perspectives, what life was like as far back as their memories could reach. She returned to James Bay, to both the east and west sides, in 1935, 1937 and 1938. Few Cree spoke English at the time, and Flannery was fortunate enough to have a number of interpreters who allowed her to talk at length to Cree women. Through these visits, Flannery compiled extensive field notes from which she wrote a number of articles covering aspects of women's material culture, status, spirituality, life-cycle and gossip as an indicator of attitudes (Flannery 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1939, 1962, 1981).

However, at the time Flannery was interviewing women in the North, the Cree had already experienced two and a half centuries of contact with Euro-Canadian outsiders. During this time, the traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering activities, social and political systems, and religion of the Cree had been greatly affected, first by the fur trade, and later by missionaries and government institutions. Therefore, the culture that Flannery was documenting was in no way a static representation of a 'pristine' indigenous society.

Flannery's Informants

In total, Flannery interviewed six women in Waskaganish over the course of her summers spent in the area. However, for matters of confidentiality, I will only reveal and discuss those women with whose descendants I spoke; these women were Harriet Whiskeychan, Nancy Katapatuk, Alice Yearless[10] and Margaret Blackned. The lives of these women were spent primarily in the bush engaging in hunting and trapping

[10] This last name is now known to the community as 'Erless'. Flannery's spelling was likely phonetic.

activities. In the bush, the division of labour between men and women was separate and distinct, but flexible in times of need. During the period that Flannery was in the North, Cree families generally lived together in small grouping during the winter months, but came together in larger grouping in the summer time, often in areas around Hudson's Bay Company posts where they could trade and obtain supplies and country food. However, some of these traditional patterns of movement were beginning to change, with some families establishing themselves semi-permanently around the posts. Marriage was at a young age and often arranged, but women were able to refuse a suitor if they saw sufficient reason. Traditional spirituality was strong, but at this time, had begun to become intertwined with introduced forms of Christianity.

Though bibliographic information about these women is somewhat scarce in comparison to data about particular practices, it is possible to recreate some of their backgrounds using Flannery's information, and supplementing this with information from descendants and from anthropologist Rolf Knight, who interviewed a number of the same women while he was in the community in 1961. It is known that Harriet Whiskeychan was married at 17 and at that time trapped and fished with her husband and brother-in-law (Knight 1961:fo. 5). After a few years of trapping on the coast, Harriet and her husband moved inland to the north east of Nemaska (now Nemiscau) to hunt, and this remained their general hunting area for the 'rest of our lives' – although they did move around frequently within this zone (Harriet Whiskeychan in Knight 1961:fo.5). Harriet reports that she worked very hard when she was in the bush and would constantly be busy with some activity or another (Knight 1961:fo. 6). She remembers carrying many supplies – flour, sugar, lard, and tea - into the bush from the post (Nemiscau) in order to survive the winter (ibid). At the time Harriet was speaking to Flannery, she and her husband had four unmarried boys and two married girls (Flannery 1938: card #1035, 1037). She had also raised an orphan boy who had been abandoned by his parents and who, she reported, was a 'great help to her' (Flannery 1938: #1038). When talking to Flannery, Harriet describes spiritual aspects of her life such as the conjuring house (shaking tent ritual that allows people to converse with spirits – see Preston 2002[1975]),

and, what Flannery terms, the 'Supreme Being'.[11] The year that Harriet Whiskeychan was talking to Flannery (1938), starvation was still a fact of life. Harriet states that: 'starvation is worse now than when she was a little girl, there are only partridges, rabbits and fish, not every year do they get a bear, some years they don't get one at all, even now there aren't even any squirrels' (Flannery 1938: card #1047). Descendants of Harriet Whiskeychan said that she was remembered as a hard worker who was very generous and would take orphaned children under her care.[12]

Biographical information about the other three women is more scarce. It is known that Nancy Katapatuk was born in Eastmain, but came to Waskaganish 'at the time Mr. McJarvis was the boss' (1937: card #5).[13] She had three daughters, but one was a miscarriage (she also had sons, but it is unclear how many) (1937: card #5). Alice Yearless was originally from Chisasibi, but moved to Waskaganish with her family 'when she was very young' (1937:card #12). She was married twice, because her first husband died during a trip back from the bush to the post (ibid). Margaret Blackned is described in Flannery's notes to be a 'coast woman' (1937: card #2), meaning she lived in the areas bordering the James Bay, as opposed to the inland areas. She lived only with her father when she was young, who later died of starvation (1937: card #2). Margaret had five girls and two boys, and one of her girls died at childbirth (1937: card #2). Her brother in law was the chief of Waskaganish (1938: card # 39). At the time of meeting Flannery, Margaret was described as being one of the oldest women in Waskaganish

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[11] In Cree spirituality, there is a notion of the 'Supreme Being' - or God – who is considered to be the highest in the hierarchy of animal, human and super-natural beings. However, from further study of the notes, it is likely that what Flannery's informants were referring to here is the *Mistabeo*, which is understood by the Cree as a 'spirit helper' who aids hunters in their quests for food. For a discussion of the *Mistabeo* see Tanner (1979) or Preston (2002[1975]).

[12] An elder descendant, upon hearing about Harriet's account of starvation was prompted to add her own experience, which is at once a story of want, but also of the importance of sharing. I include an excerpt of this story below.

*L: When me and my husband were young, he* [her husband] *was walking around and he got to the lake, and at the shore they saw a small tree, that' what they used to do when they* [people] *make a camp, they would make a small sign with the tree on the ice. They went up and they saw a tipi and those people* [the people in the tipi] *were very hungry* [...] *and they were starving, and my husband sat for a long time because those people* [were too weak to go out] *In his* [her husband's] *bag, he had something to eat for the day, bannock and things, and so he gave the food to the people. He* [her husband] *killed three partridges and gave them. He kept one because he had to get back* [home] *and so he went and started on the way home, and the next day he brought a toboggan, and I don't know how many dogs, and they* [her husband and others] *came to get those people.*

[13] The exact date is, therefore, unknown. Indeed, the Hudson Bay Company Archives in Manitoba were unsure as to the postmaster she was referring to, as none of their records for Rupert's House make mention of this particular name. Therefore, it may be that this name is incorrect or refers to another post.

(1938: card #2). It can be said that the lives of these women were characterized by high mobility and challenging circumstances. Descendants stressed that these women had to endure great hardship, but were able to weather difficulties with strength and competence.

Flannery's Notes

Flannery took her notes in shorthand on small cards, with each card containing a themed element of information (for example, Margaret Blackned's information on 'Food', recorded 1938: card #19). The information contained in the notes is vast and wide ranging. For instance, the women described menses isolation in detail. For their first menstruation, girls were required to be removed from the camp for the duration so as not to bring weakness to hunters (1937: card #45-58, 1938: #143-146). Girls spent this time in a specially constructed tipi, and observed eating restrictions (1938: card # 148-151), wore particular clothing (beaded hoods – 1938: card #145), and used special cooking implements (1938: card #552 -557).Other topics that women described included the spring feast (1937: card #130-135, 1938: card # 23-24, 26,29, 44-47), marriage practices (1937: card #76-83, 1938: card #155-157), conjuring tent (1937: card #178-179), taboos (1937: #191-192), childbirth and childcare (1937: card #268 -293, 482-494), games (1937: card #304-312, 1938: card # 301- 302), food preparation (1938: card #15 –20, 310-316), sweatlodges (1938: card #75, 77) , child's first Walking Out (1938: card # 84-87, 91, 208-215), medicine (1938: card #173-176), first snowshoes (1938: card #231-2), and even pets (1938: card #1030-1). To describe each of these elements and trace their continuity, change or abandonment over time cannot be attempted here. Rather, as will be described below, discussing this information served to 'set the tone' in interviews.

Reactions

When the descendants of these women and I sat down for interviews, we would begin by looking at the notes and, specifically, those tidbits of information given by their ancestors. The majority of women I spoke with had not ever met these women, but many knew they were related to them through sharing a last name. In this manner, some women introduced themselves to me and expressed their interest in seeing what their ancestors

had to say.[14] Their reactions to the information contained in the notes were varied. Those women who were less familiar with the ways of 'the old days', or those whose lives were very different from the lives of the women described in the notes, seemed almost entertained by this information. Some would laugh and make comments about the archaic nature of certain practices. Others would quickly distance the present from the past with statements such as: 'We don't do that anymore'. Women who were more familiar with the information would convey how they knew of such things, for example: "My grandmother told me about that", or "I heard about that from long ago". Further, some of these women also described how certain practices, such as the Walking Out, beaver trapping, and First Snowshoes - to name a few examples - were still carried out. However, insufficient information of this nature prevents an adequate comparative description at this time. The interest that the community displayed in the information was great, but due to its vast scope, such information takes time to become absorbed by individuals, and disseminate through the community.[15] Therefore, interviews quickly changed course from chatting about the notes to talking about women's own lives. However, Flannery's notes did serve the purpose of orienting informants towards the past and allowed for discussions of cultural change and tradition.

Flannery's Framework

Flannery herself admits that she had no theoretical framework when she was collecting and writing up her data, rather, as she says "I just got the facts" (Flannery personal communication: 2002). She was interested in getting a general sense of Cree culture from a woman's perspective, and was open to what women had to tell her about their lives and how life was in 'the old days'. Flannery's work can be loosely categorized as part of the larger school of diffusionist studies, whereby anthropologists attempted to isolate what elements of cultures were particular to which geographical area and subsequently categorize these spaces as 'culture areas'. Because of her primary interest

[14] In addition, many women were interested to hear that one of their female ancestors had come from another community, such as Eastmain or Chisasibi.

[15] During my time in Waskaganish, I typed up these notes into a more easily accessible document that was given to the descendants, as well as to the Cultural Institute for general use and interest. I hope that the document will continue to be used and referenced by residents and researchers alike. In addition, it is hoped that the information may be used as a resource at the Winnibekuu School as something that is specifically from the community and which, therefore, forms a part of the history of Waskaganish.

in 'the old days', it would be easy to relegate Flannery's work to the realm of salvage anthropology, but to do so would be to ignore the potential value this information has as an historical source to both historians and anthropologists, as well as the community of Waskaganish itself.

In one of her later articles (1962), Flannery writes: "It is the purpose of this paper [...] to present the data gathered from middle aged and older informants who spoke from their own experiences in their youth and from what they had been told by their parents and grandparents. It is hoped that this material may serve as a baseline against which the subsequent changes among the Indians of the area [...] may in the future be assessed" (Flannery 1962:475). It was the original intent of the study at hand to attempt such an endeavour. By returning Flannery's notes to the community, it was hoped that a form of comparative analysis could be made between the information contained in Flannery's notes and the knowledge held by the descendants of Flannery's informants. However, to undertake such a comparison would involve accepting Flannery's 'baseline' and contrasting this to a created baseline of my own – i.e. a static snapshot of women's knowledge today – thereby obscuring the mutable nature of culture and knowledge. Indeed, attempting to contrast massive, amorphous concepts such as 'knowledge' is beyond the scope, and capability, of my own limited experience as a novice anthropologist. To achieve such a grasp and understanding of another culture takes a lifetime, including learning the language, and even then, this understanding is limited by one's own inescapable position of subjectivity.

This study does not attempt to provide an objective account of changes in knowledge systems nor a comprehensive list of changes in the community of Waskaganish since the 1930's. Instead, it examines how women themselves speak about their lives and the change that they have experienced. What emerges from these interactions is that, in many cases, women themselves speak of Flannery's notes as being a representation of 'the old days', and subsequently use this representation in narratives to make comparisons with the present. Therefore, Flannery's notes serve as a means for women to reflect on the past and discuss change, as opposed to simply being an imposed ahistorical baseline, and revealed much about how women use and understand particular concepts in their lives, and in this case, tradition. These narratives include discussions of women's own lives, experiences and opinions that expose the multiplicity and nuanced

nature of tradition. Consequently, it is apparent that tradition is a term and concept that deserves attention and analysis.

In light of the discussion above, the following chapter will provide an examination of narrative and tradition as a means of developing an appropriate theoretical framework within which to position this analysis.

## Chapter Three

## Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives

### Introduction

In order to locate this research in reference to past academic theory and work, I will be drawing on a number of bodies of literature dealing with women, the Cree, narrative and tradition. Although there exists much literature concerning the Cree, ranging from their material culture, adaptation to change, and their more recent politicization, specific studies dealing with women's own perspectives are fewer. Therefore, to supplement this literature, I will be turning to the anthropology of women that foregrounds those particularities of a woman's experience in culture. In addition, as a basis for my theoretical position, I will be looking at studies that prioritize people's own words and narratives as a means of understanding cultural change and accessing those cultural categories significant to individuals. Finally, I will be locating my analysis within the existing debate of positivism vs. social constructivism that surrounds the category of tradition.

### Anthropology of Women

Women-centered anthropology emerged alongside the feminist movement of the 1970's with an emphasis on the status of women cross-culturally.[16] Although for purposes of this analysis I will not be concerned with changing status and women's power relative to men, I will, nevertheless, be drawing on literature from women-centered anthropology that is oriented specifically towards questions of gender. Women-centered anthropology conceptualizes gender as a social construct that reflects the social identities of women rather than biology. Notions of gender provide culturally determined roles which become models for behaviour, both legitimizing and reproducing women as

[16] Universal subordination theorists, as typified by the writings of Rosaldo (1974), and Ortner (1974), argued for the existence of universal male dominance based on a separation of differentially valued private and public spheres and a widespread assumption of women's association with nature, making them inferior to men who were associated with culture, and thereby considered intelligent and creative. These formulations had widespread influence among feminists across many disciplines because they seemed to explain much of contemporary sexist ideologies existing at the time. However, these theories were soon challenged by Leacock (1978, 1980) and others as being ethnocentric, essentializing and ahistorical. Leacock's writings are useful in that they underline the importance of considering historical processes in the transformation of women's status; however, her strong Marxist orientation as well as many of her conclusions have now been challenged (see Morantz 2002, Anderson 1991).

social beings within the context of their culture. However, as highlighted by Kassam and Wuttenee (1995), investigation of gender issues has essentially emerged from the perspective of western industrialized societies, and while this material can contribute to an overall understanding of women's lives, it is not always applicable to societies that have their roots in non-western culture. Most significantly, the majority of this literature does not take into account the immense complexity involved in the historical encounter and interaction of non-western, semi-nomadic, hunter and forager groups with western, sedentary, market-based societies. Historical process must be taken into account, and gender must be seen as a dynamic concept that is subject to historical forces of change. Studies that have looked at changing gender roles, and which have, thereby, made women the focus of their research, hold value here as a means of identifying those forces that may have similarly affected Cree women's lives (Kassam and Wuttenee 1995, Moore 1988, Bonvillain 1989, Gonzalez 1982, McElroy 1975, Condon and Stern 1993). In addition, women-centered anthropology provides important parameters and cautions regarding generalizability to keep in mind when using standard theoretical conceptualizations, and particularly those that do not take gender into account. Though there now exists a long history of academic literature concerning the Cree, far fewer studies exist that focus on women's own opinions of change. Therefore, this analysis contributes to the growing body of literature about Native women's narratives generally and Cree women specifically.

## The Cree and Anthropology

The Cree of eastern James Bay have been the subject of much academic research. Beginning in the early years of the last century, anthropologists, ethnographers, scientists and historians have been a fairly continuous presence in the region. What has resulted is a substantial body of literature concerning the Cree.

Theoretical models have undergone great changes over time, which have in turn affected how ethnographers approach the study of Cree culture. Early studies were broad in scope, with topics ranging from the Cree's social organization, to their material culture, hunting behaviour, magico-religious life, land tenure, and kinship systems (Speck 1923; Cooper 1933, 1939, 1944; Rogers 1963, 1972, 1973; Honigmann 1952, 1959, Knight 1961). Emphasis on 'modernization' in the 1950's led to predictions that

traditional societies such as the Cree would soon be absorbed by national industrial economies. In the 1960's, government plans for northern Canada were heavily influenced by acculturation theories which saw similar traditional-to-modern trajectories for northern communities (Holden 1969). By the 1970's inhabitants of northern areas were becoming more politically vocal and took issue with the assumption that they were abandoning their traditions, and groups began to assert their cultural continuity. Consequently, academic attention shifted to documenting cultural persistence, and it was found by researchers that indeed northern societies were not disappearing, but were in fact displaying great resiliency (Feit 1979, 1980, 1982, Tanner 1979, Scott 1985, Morantz 2002).

However, in northern ethnography there remains unresolved conflict between models of stability and models of change. To what extent and in what form cultures are able to maintain themselves remains a dilemma for anthropologists. Further, understandings of the dynamics of persistence, loss and change in culture, and in cultural ideas about tradition, are still contested. In efforts to resolve this problem, researchers are turning to narrative, oral history and life history as a means to better understand how individuals themselves understand and experience change and how this change has influenced their sense of cultural identity.

Narrative in theory

Life history, narrative, and oral history have been used as research approaches in anthropology and the social sciences since the turn of the last century, but have often been largely secondary to more quantitative methods of data collection (Shaw 1980:226).[17] However, in light of recent developments in anthropology that aim to deconstruct the supposed objectivity of the anthropologist's gaze, as well as increased interest in meaning and text, methods that focus on people's own accounts have become more accepted. By examining the ways in which individuals speak about their lives and experiences, much is revealed about the particular components of culture, and how concepts are used and understood by individuals. Authors such as Sarah Preston (1986,1987), Julie Cruikshank (1990), Freda Ahenakew (1992) and Richard Preston

[17] For a brief overview of the academic use of life history over the ages see Preston (1986), and for a discussion of the debate over the utility of oral history see Cruikshank (1990a).

(2002[1975]) have focused on life histories and personal narratives as effective means of conveying individuals' understanding of their own culture and change. It has been argued that the most accurate descriptions of other cultures lie in the literal transcriptions of life history accounts (S. Preston. 1988:71, Cruikshank 1990:ix).[18] Though this form of transcription has not been attempted here, this study does take people's own words as a starting point for analysis.

For the Cree, it has been established that recalling and retelling events through narration is an integral part of appropriate social interaction, as it provides an opportunity to generate shared imagery and beliefs, and subsequently reinforce social norms (S. Preston 1987:158). Within Algonquian narrative tradition, including that of the Cree, narrative is classified into two broad genres: 'myth' *(aatiyuuhkaan),* and 'news/history/tidings' *(tipaachimuun).*[19] Both forms are used by Cree speakers, sometimes interchangeably, during their accounts. In a study that has been called 'ahead of its time' because of its theoretical insight (Morantz 2004: personal communication), Preston pointed to the importance of narration within Cree culture, and identifies narrative as: "the basis for understanding Cree experience for the Cree themselves" (2002[1975]:64). Traditionally for the Cree, narrative was considered the preferred method of communication. As stated by Preston:

> the context of narration (as contrasted with isolated facts) functions to convey to the hearer a whole, a precise perception, sometimes almost a visual image, within the appropriate, inherent context. By conveying facts within their context, then, the Cree attempt a precise understanding or, on the negative side, prevent distorted or incomplete understanding. (2002[1975]:69)

Preston's task was to demonstrate a view of what a Cree traditional world view looked like from the inside in an effort to provide greater accessibility to, and understanding of, the categories of Cree culture and their meanings. By focusing on narrative in this way, Preston highlights the significance of narration as a culturally-appropriate vehicle for defining those aspects of culture that hold meaning for individuals. Following Preston, in the analysis at hand, it is tradition that emerges in narratives as a significant, but complicated, cultural category.

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[18] Examples of such ethnographies include Cruikshank (1990), Ahenakew and Wolfart (1992), S. Preston (1986).

[19] The narratives provided in the analysis at hand fall under the latter category.

Julie Cruikshank's work among Athapaskan women in the Yukon highlights the importance of prioritizing personal narrative when conducting research concerned with cultural change. Cruikshank (1990), like Preston, has focused on the ways in which individuals use aspects of culture to remember and talk about the past and everyday life. In doing so, individuals contribute to a more personalized and multifaceted account of 'history' and change (1990:2). Her work orients researchers towards the use of oral tradition in narrative accounts and memories, rather than providing a simple documentation of its factual content (1990:4). Following this, Cruikshank points to the importance of acknowledging the processual and social nature of research. She argues that it is equally, if not more, significant to study the process by which accounts are constructed as it is to analyze the finished transcribed product. Cruikshank has categorized her work as 'collaborative research in which the narrators and I each used our own culturally embedded 'stories' to interpret the past" (1990: x). The women with whom Cruikshank spoke were integral in determining the direction the research would take, and the uses to which it would subsequently be put.[20] Through this collaborative effort, Cruikshank remained aware of her own cultural stance, and those cultural categories that were significant to the women with whom she spoke emerged and were emphasized. For the analysis at hand, Cruikshank's work serves as an example of collaborative fieldwork, and as a study that is concerned primarily with the ways in which women discuss their lived lives. Following Cruikshank, this study will not provide a comprehensive account of historical change, but rather, an analysis of how women talk about change and their experiences.

Narrative, therefore, is a valuable means of gaining a greater understanding of another person's lived experience. If it can be taken that a person's experience and existence are their fundamental realities, then narratives of life events can be thought of as accounts of existence (S. Preston 1988:71). As stated by Ochs and Capps, "Personal narrative simultaneously is born out of experience and gives shape to experience [...] narrative and self are inseparable" (1996:20). Narratives of personal experience are essential elements of everyday discourse, but are also means of elaborating on the various

[20] At the time Cruikshank was conducting her research for her book, Life Lived like a Story, the area in which she was working was in conflict over proposed development, and many residents were highly politicized. For some participants, it was believed that Cruikshank's research could aid in particular political endeavours.

aspects of the self. Notions of the self are now, more than ever, understood to be fragmented and fluid. Narrative can be used to connect the various elements of the self, as it allows speakers to create coherence out of their lived experience (ibid: 28). As will be explored in Chapter Five, by speaking about their lived lives, Cree women were also engaging in a form of self-definition. It was found that within these narratives, tradition was an important element of women's contemporary cultural identities.

Personal narratives about the past are told from the temporal perspective of the present, and are thereby shaped to accommodate present circumstances. The narrated past is significant because of its relation to the present and the future; the telling of past events is linked to people's concerns about their current lives (ibid: 25). As discussed in Chapter Four, Cree women used a form of 'critical nostalgia' (Seller 2003:169) in their narratives to comment on culture change. In this sense, nostalgia is not a 'yearning' for a past time or a desire to return to a more 'ideal' way of life. Rather, using Seller's formulation, 'critical nostalgia' can be understood as a narrative tool that women use as a means of speaking about the 'old days' and highlighting perceived changes in traditional life and, most significantly, in traditional values. However, memory can never be thought as capturing 'authentic' experience. As individuals recall events, these events are immediately transformed. Cruikshank (1990) writes that the recording of narratives should be understood as a social endeavour that happens between two people. She states: "storytelling does not occur in a vacuum" (ibid: 16). Personal narratives are situated forms of communication, meaning they can be used to serve particular pragmatic ends, and are affected by their surroundings and the particular discourse within which they are situated (Robinson 1981:58). Therefore, the particular context of narratives must be taken into account when conducting any kind of an analysis. Specifically, my presence and position as a 'represent-er' of culture is likely to have influenced the content and presentation of women's narratives. This issue will be addressed in Chapter Five.

Narrative, therefore, cannot be thought of as providing any form of absolute truths. Rather, it allows for discussion and expansion on concepts, understandings and experiences that inform people's lives.

From an attention to narrative, it can be established that the ways in which individuals discuss their experience provide important information about themselves, their understandings, and the concepts that inform their lives. Specifically, within their

narratives, women used various modalities of the concept of tradition when talking about their lives and culture change, subsequently allowing for a more nuanced and multiplicitous understanding of tradition. As will be explored below, tradition is used in a number of different ways in narrative to talk about aspects of Cree women's lives. Tradition can now be understood as a concept that can be used as a somewhat static representation of the past in one narrative context, but in another context be understood as something mutable, adaptable and vital to contemporary Cree identity.

Tradition, Theory and the Social Sciences

Before embarking on my analysis, therefore, it is essential to devote some attention to the idea of tradition and how it has been approached in academic thought. New concepts in the social sciences develop and change over time, and this has clearly been the case with the notions of 'tradition' and 'traditional'. Though the definitions of these terms have been taken as largely self-evident in the past, contemporary studies have highlighted their problematic and mutable nature as loaded cultural categories.

What follows is a brief examination of the use and conceptualization of tradition and traditional in social scientific literature, and, more specifically, in anthropological study, with a view to positioning the analysis at hand. It is evident from this discussion that the term 'tradition' has a complicated theoretical history in, and of, itself, and can no longer be used without paying attention to its relationship to the particular contexts in which it occurs. This analysis is particularly necessary at this point when anthropology itself is in a process of transformation: where the historical development of the discipline is undergoing reflexive considerations, and its conceptual building blocks are under high scrutiny.

The study of 'traditional culture and groups' formed the basis for the development of anthropology as an intellectual discipline in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this context, the term tradition referred to "those beliefs, customs, practices, and conceptions handed down from the past to the present, and which persist or recur through their being passed on" (Shils 1981: 12). This formulation implied notions of order, or legitimacy, and of continuity with the past. The Enlightenment period of the 1800's gave rise to the development of modernist thought and the subsequent valorization of the present, over the past, in terms of the concepts of reason and progress. As outlined by

Harris, modernist thought can be characterized by a temporal rupture with the past, in which rationality reigns and modern social forms exist independently, without reference to tradition (1996:3). Tradition came to be seen as the product of unreasoned acceptance of beliefs that were rooted in the stubborn clinging to the past, and was, therefore considered to be in direct opposition to scientific endeavour, rationality and, most significantly, progress (Spiegel 1989:51) In this sense, traditional societies, characterized by the maintenance of traditions as repetitions of the past, were seen as existing in a permanent state of stasis. However, such a characterization is somewhat misleading, as the commonsense notion of tradition according to the above stated definition implies temporality, process and a 'passing on' of a core of cultural traits. Interestingly, the earliest anthropological theorists – most notably from the British school of social anthropology - did not use the term tradition or traditional due to the use of the ethnographic present in their monographs (ibid: 53). It was not until writers became more aware of cultural contact and social change that references to 'traditional societies' emerged. By naming social systems traditional, authors implied that there were other social structures and practices which were experiencing disintegration (ibid). Subsequently, there was an increased concern with salvage, and with recording those aspects of the traditional that were untouched by Europeans and colonialism.

As anthropological attentions shifted to the effects of this contact on non-European societies, modernist dichotomies of modernization vs. tradition remained firmly in place. It was generally assumed that traditions would be abandoned as outside influence increased and societies became more 'modern'. Due to its inflexible nature, tradition could not coexist with 'modernity'. In the 1970's, theories of social change and culture contact soon gave way to seemingly more culturally sensitive theories of 'development'. But, even here, the concept of tradition was considered to be anti-progress and the antithesis of modernity. As explained by Atal, where his use of 'primitive' could equally stand for 'traditional': "whatever terminology we use, the modernization-development paradigm suggests a hierarchical stratification and implies a unilinear progression... from primitive ways of living towards the modern (i.e western, industrial) style of life" (1997:335).

Recent theoretical developments have called these former conceptualizations and uses of tradition into question. The post-modern movement in particular has been critical

of all postulates that rely on generalizations or that emphasize continuity in any capacity (Harris 1996:6). Post-modernism is characterized by change and impermanence, and rejects any dichotomized or essentialized perspectives.[21] Alongside developments in postmodernism have been similar intellectual tendencies towards deconstructing the historical use of tradition. Specifically, in post-colonial studies, tradition has gained much revisionary attention. For example, Asad (1991) has argued that in Anglophone Africa, colonial administrators used a particular notion of custom or tradition to codify the practices of the colonized. What came to be known as customary law was then taken mistakenly by anthropologists to be unbroken traditions based on lineage elders as opposed to an effect of colonial rule (ibid: 322). Ranger (1993) has likened this codification of tradition to an invention of tradition. He states that previous to colonialism, African politics were characterized by pluralism and flexibility, but with codification they became rigidly bounded into categories based on gender, generation and the 'tribe' (ibid:63). Tradition was used here as a means of justifying and legitimating colonial action by falsely claiming a linkage to the past.

Theoretical developments such as these have been spurred in large part by indigenous and ethnic struggles for cultural rights and social justice which emerged in the late 1960's. These revolved around politically crucial ideas such as autonomy, democracy and sovereignty, thereby forcing anthropologists to rethink their own colonial roots and political hierarchies and pay attention to the way in which Indigenous people and ethnic groups, themselves, now evoke tradition in the context of political struggles and identity affirmation (Rethmann 2002:41). Indigenous activism rejected former stereotypes of tradition as being an inhibitor of development, and has embraced tradition as a "framework of opportunities" that can aid individuals to reshape their social world (McDonald 1990:104).

Tradition and traditional are no longer concepts used simply by the 'West' to classify the 'Rest'. Tradition has now emerged as a resource for Indigenous and ethnic populations around the world to assert their individual cultural identity, and also for various groups to advance their nationalist goals. Eller (1999) highlights the importance

[21] For an exploration of the relationship between modernism and post-modernism including a schematic representation of their differences please see David Harvey (1990): The Condition of Postmodernity Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing Inc. Though this text deals primarily with architecture, space and art, it provides a clear analysis of the social and semantic historical development of postmodernity.

of the past and tradition to an ethnic group's self-definition. For ethnic minorities, traditions are those cultural practices and beliefs that originate from their homeland, and to which they can lay legitimate claim as components of a distinctive ethnic identity. It is their common heritage; one that distinguishes them from other ethnic communities, and one in which in members have common interest and can claim common rights. Therefore, tradition holds significant symbolic value and the past is always a strong presence: "Thus, the language the group has 'always' spoken, the religion it has always followed ...the customs, the clothes, the stories and music, the values and morals – these things are effective identifiers and legitimizers of the groups" (ibid:29). As explored by Ganz (1996[1979]) and Buckser (1999), the boundaries and coherency of ethnic groups have become more fluid as a result of social and cultural change, and, consequently, many members are choosing to express their cultural identity through selective symbolic means, such as eating a particular traditional food, speaking the group language or participating in a traditional cultural ceremony. Although these traditional activities may no longer feature largely or pragmatically in their everyday lives, they serve to link individuals with their cultural group and to assert their individual cultural identity.

For Indigenous people, including many Native groups in North America, the assertion of local tradition forms a crucial part of their fight for self-determination and equal recognition within their own countries. By using culture, history and tradition, indigenous groups are invoking national uniqueness to make demands in the political arena. In some cases, such as the Mohawks of Kahnawake, tradition has been selectively revived in order to create a national identity that is rooted in tradition but adapted to modern political reality (Alfred 1995:179).[22]

In many cases, using the past as an orientation for the future, has relied on constructing a particular form of indigenous 'authenticity' that is overt and recognizable to outside parties. This has, in many cases, meant the projection of generic essentialisms and stereotypes in order to gain legitimacy as 'authentic' traditional groups (Lattas 1993:246).

Tradition can be seen as a resource for ethnic groups and Indigenous people both as a symbolic source of identity affirmation at the personal and local level, and as an instrument to gain political recognition. As will be explored in Chapter Five, the Cree

[22] See also McDonald (1990)

have also used tradition as a resource at both the local and at the level of the Cree Nation as a means of legitimating their identity and asserting their rights. For Cree women, tradition is a significant part of their individual cultural identity, and can be manifested in their daily lives in a number of symbolically important ways, such as eating traditional foods, going to the bush when possible, speaking Cree and upholding particular traditional values. In this sense, these traditional activities are important for the symbolism and the significance that they have as means of asserting Cree cultural identity, and membership in a larger cultural community. In addition, tradition has become a strong component of Cree political discourse and this discourse may have an impact, though subtle, on women's narratives about their lives. However, this analysis will not argue that tradition is simply understood as a politicized concept, but rather that this is one of the many modalities that tradition takes when used by individuals.

Theoretical Framework

As will be explored below, tradition is a concept that has a number of different conceptual modalities for Cree women, and it is used and understood in different ways depending on the subject that women are discussing and the context within which the discussion is taking place. Through narrative, women expand on concepts that are meaningful to them, and in the process, these concepts become more nuanced and difficult to define using absolute categorizations. In the time I shared with women, tradition was used in a variety of ways.

Before proceeding therefore, it is necessary to explore the seemingly contradictory conception of tradition as something at once essential and mutable – i.e. as a concept that can take on different modalities and meanings depending on variables such as the context, subject, referent and speaker's cohort. As the flexibility of culture and society is more evident, and as anthropologists recognize the tremendous ability of communities to adapt to their changing circumstances in ways that do not sacrifice their cultural integrity or their identity, it is apparent that traditions are not easily abandoned, nor are they fully maintained. This has prompted social scientists to inquire into the very nature of the category of tradition itself, and to question its continuity and linkages to the past. Scholars debate as to whether tradition should be understood in its original sense as a core of inherited culture traits, or whether, in light of historical flux and the

deconstruction of objectivity, tradition should be understood as a symbolic construction. What emerges from this debate is that neither extreme is fully sufficient for an adequate understanding of tradition, but rather, tradition should be understood as a flexible concept that can be redefined in the present, but which has meaning to individuals through its reference to the past. It is both a fact (something that is experienced) and a value (an attribute) that can embody both continuity and change.

In early definitions, tradition was originally understood as a core of traits, characterized as 'traditional', that is handed down from generation to generation through a process of cultural conservation. This naturalistic definition of tradition caused anthropologists to treat tradition as a bounded object, whose essential traits could be identified and described (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 274). This understanding is exemplified in A.L Kroeber's definition of tradition as: 'the internal handing on through time' of culture traits (Kroeber 1948:411 in Handler and Linnekin 1984:274). Recent attempts to clarify this definition include Edward Shils' (1981) analysis of tradition. He argues that there is no such thing as a traditional baseline against which to measure progress or modernity (ibid: 13-14). Rather, tradition changes continually as it is transmitted from one generation to the next and is interpreted through the subjectivity of memory and personality (ibid). However, Shils' definition still assumes that there are 'essential elements' (ibid) of tradition that persist over time, thereby perpetuating a naturalistic framework.

Social constructivists, post-structuralists and theorists influenced by postmodernism, take issue with the presumption that tradition is an unchanging core of ideas and customs handed down from the past. Rather, many theorists have argued that, in the face of inevitable historical and social change, tradition must be understood as a product of reinvention and construction.

As forerunners to this movement, Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) now famous analysis of the nature of tradition in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain, argue that many traditions that exist are in fact invented. Hobsbawm states:

> Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past (1983:1).

Hobsbawm and Ranger's analysis refers specifically to the creation of traditions in the present and the portrayal of these as continuous with the past, whether that past is real or imagined. Thus, their formulation includes a distinction between 'genuine' and 'invented' tradition, and therefore implicates the problematic notion of 'authenticity'. However, Hobsbawm's discussion is useful in drawing attention to the fact that traditions do not necessarily have to be grounded in history, nor have continuous linkages to the past. Traditions can be those activities, practices or beliefs that *imply* continuity and thereby hold significance for those practitioners by virtue of their repetition and *reference* to a past. Along similar lines, Keesing (1989) has looked at the ways in which indigenous peoples have 'invented' their pasts as a means of asserting their identities.

> [...] ancestral ways of life being evoked rhetorically may bear little resemblance to those documented historically, recorded ethnographically, and reconstructed archaeologically – yet their symbolic power and political force are undeniable (1989:19)

These analyses highlight the utility of tradition in the authentication of one's identity, as well as the charged politicality of tradition. However, there has been much resistance by indigenous people against the notion of 'the invention of tradition', as it implies inauthenticity. Stating that certain traditions are 'invented', in the sense of Keesing and Hobsbawm, can be highly detrimental to those indigenous people who continue to assert their 'authentic' identity based on their distinctive pasts. Mauze (1997) writes that it is impossible to verify whether a tradition has maintained continuity with its original version, or if indeed an original version existed. She states that: "a tradition can be no more 'false' than 'true'" (1997:7), and that any accusation of the falsity of a tradition implies going back to the naturalistic, and untenable, definition of tradition.

Handler and Linnekin argue that tradition should be understood as a 'wholly symbolic construction' and that naturalistic paradigms should be rejected (1984:273). What constitutes tradition is always made in the present, in that the content of the past is modified and redefined according to modern significance (Linnekin 1983:241). Following from this, tradition cannot be conceived as an objective category of phenomena, but rather a process of interpretation that attributes meaning in the present through making reference to the past (Handler and Linnekin 1984:273). As such, it is impossible to identify 'authentic', unchanging traditions, and the malleable nature of tradition makes such a task unnecessary. Handler and Linnekin support this hypothesis by

examining the use of tradition in nationalist movements in Quebec and Hawaii. Here they argue, tradition is used by Quebec and Hawaiian nationalists as a means of asserting cultural identity, but the tradition that is evoked is not necessarily an objective attribute of cultural practices, but rather a designation that is given in the present (ibid:282). For example, in Hawaii, traditions that are promoted such as kava drinking and ukelele playing are selective and cannot, in many cases, be traced to any pre-contact 'authentic' time period. However, they argue that the origin of cultural practices is not significant to the experience of tradition, as 'authenticity' is defined primarily in the present (ibid: 286). Paine agrees that 'authenticity' can be something that is constructed in the face of current politicization of issues of Indigenous/ Aboriginal identity, and that, therefore, the notion of 'authenticity' should be conceived as relational, contingent and – in some cases - influenced by hegemonic power structures (2000:18).[23] In a similar vein, Clifford states that 'authenticity' is now considered a process that is negotiated by Native People themselves through preservation and transformation (2004:6). For the analysis at hand, therefore, reinvention and the creation of tradition should not be equated with inauthenticity, and the question of 'authenticity' must be understood as largely moot.[24]

Boyer (1987) has contributed to social constructivist views by arguing that it is specifically the notion of *conservation* that is problematic when discussing traditions. To assume that cultural material is conserved from generation to generation, and thereby imply that no change has occurred in this process of transmission is unrealistic. Boyer proposes that theorists should replace the idea of *conservation* with a notion of *reiteration*, i.e., tradition is that which is reiterated and involves a reference to another occurrence, but does not involve the transfer of essentialisms (1987:57). However, simple reiteration is inadequate as a definition for tradition. That which is reiterated must hold significance for those who perpetuate it, as tradition is a highly symbolic category (ibid).

Though the above debate has made significant contributions to the way in which social sciences define and think about tradition, neither extreme is fully adequate to

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[23] See Williams and Philibert for discussions of the way in which political elites have used their influence to authenticate cultural forms and create 'traditions' as part of their nationalist projects in Guyana and Vanuatu respectively. By inventing a particular version of cultural history, the elite are able to establish themselves as those who are the most appropriate to lead the new nation (Williams 1990:113 ; Philibert 1986:251).

[24] Following this, when the term is used within this text, quotations will also be used to indicate the term's problematic nature.

describe how Cree women understand or use tradition. By setting up a dichotomy between tradition as something objective, naturalistic and passively embodied, versus tradition as the purely contemporary product of human self-consciousness, it can be said that theorists have essentially reduced their debate to a dichotomy of positivist and subjectivist perspectives. Both perspectives hold value as having problematized the nature of tradition, and for the purpose of the analysis at hand, I draw on both theoretical perspectives as well as Preston's (1999) and J. Scott's (1985) formulation of tradition.

Taking inspiration from Edward Sapir's formulation of cultural forms,[25] Preston (1999a:304) argues that tradition, though dynamic and mutable, maintains an underlying dynamic 'grammar' of cultural form. Though the content of tradition changes from individual to individual, the underlying cultural patterns that inform it change much more gradually and slowly (ibid). Preston's conception of tradition allows for an acknowledgement of both the socially constructed nature of tradition, and the existence of a more subtle and largely imperceptible cultural form that serves as a guide for the individual's understandings and uses of tradition.

J. Scott (1985) offers a similar description of tradition, but instead of cultural form, he refers to Bourdieu's concept of doxa. Scott sees two sorts of tradition operating simultaneously. He states: "One that is taken for granted – what Bourdieu calls doxa[26] – and is thus not perceived as tradition but is simply what is done, and another that is the imaginative reconstruction of the past in the service of current interests" (J.Scott 1985:346). In this formulation, tradition is both something that is known and experienced subconsciously, as well as something that can be consciously reinterpreted to serve particular political or personal ends.

For the Cree, therefore, tradition can be seen as something that shows continuity, transformation, and loss. It is a nuanced concept that has different uses and understandings for Cree women. As will be discussed below, in the context of the women's descriptions and memories of the past, tradition is used as a narrative device to characterize 'how things used to be' – a time that is described as distinctively Cree and

[25] Sapir conceptualized cultural form to mean historically determined types of organization that are intuitively felt by people as opposed to being known by them (Sapir 1994 in Preston 1999a:304). Cultural form combines history, culture and personality.

[26] In Outline of Theory and Practice, Bourdieu (1977) uses doxa to refer to a realm of presupposed knowledge, of that which is inferred but rarely stated.

traditional. By utilizing this seemingly static and essentialized formulation of tradition, women are able to make more distinctive contrasts with the present and allow for significant commentary on culture change that touches not simply on material changes, but also speaks to those moral and valuative changes that women see as having occurred in their community. In the context of women's representations of their personal cultural identities, however, tradition can be understood as a fluid cultural concept that is subject to change and reinterpretation over the generations. It is no longer seen as simply a collection of archaic customs, but as something more dynamic and fully a component of the present. It evokes a sense of the past, but does not have to be grounded in the past. In addition, tradition has been harnessed as a tool by the Cree in nationalist discourse, and in this context has taken on a highly symbolic and essentialized form. Finally, in the context of women's concerns and aspirations for the future, tradition is used and understood in a more naturalistic or fluid manner depending on women's age cohorts. The maintenance of these traditions is both a product of internal valuation of these beliefs and practices as part of cultural identity, and a reaction to external influences and ideologies. Therefore, the nature of the category of tradition is multiplex and contextual and cannot be reduced to simply an essentialized core of unchanging traits, nor to a product of social construction. Rather, over the course of its many modalities, tradition must be understood as encompassing both continuity and change as does any other cultural product.[27]

As pointed out in this discussion, the study of tradition and narrative should not simply be a matter of conceptual definition, but rather of empirical investigation in order to avoid imposing spurious evaluations on people's own experiences. Therefore, I will now turn to what the women with whom I spoke actually had to say.

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[27] A word here must be said about my use of the term 'tradition'. I realize that by using the term in its singular sense, as opposed to its plural, I run the risk of essentializing or reifying its meaning. I caution the reader that this sense does not refer to one singular tradition, or imply that there is a singular body of tradition. Rather, it should be understood that 'tradition' encompasses many things - activities, values, experiences, language, practices etc. – and that the object of the discussion at hand aims to move away from generic or essentialized definitions towards a more pluralistic understanding of this concept. Further, although quotation marks are generally used to indicate a term's problematic or fluid nature, I have chosen not to include them when using tradition in my discussion in order to at once facilitate the presentation of this discussion, but also because I believe quotations tend to question the validity of a concept. Tradition is something very real, and at times, very tangible to the women with whom I spoke.

## Chapter Four

## Tradition, the Past, Nostalgia and Culture Change

Introduction

In this section, I will examine how tradition is a significant narrative tool in women's discussions of the past, as it provides a characterization of a distinct time past and, subsequently, allows women to reflect on the nature of change that they see as having occurred around them. When asked about their lives and those of their mothers and grandmothers, women of each generation would speak of the 'old days', and qualify this period as one of bush life and hard work. In the context of these interviews, the 'old days' or the 'past' were not used to designate a particular time period, but rather in a valuative and symbolic sense to refer to an era when Cree life was free from outside influences and, therefore, considered to be distinctively Cree. Further, this era was characterized as being traditional. Over the course of their descriptions, women used the past to make commentary on the present and thereby employ a narrative stance that Seller has termed 'critical nostalgia' (2003:169). Discussion of the past resulted in a preoccupation with those aspects of traditional life that have changed, and hence constructed the traditional past as different from the way things are today. Again referring to Seller, women's accounts of the past as compared to the present can be seen as 'moral narrative' in that they describe the hardships of a traditional life spent in the bush, and, subsequently, reveal their concerns with changes in values that have occurred in their community and in the lives around them (ibid:6). Here traditional life is conceived as a separate and bounded other, or a state of being that has passed, and is implicated in narrative as a means of making moral statements about the present and culture change.

However, although women of each generation employ this narrative stance, it cannot be argued their statements are intended to reflect a precise description of reality where the past was 'hard' and the present is 'easy'. Rather, women, most notably of the middle generation, are aware of the challenges and responsibilities that women continue to face today, and are, alongside elder women, using this stance and a rhetorically constructed image of the past as narrative tools to make commentary on changes in lifestyles and traditional values.

The Old Days

When speaking about the lives of their mothers and grandmothers, women of each generation characterized these 'old days' as being more traditional than today. In their narratives, women effectively equated the 'old days' with 'traditional life' and used these two expressions interchangeably. The 'old days' are represented as a time when the Cree lived exclusively on the land, and spent the majority of the year in the bush. Women in the 'old days' were expected to carry out the roles of a traditional Cree wife. Women's traditional roles centered around the maintenance of the bush camp, the caring for children, and the preparation of foodstuffs. The women I spoke with displayed great familiarity with how women's lives were in the 'old days'; however, each generation had a different temporal relationship to this time period. For younger women, the 'old days' referred mainly to the lives of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers, as well as to a symbolic pre-contact 'golden age'. It is a time to which these women hear only references in the stories of their elders, and in school. They themselves do not characterize their current lives as traditional, nor can they apply this designation to the lives of their mothers. The 'old days', therefore, is a time period that is removed, bounded, abstracted and stands for a type of life that is no longer.

*MA: My grandmother's life in the old days were more traditional than mine. She spent all her time in the bush, living off the wild. It was like that a long time ago. Not anymore.*

For middle generation women, the 'old days' are used in reference to the lives and time of their mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers. Though many of these women spent a portion of their lives living in the bush either before they were sent to residential school, or before they began to work wage labour jobs, they speak of the 'old days' as being a time that is removed from their own lived experience. It is a time that is perceived as more homogenous, and less subject to the change and outside influences that they themselves have experienced. For elder women, however, the 'old days' could refer both to an earlier pre-contact time that is removed from outside influences, and to their own childhood and lifetimes. For example:

Where L is talking about her immediate grandmother:

*L: In the old days, women did lots of things. My grandmother worked very hard. She was a strong woman. She trapped all her life.*

And where L is talking about herself:

*L: In the old days, we went trapping every year. We don't go so much anymore.*

Or, where M is talking both about her own life experience, but also making reference to how Cree women in general used to live (i.e. 'we'):

*M: In the old days, we lived in the bush all the time. We only came to town in summer. It was good to be out in the bush.*

Discussing the 'old days' can, therefore, involve a collapsing of temporality as current and past generations are meshed into a common framework characterized by a certain kind of lifestyle considered to be representative of 'traditional life'. This is not to argue that Cree do not have a sense of historical accuracy, but rather that, in narratives of the past, the 'old days' can be used to represent a whole way of life – one that is idealized - rather than a specific historical period. This conceptualization of the past creates a collective memory of 'how we used to be' that can be harnessed in narratives by all generations, regardless of whether individuals have experienced this traditional lifestyle. By talking about the past in this bounded way, it can be used more effectively as a contrastive narrative device. Within this idiom of expression, women set up an opposition between traditional and modern, thereby confining the former to a space where change is not allowed to take place. Objectifying the past and qualifying it as 'traditional' signifies the speakers' perception of social and cultural changes, and allows for the development of a nostalgic stance towards the past. The space created by the speaker between the past and the present allows them to take a moral position and reflect on the past and change.

Critical nostalgia

In talking about the past, women are not only contributing to oral history but are also making commentary on the present and how culture has changed. By describing how lives used to be, women are using descriptions of the past to provide a critique of the present. This form of narrative device can, according to Seller, be identified as 'critical nostalgia' (2003:169). Nostalgia is most commonly understood as a yearning for something 'authentic' that has been lost, and has been dismissed by social researchers for being an overly sentimental, and therefore, inaccurate representation of the past (Hutcheon 1998). Recently however, some authors have re-examined the concept of nostalgia as a narrative device or discursive strategy. Battaglia has argued that nostalgia

can be 'practical' or 'active' in that it can be used by individuals to serve particular purposes (1995:78). Specifically, Battaglia looks at how urban Trobrianders are planting traditional gardens as a means of recalling more meaningful patterns of relationships, and therefore, to aid social reconnection (ibid). Therefore, nostalgia does not have to be oriented solely to the past, it can also position the subject in relation to the present and indeed to the future. In her study of Dominican women's narratives, Seller developed the idea of 'critical nostalgia' to qualify how the women she spoke to used descriptions of the past to make statements about cultural, economic and social changes they perceived in the present (2003:169). She states:

> ...women position themselves in relation to the present through their talk of the past, their hardships and the changes that they have experienced [They] speak of 'how things were', they position themselves by making moral inferences that invoke a discourse of both respectability and egalitarianism. (Ibid:168)

For example, women she interviewed spoke of the past as a time when children displayed more concern for the well-being of elders, in contrast to their contemporary attitudes of disrespect (ibid:178).

Therefore, Seller sees nostalgia as a useful tool in women's narratives to express their moral positioning on the change around them. As we see below, Cree women also express a form of nostalgia for the past, and concurrently emphasize the value that is placed on traditional life. Using descriptions of the past in juxtaposition with the present allows women to contemplate how things have changed, and consequently make judgments on these differences.

Cree Nostalgia

In these interviews, talking about the 'old days' and 'traditional life' was used both to describe 'how things used to be', and to provide an indication of an underlying system of cultural and personal values. In describing the difficulty of the old days, women made comparisons with the present, which provided a means for them to reflect upon and evaluate their contemporary surroundings. This form of 'critical nostalgia' is less a 'yearning' to return to the difficult physical circumstances of the old days, and more a narrative device to highlight those traditional values that have been affected by social and cultural change.

Women's Lives and Responsibilities

*a) Gender Roles and Modernization*

Women's lives have been affected by change, and concurrently, their current roles and responsibilities differ from those of their female predecessors. Studies that have looked at changing gender roles hold value here as a means of isolating some of the forces that have impacted upon Native women's lives. The majority of these studies assert that through increased contact with Western social, political and economic institutions, traditional patterns of life, including traditional gender roles, were undermined.

For the Cree, gender roles in traditional life have been described in both family and community settings within the framework of tasks in the production process. Anthropologists, including Flannery, working on subsistence-based societies, have described a flexible division of labour based on the complementarity of women's and men's roles. Tanner, in his detailed exploration of Mistassini Cree hunting life, describes a women's effective control of food that is brought to the camp by men after hunting (1979:153). Women, as part of their responsibility in maintaining the household, were depended upon for the preparation and cooking of the meat and its accompaniments as well as processing the skin and furs. Women were also responsible for gathering wood and water for cooking, and spruce boughs to cover the floor of the tent. The responsibility for distribution of the cooked meat is then traditionally given to the elder man of the household. However, while specific traditional roles for the different sexes did exist, they were not necessarily fixed. In a small community grouping where survival of the extended family was paramount, gender roles were fluid. As Bonvillain (1989) notes, among the Montagnais-Naskapi, who are closely related culturally to the Cree, there existed a pattern of culturally differentiated ideals on the one hand and actual practice on the other. She states: "Men hunted, fished and made their equipment", whilst "women prepared food, made clothing and tents and cared for their children" (ibid:5). She continues to say that in actual practice, however, women often accompanied their fathers or husbands in hunting and men readily tended to children's needs. Women also engaged in trapping and fishing in order to support their family and contribute to the socio-economic unit.

It is this sort of role fluidity that is presented in the writings of Flannery, and that was confirmed by the women with whom I spoke. She notes that the "division of labour between the sexes would seem therefore to depend much on personal ability and commonsense adjustment to circumstances" (Flannery 1935:83).

As a result of a transition from hunting to a mixed economy, a number of authors have argued that this complementarity was dissolved. Gonzalez, in her work on Miqmaq gender roles, described the differential effects on men and women when "a more economically complex culture (European) intrudes upon a less market-oriented economy (Miqmaq)" (1982:118). She argues that with the introduction of new European technology as the by-products of trade, there was a change in Miqmaq subsistence base and a corresponding change in the amount of productive contribution made by men and women (ibid:124). For the Cree, early contact with Europeans likely did not drastically change gender roles, for, as has been stated above, Cree life was not profoundly altered socially and economically by early trade relations. Rather, it is later historical developments that impacted more significantly on women's traditional gender roles. Kassam and Wuttunee (1995) describe this process among Gwich'in women in the Northwest Territories. The authors found that women described the period of transition from the trapping economy to a wage economy one where the lifestyle of trappers was slowly phased out, and that it was the women in the community who were becoming employed in the wage economy because it was they who had sufficient education, which left the men in a 'sort of limbo' (ibid:58).

A similar situation can be seen among the Cree. With the institution of transfer payments, the provision of better housing and facilities, the introduction of formalized schooling, and the increase of wage labour opportunities in town, women began to remain in town for the winter months where traditionally, they had gone to the bush with their husbands. As some men then soon started to abandon hunting as a viable economic option, they too remained in town to seek employment. Jobs for men usually took the form of seasonal labour and construction, and therefore resulted in men spending a great deal of time in the home. However, as Feit (1991) and others have argued, virtually all men continue to hunt and trap to some degree of participation, though not always for economic purposes. Since wage employment for many is often temporary, many men continue to hunt between periods of work and on weekends.

Currently in Waskaganish, more women are employed in year-round positions than are men (Waskaganish Band Office: personal communication). Men engage primarily in seasonal labour and crafts, while women are employed in a variety of different positions at the school, clinic, Lodge, restaurant and band office.[28] Though the total number of jobs occupied by men and women is comparable (~325 women, ~320 men - Institut de la statistique Québec 2001), the types of jobs are different. A large number of men are employed in construction and transport (105 out of 320 employed), while the majority of women are employed in sales and services and teaching positions (Institut de la statistique Québec 2001; Waskaganish Band Office: personal communication).

The social impact of this movement into the wage economy by women has meant that their role has expanded to generating income for their families as well as tending to household responsibilities. Cree women now find themselves juggling several roles of mother, worker and wife. As explored by Jacobs, women today are now faced with a variety of new life choices such as taking a job, raising a family, going to the bush or leaving their community and these choices are guided by the responsibilities that women feel they have towards their families and society (1993:34).[29] Though not explicitly stated by Jacobs, choices are also guided by traditional values and norms that form the basis of Cree culture. These include promoting well-being and social connectedness within the community, and ensuring the transmission of these values to future generations. Middle generation women perceive their roles and responsibilities as being very different from those of their mothers and grandmothers, for many no longer see themselves as living traditional lives. Therefore, as explored below, older generation women qualify the lives of contemporary women as being too 'easy'. Middle generation women, however, convey the difficulties they face in attempting to adapt and survive in today's world.

Traditional fluidity of gender roles was an important asset for women when facing the challenges of colonization and the market system, for they were able to adapt to this change and accept 'modernity' on their own terms. It can be argued that traditional

[28] Of course there are men employed in these positions as well, but they are largely outnumbered by women. Men are the majority at the police station, the gas pump, and as maintenance workers for the school and clinic.

[29] For an examination of a similar situation , but among Inuit women, see Reimer (1996).

gender roles of women have, therefore, been supplemented rather than replaced by entry into the market system.

*b) "Life was hard..."*

A theme that pervaded women's accounts of the 'old days' was that a life spent in the bush was very strenuous for women, as they were responsible for the maintenance of the camp and the wellbeing of the family. Women describe camp life as being characterized by a multitude of physically challenging tasks.

*J: When my husband was hunting, he would be gone all day. He would leave early, and I would do all the work. I would cut the wood and carry the water and cut some boughs – everything! And sometimes I would have to cook some food for the dogs* [...] *Every morning I made his lunch. Before sunrise I would get up and make it for him. We did this for many years.*

*D: When I got married, my granny sat me down and taught me about being a good Cree wife. She said when your husband goes out hunting you have to get up early with him and make him a little lunch. Then you have to clean up the tent and make it all nice and put new fresh boughs if you need to. Then you have to take care of the kids and make sure that they are well fed. When your husband comes home, the tent should be warm and clean and there should be some good food waiting for him. Whatever he brings home, you have to prepare before you got to bed - especially goose and beaver- you have to take off their feathers and take out their guts and make them all nice.*

As part of successful bush living, women emphasized how they were required to remain strong, independent and competent as well as display their ability to overcome such hardships as starvation and childbirth.

*L: I remember in the old days, sometimes we didn't have enough in the bush, not enough food and we were hungry.*

*M: I had my baby there* [in the bush]. *I felt the pains and I was walking on the ice, and I stopped and had him* [the baby] *standing up on the ice.* [...] *I rested for one night and then I got up and walked the next day. Women were tough eh? Not like today.*

The hardship of the 'old days' is seen as contributing to a strong Cree woman, both in terms of her physical ability to cope under duress, and in terms of her sense of self. Hardship and the ability to survive in the face of challenges is a common theme in studies that focus on the personal experiences of Cree women. S. Preston's (1986) account of Alice Jacob's life is as much an exercise in the use of oral narrative and life histories, as it is a story of a woman overcoming a series of challenges in her life. Flannery's later work, Ellen Smallboy (1995), is a similar examination of a woman's ability to cope under

a variety of difficult situations. S. Preston (1981) has used the term 'competency' to describe this ability to remain self-reliant and independent. Displaying competency in all aspects of life, for both women and men, as identified by Preston (1976),[30] was considered to be an essential part of bush living. By recalling hardship in the past, women illustrate what competent Cree behaviour should be, and this ideal is reinforced through a contrast with contemporary behaviour.

Accounts of the past as 'hard' were used by women in many cases in juxtaposition with what they described as the relatively 'easy' life of contemporary women. When taking this narrative stance, women of each generation stated that women today have a much easier life than did women in the 'old days', and that women are not as strong as they used to be. Various reasons were given for this change, but overall, individuals noted that this was primarily due to the fact that women were no longer living bush lives, but were now settled in town with greater access to facilities and amenities. Using this narrative stance, women's tasks today were described as fewer and less taxing than those of women in the past. These tasks were also considered to be unique to the bush context, and relatively free from outside influences.

*Ma: My grandmother worked very hard. She had a very hard life. Life in the bush is hard. Women have to do a lot of the work there, like gather wood and, in the old days, women were the ones who set the nets. Life is easy for women today. Now they have things to help them. In the old days, they didn't have things like fridges, or stoves or washing machines. We used to do everything by hand. Things are easier now.*

*EJ: Life is easier. It is different. We* [women] *don't do the jobs we used to do... we used to scrub the floor and split the wood. We used to chop the wood. We don't do this anymore. We used to carry the water. Women did that too.* [...] *Now you just turn the tap and water comes out.*

*V: It was hard! Women had to do everything. They had to get water. They had to make clothes. Men were out all day. There were no stores to buy food so men had to spend all day out hunting. If you have something there to cook, you have to make sure that it is there for the husband when he gets home!*

*E: Granny would be in the bush cutting wood and I would take the dogs and bring them down, and go and get the wood, and after my granny gets back and she would saw them by hand. It's pretty different now. They* [women in town] *buy everything. They buy wood from other people. They didn't have that a long time ago. They used to cut their own wood from the bush.*

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[30] Richard Preston defines competency as: "behaviour that demonstrates effective interaction with the environment and to a synthesis of internal strength or will and aptitude that is the potential for such behaviour." (1976: 465)

Women now have access to a greater number of facilities to help them in their household tasks as well as raising their children:

*E: Now we have other stuff such as electricity, running water, washers and dryers...it is easier that way... they didn't have all that stuff in the old days.*

*J: Life was very hard. Now it is nothing! All the women used to nurse their babies, they didn't use a bottle. I didn't use Pampers too! No Pampers. I just used moss. I just put it outside or in the stove after they used it.*

In sum, in their descriptions of the present, women emphasized the introduction of amenities and facilities that have seemingly rendered the responsibility of maintaining a home comparably less physically taxing. Although these products and facilities are appreciated by women as aiding in their daily tasks, they are cited in narratives to highlight 'the ways things have changed'. However, as will be seen below, in spite of these developments, life for women today presents its own challenges, though different from those of their forbearers, and women continue to take on significant responsibilities.

*c) Generational differences*

Although women of both the older and middle generations took this narrative stance and spoke about the past as being 'hard', women of the middle generation were also quick to emphasize the very real challenges that women confront today. It is evident that although women's tasks have changed as a result of moving from a bush to a town setting, their roles of being responsible for child-care and the maintenance of the household have continued to be important. In addition, many middle generation women today see their roles as having expanded with the inclusion of wage labour, schooling, and the challenges of town living.

For older generations, women's lives today are described as being especially easy in comparison to their own lives and those of their grandmothers. With sedentarization and increasing commodification, women are seen as no longer experiencing hardship the way people did in the 'old days'.

*D: Life for women was much harder before. Now life is too easy and women don't know about hardship. They don't know what to do when things go wrong. When I was raising my kids, women were tough.*

Specifically, elder women now point to what they identify as laziness among today's women.

*J: Women today, they don't do nothing at all. My son's wife, she doesn't do anything...not even scrub the floor. I talk to her when I went down there* [to their house], *I said 'why you got lots of dishes? You need to work!"* [laughter]

Although this narrative stance is pervasive and, as will be seen below, an effective means of making comparisons, it does not necessarily reflect the reality of women's lived lives. While women from the middle generation also employed this narrative stance and identified the past as being 'hard', they simultaneously recognize that theirs and future generations have their own obstacles and hardships. For example, in order to help support their families today and contribute to the household income, women are now expected to take on wage labour positions. Increased time spent away from home, children and the extended family is seen as negatively affecting the solidarity of the family unit.

*V: Before, women had a hard life, but they were happy. It was a good life. I think that women are more stressed out now because of the workload they have you know? Office work and that. And they have no time to have close-knit families.*

Women's lives and tasks in the past are considered to have been physically difficult, and this was eased with the move to a sedentary context. However, women's responsibilities as caretaker and homemaker have continued. With the added challenge of wage labour, women's roles have expanded to encompass more responsibilities.

*S: It's true in a way that the women had a hard time in the old days, because they had to be as tough as the men. Because they had to live out on the land, and they also had to work really hard to keep the home living. I think that it is just different now. It is a different kind of easy for women today.*

Women express their frustration at having to work a 'double day' – i.e., employed during the day outside of the house, and working inside the home in the evening in order to keep the household running smoothly.

*E: I work so hard now! Life was hard in the old days, but now... now it is hard too. I work at my job all day and then I come home and I take care of my family and my husband, he doesn't work.*

In addition, women are seen as taking on more leadership roles in the workplace, the home and the community. The quote below suggests that relationships between husbands

and wives have been altered by social changes. Where once a form of role complementarity was observed, now women are more independent and find themselves supporting their family financially as well as emotionally.

*Vg: I think that women today are more... how do you say.. what's the word for.. when they are having more leadership. They are taking more responsibility for their own lives... they are more independent. There are a lot of working women here. I know some of the women's husbands who don't work and the* [the women] *support their men!* [laughter] *That would be unspeakable in the old days!* [laughter] *You have a lot more responsibilities ... and with the grocery thing...because in the old days, the men would go out hunting and they would bring the food.*

These women convey the difficulties inherent in contemporary everyday life, of working long hours in wage labor jobs and being responsible for their children and, in some cases, for the financial support of their husbands. Younger generation women also express their concerns over their current and future responsibilities. Increased expectations are now put on women to attend school and obtain gainful employment.

*C: I'm going to go to college in the fall to get my diploma in Accounting. I wouldn't want to stay at home, it would be too hard, I just need to do something to support my family.*

*Q: Women work all the time! They do everything! They have all the jobs! I see them everywhere.*

Life for women today has changed substantially in terms of particular tasks and life circumstances, and currently presents new and different challenges from those of 'the old days'. It is not possible to simply state, therefore, that women of the middle and younger generation believe that theirs is an 'easier' life in comparison with their mothers' and grandmothers'. For these women, present responsibilities and the adaptation to the rapid pace of change around them is the reality of their lived experience. The particular hardships of the 'old days' are very far from their everyday lives, and they have their own hardships to endure. However, women of these generations also utilize a modality of tradition when evoking the 'old days' in their narratives, whereby tradition is juxtaposed with modernity as a means of comparison. The past can subsequently become sentimentalized, and the present obscured, through rhetoric and narrative. It is evident, therefore, that a nostalgic stance towards the past is not a narrative device used simply by elder generations. It can be adopted by any speaker in their accounts of memories, as well as an effective contrastive tool in narrative commentary.

d) *"...but life was good!"*

The excerpts above demonstrate that, when taking this particular critical nostalgic narrative stance, women's lives in the past are described as more challenging than those of the present. Subsequently, statements such as these can then be used to make judgments on the relative facility of life for women today as a means of effective social commentary. Though the 'old days' are described as being more difficult, they are also described as being 'better' in many ways than contemporary life because they are associated with traditional life and traditional values.

*V: Woman had a really hard life a longtime ago. I think that they really enjoyed that traditional life, because it was part of them.*

Used in this context of describing the past, 'tradition' can, therefore, refer to a way of life that is removed from outside influence. It was a time when people were living a distinctively 'Cree' life that was, as V says, "part of them". As will be discussed in the following chapter, in their own self representations, tradition continues to inform women's understandings of their identities today. However, when used in narratives to characterize the past, tradition takes on a different modality and is understood in reference to a time that is qualitatively different from present life. Tradition is used in juxtaposition with modernity, and subsequently, any departure from this traditional model is expressed as change. This dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' quickly becomes problematic when women begin to talk about the continued importance of tradition to their everyday lives and their identities because it qualifies tradition as static and resistant to adaptation. Yet, this opposition is a powerful rhetorical tool of contrast to talk about change. Thus, tradition must be understood to have a number of modalities for individuals depending on what women are attempting to convey about their lives and their selves. Women highlight those changes in the community that they see as having the most significant impact on traditional life and, particularly, on traditional values – change is expressed in terms of impositions and contrasts with the rhetorically constructed ideal of the past. These changes are seen as contributing to the weakening of social bonds, of values and of the health of the body and community.

Tradition, Sense of Place and Community

The past was described as a time when families lived on the land, as opposed to living in town. Women contrasted the satisfaction that people have traditionally drawn from time spent in the bush, with the problems they perceive as being associated with town living. Gupta and Ferguson have described 'space' as a "kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization are inscribed" (1992:7). This notion is helpful in understanding how the Cree demarcate cultural and social differences between bush living and town living. The space of the bush is conceived as qualitatively different from that of the settlement. It is a place that is associated with Cree lifestyles and Cree values, in contrast to the perceived 'white man's ways' of town, and is thereby considered a source of comfort and spiritual nourishment. As seen in the following chapter, the bush continues to be a central component of Cree identity in spite of substantial changes in settlement patterns.

The Cree's traditional sense of place and community has undergone great changes with sedentarization. As described by Preston (1986), traditionally, the locus of the 'home' was considered to be the series of fall, winter and spring camp locations in the bush, and Waskaganish was simply a summer vacation community. As Waskaganish became a more permanent settlement, notions of 'community' and 'home' had to be renegotiated by the Cree. Although town life is now the norm for the majority of Cree families, some see traditional values as being compromised by settlement.

In interviews, elders reflected on how Waskaganish used to be in the 'old days' – i.e., in this context, their childhood – emphasizing how when they used to come to the community in the summers, Waskaganish seemed to be a much friendlier place. People would visit each other more often, and they would help each other out in times of need. Norms of reciprocity[31] and respect which guided life in the bush, would also regulate town life.

[31] For the Cree, reciprocity, respect and redistribution were fundamental to bush life. As described by Feit (1986) and Tanner (1979) traditional Cree hunting ideology is based on the belief that animals give themselves to hunters as gifts, and it is they who are largely responsible for successful or unsuccessful hunts. In order to ensure future success, the hunter must be observant and respectful while hunting. For their part, women must maintain a clean camp so that the animal spirit is not insulted when brought there. Hunter and animal are bound together in a relationship of reciprocity and respect; the ethic of respect inherent to Cree hunting is integrally related to the respect for the animals and the land.

*J: In the old days, they didn't have anything at all. They just used to put up their own tents. You know what they used to do? I'd see them, when they came by canoe, they would land and put their stuff on the ground and they would just sit down on the bank and people would come and give them tea and give them a snack. That's what they used to do a long time ago.* [laughter] *After they do that they used to take their stuff up and go and get wood to put up their tents.* [...] *And when somebody wants to go out, they just move everything out!*

Before the construction of houses by Indian Affairs, slowly beginning in the 1950's, families would gather at the site of Waskaganish and erect their tents by the waterfront. These structures were usually taken down when families were ready to go to the bush come winter. The mobility of hunting groups necessitated that families not carry large quantities of supplies. For a hunting culture, the ability to be mobile when needed was a well-valued asset. Middle generation women also speak of a time when people were more mobile. As stated by E, this mobility was also valued in town.

*E: In the olden days they didn't cost... they didn't pay rent in those days. In the time that these ladies were being interviewed* [Flannery's interview subjects], *they would just erect their tents or tipis, and then when they went to the bush they would just put it down, break it, and would go off to the bush. That is what they had to do. They would take all their belongings. They didn't have much belongings. They could move anytime. That is what they used to do.*

These norms are contrasted with the present situation in Waskaganish. As explored by Jacobs (1993) and Adelson (2001), planned housing settlements have been blamed as an inhibitor to visiting between families, and town life is seen as having led to decreased inter-household sharing. As discussed by Adelson, people see the permeable canvas tent walls as more conducive to communication than permanent houses. One of her informants states:

> There is the community togetherness that is not here [in the village]. Because it is very hard. Even with my next door neighbors – we have walls .. [on] both sides, we would live this close if we were in a tent side by side. All those barriers that were put around us, barriers that isolate us from one another, are taken away when we live in our traditional way.
> (2001:298)

This attitude towards the modern establishments vs. the traditional settlements can also be seen in Waskaganish.

*L: People never visit any more. In the old days, we visited all the time and people talked* [to each other].

In their narratives, women cite the move to permanent housing as marking the beginning of substantial changes to traditional life-ways, and consequently to traditional values.

*Mn: When I was little, my family lived in a tent on the bank of the water in the summer and then in winter we would move. I loved moving.* [...] *I would carry all our belongings on my back like this* [Mn demonstrates 'miskoben' - how to take a piece of caribou hide and string it around the object to be carried and then loop part of the hide around your forehead to take some of the weight – which is also known as a 'tump line']. *Things were different when we moved into a house. That is when things started to fade.*

Patterns of social relationships between families and community members, such as visiting, have been altered and reworked under conditions of sedentarization, and have, for many, led to a sentiment of decreased social or community solidarity. Women, therefore, cite the institution of housing and increased sedentarization of the community as being a change in the community that has not only affected physical living conditions, but has also influenced certain values that were promoted in association with traditional living conditions.

Bush food

Related closely to shifts in living patterns is what women see as a movement away from the procurement and consumption of traditional foods. The eating habits of the 'old days' are contrasted with the consumption of store-bought food today. A traditional life spent in the bush is positively associated with eating bush food. As explored by Adelson (1992) and Feit (1991), the procurement and consumption of bush food is, and continues to be, one of the fundamental elements in the Cree sense of well being. Bush food includes goose, duck, ptarmigan, hare, porcupine, beaver, caribou, moose, grouse, bear and a variety of different fish that are hunted, trapped and fished from the lands and waters of Cree territory. These foods are described as being a source of strength in contrast to store-bought foods, because of their superior nutritional value, and most significantly, because of their connection to the land and bush life.[32]

*E: Me, I like to get my fresh meat from the bush. That is how we do it here. It is so good!* [laughter] *Food from the bush is so good and it makes you strong.* [...] *In the old days, we ate it all the time. That was our way.*

*V: People don't go to the bush as much anymore. It's sad! You can get good food there.* [...] *Some of them eat more white food than wild meat now. That is not for the older*

[32] The devaluation of store-bought food in contrast to bush food is found in other Native communities as well. See Weine, Sabry and Ever (1989) for a discussion of this among the Metis and Algonquians in the Western parts of Canada.

*people. My husband and I barely eat it* [store-bought food] *you know? We have to be really hungry to eat that stuff from the store. It's not really that fresh when it comes here. But when you go to the woods there and get it... fresh fresh*!

Store-bought food is seen as contributing to the 'weakness' of contemporary Cree. This is in part because people are no longer reliant on the bush to procure food. The hardship of the 'old days' revolved around the threat of dwindling resources and the challenges of securing bush food. Women describe the time spent trapping and fishing as healthy because they are out on the land.

*Mn: I still like to go fishing. It feels so good to be out in the bush or just sit by the river there and get my food right there like... like in the old days* [laughter]. *People only do it* [fish] *for fun now.*

*V: People are weaker now... no one eats right. They eat all that stuff there from the store. I miss the good food.*

Further, store bought food has resulted in very real health risks. Diabetes and obesity have become two of the largest and fastest growing health problems in Northern communities. It has been reported that up to 60% of Cree children age 6 to 12 are overweight (Montgomery 2004: section A1 Montreal Gazette). Health experts have pointed to the increased consumption of sugar, carbohydrates and fats due to cheap prices and easier availability as the cause of obesity in northern communities.[33]

In Waskaganish, the Northern Store and a smaller convenience store provide the community with a variety of different wet and dry packaged goods, as well as beef and chicken. Though vegetables are available, workers at the local clinic stated to me that community members are not familiar with how to incorporate these vegetables into their daily diets. This characterization seems to me to be somewhat simplified. From my observation and conversations with women in the community, it is not that they do not know how to prepare balanced meals, it is that they do not have, or take, the time to do so.

Store-bought goods were first introduced in the form of tea, flour, lard and sugar by the Hudson's Bay Company, and today's elders remember using these foodstuffs

[33] Lately, this issue has been in the larger national spotlight due to a series of articles published in the Montreal Gazette (January 26-29 2004). Under the heading 'Cree Health Crisis', Sue Montgomery reports on the changing eating habits of Cree youth in Chisasibi. Though such reports hold truth, they also contribute to already entrenched negative stereotypes of 'overweight Natives' held by southerners.

alongside bush food. However, they emphasize how there were fewer of these imported items in their childhood. In addition, they do not equate these items with today's 'southern' foods. They see them as qualitatively different. This can be attributed both to the longer time frame in which these older introduced items have been used, and also to the fact that newer foodstuffs have made a dramatically negative impact on people's health.

*L: I remember when we got all sorts of things came into the store – all that different food, and lots of candy. We used to go out [to the bush] and then come back here in the summer and there was hardly anything in the store.* [...] *The first time they had the pop, people went crazy. People were drinking it so much. But they* [health workers] *said that too much pop is bad to drink. Too much sweet. Too much sugar, and they get tired.*

*J: When I was a little girl, we didn't have any of that stuff from the store. Just a little flour or tea. We had rabbit and beaver. No moose. Just rabbit and beaver and partridge.*

Women from the middle generation recognize the cultural value placed on country food, but many did not learn the traditional skills needed to prepare such things as *shikumin* (fish eggs and blueberries) or *sakapwaan* (goose slowly cooked over an open fire). Many expressed their regret at not having acquired these traditional skills because of having been sent to residential schools when they were young. However, as will be discussed below, many of these traditional culinary skills were relearned and are being incorporated into contemporary life.

It can be seen, therefore, that traditional foods are considered to be superior nutritionally and valuatively to store-bought foods, and that women see the increased consumption of store-bought foods as contributing to current weakness, both physically and morally, in Cree individuals.

## The Road

The most oft cited change that women describe as having occurred in Waskaganish in recent years is the construction of a new all-season road connecting the community to the James Bay highway. The road has been subject to much discussion as it had caused people to reflect on the new accessibility of the community, and how outside influences are affecting Cree ways. Previous to its completion, the community was accessible by plane, barge, or by a winter road that could only be used during deep freeze (and which my informants told me took over six hours to drive the winter road to the

main highway). Now it is possible to drive from Waskaganish to the city of Val d'Or in just over seven hours. Preston and Long have attributed a large part of cultural and environmental change in the north to developments in transportation (1998:269). They explain how the increased circulation of much-appreciated goods also brings increased contact with outside influences. The road, therefore, has brought much dispute among residents as to its positive or negative impacts on the well-being of community. Women emphasized how expensive it was to leave town before the road was built:

*VG: I'm glad the road has come in. We used to have to take the plane in and out. It costs.*

*M: Before the road, you couldn't really go out easily... it cost a fortune to get out of here. If you want to go out with your kids to, like, show them the city, you wouldn't be able to afford it, it is so much money. But now, there's a road and when you wanna go out, you can go out!*

Elders of the community were more hesitant than younger residents about the completion of the road, and saw it as an invitation for negative outside influences.

*M: The old people, they didn't want it at first. They were worried about bad things coming in.*

*Eth: Some people didn't want to have it* [the road]. *They were worried that their daughters would run away or get kidnapped or run away with other people. They were warned to watch their kids, that's why they were afraid, the older people. But the young people, they were excited.*

The road has meant that residents are traveling to and from the community much more often than in previous generations. Many couples or families will make the seven hour trip for little more than a night in Val D'Or. These trips are taken to purchase goods and services that are difficult to obtain in the community, as well as simply to enjoy the night life of the city.

The increased mobility has brought many new products into the community, and some residents blame the road for making people more oriented towards material goods. This has resulted in increasing jealousy between community members, and, according to some women, has thereby further weakened traditional social bonds.

*Vc: Before the road, people never left. Now people have big vehicles – huge vehicles! The people here now have this thing of wanting what the other person has. They see somebody with something they like and they say 'I'm gonna get one too!'*

However, women also see increased products as a positive thing, as it can bring down prices. Along with outside goods, some women also saw the road as bringing in people from out of town. This development can be both positive and negative: positive for the possible economic benefit and human interest, but negative for the potential harmful exterior influences.

*D: There are more outsiders coming in now. Before it was just the company manager and the minister. Now there are researchers and hydro-people and even tourists!*

Most significantly, the road has been blamed for what women see as an increase in drinking and drug use in the community. Waskaganish, in contrast to many other James Bay settlements, is a 'dry' community. There is no bar and the consumption of alcohol is prohibited anywhere in the town, and theoretically results in a hefty fine. However, bootlegging and illegal vending occurs and alcohol circulates widely. Though community members are aware of those individuals who are responsible for this circulation, little is done to curtail it.

*Mn: I see a lot more drunks now.*

*L: There is a lot more bad things coming in because of the road, like drinking and things...*

*Vg: There is a lot more violence, a lot more drinking, a lot more drugs, a lot more theft. It is all alcohol related theft. We had a young man froze to death here in the community a couple of years ago. We found him near the school here. Because of the drinking.*

*E: People go out to buy liquor. They are selling it here. It's the young people, they are drinking a lot now, even the younger ones they are starting. They used to drink , but not as much as before*

A few younger women told me that now people are drinking more alcohol because beer is more readily available. Where once people were drinking spirits more easily smuggled on aircraft, now higher-volume cases of beer are brought in easily using trucks. Drugs are also becoming more widely used by the younger generation, specifically marijuana and cocaine.

The road is seen generally in contradictory ways by different individuals in the community. With the welcome arrival of new luxury items and amenities, there is a simultaneous uncertainty among some as to the effects these items with have on Cree life. The road is a physical manifestation of increasing contact with the outside world and has,

therefore, been met with dissent. Discussing the road in their narratives provides women an opportunity to reflect on how increased mobility and increased exposure impacts on former lifeways.

Sedentarization, increased store-bought food, and the construction of the new road are all seen as having affected not only the physical well-being of the community, but also as having a negative impact on the social well-being of the community. According to these women, these changes have weakened traditional norms and values such as social connectedness, solidarity and respect.

## Conclusion

In their discussions of the past, women describe a time when outside interferences were minimal. In these narratives, life was harder, but the hardships were those endured by people living a traditional Cree life on the land. Though some items are seen as advantageous to everyday living, and others add luxury to life, they are simultaneously regarded as impediments to Cree activities, and hence to being Cree. Therefore, as seen above, there is ambivalence about the arrival of new influences and products that are considered to affect both physical circumstances and social-cultural well-being.

A positive valuation of the past is not a unique feature of the Cree. Cross-culturally, individuals, especially of older generations, describe the past as a time when things were better than the present. People are described as stronger and more resourceful in the face of harder circumstances. This view can often obscure the very real challenges that individuals face in the present, and result in an overly sentimentalized image of the past. However, as evidenced by the statements of middle generation women, women are very aware of the challenges of modern female roles and responsibilities. Nonetheless, as demonstrated above, nostalgic recollections of the past can also serve as a functional narrative device to comment on change and to emphasize the importance of traditional values and lifeways.

Studies of life history and narrative demonstrate that the ways in which people remember is a social process and is dependant on the context in which the individual is recounting (Ray 2000:132, Middleton and Edwards 1990:2). Memory is highly contingent and constructed. It cannot be understood in isolation but rather as a product of conversations with others. Therefore, at issue in the study of memory is not how

accurately a recollection fits some piece of a past reality, but why historical actors have constructed their memories in a particular way at a particular time. As stated by Cruikshank: "distorted statements about the past can be central intellectual devices for thinking about real dilemmas in the present" (1990:53).

In their narratives of the past and the significant changes they perceive, women called upon their own memories of childhood experiences, stories they have heard, as well as collective memories of a past not within their lifetimes. They used a conceptualization of the past as objectified tradition to be a baseline against which to measure change. As stated by Julie Cruikshank in her work with Athapaskan women:

> ...traditional Athapaskan narratives are powerful because they are constructions rooted in general social concerns, even though they are refracted through individual tellers by the time we hear them. Like good stories, they contain multiple messages: they explore social contradictions women have faced, but *they also dramatize a cultural ideal woman recognize.* (Ibid:341, emphasis added)

Retrospective narratives create the present through idioms of remembrance. As people tell and retell their memories, these memories are frequently adjusted to form a smooth linear narrative, thereby changing and revaluating their content. Therefore, a form of sentimentalizing of the past is often evident, whereby the past is described and construed in such a way to allow for moral commentary. For the Cree, the historical past of the 'old days' was fraught with very real hardships that, in some cases, resulted in great loss of life.[34] However, by emphasizing the value of the past in contrast with the present, I do not believe that women of any generation are expressing their desire to return to 'the old days' when things were harder but more traditional. Rather, these times represent a sentimentalized ideal - not one to be striven for in life - but rather a time period when the Cree were living solely off the land and traditional values were upheld.

By continuing to recount 'how things used to be', women are establishing a continuity with past lifestyles, and thereby both describing change, and asserting present values and concerns. When traditions are articulated in this way, these memories convey much to the members of society about who they are as a consequence of who they have

[34] Stories of starvation are almost ubiquitous among Cree women's narratives of the early 20th century. Though fewer women today recount these stories, the memory of starvation and a time of want remains in many narratives of the past.

been. Tradition here is used in a positive way in the construction of collective memories of peoples' pasts and practices in ways that elicit feeling of pride and attachment.

Although in the context of its use in memories of the past, tradition is used to designate what seems to be a static, essentialized way of life in contrast to modernity, I posit that this is simply one of its very real conceptual modalities. In the following section, I will demonstrate that tradition can also be used and understood in a more fluid, transformative manner. Contemporary understandings and constructions of Cree identity as a distinct cultural group are premised on their grounding in the past and the reinterpretation and valuation of tradition. Therefore, tradition emerges as a highly complex concept that has value for women both as a designation of 'how things used to be', but also as a continued source of identity affirmation and a powerful tool of cultural and self-representation.

## Chapter Five
## Tradition and Identity

Introduction

Following the above discussion, to conclude that tradition for the Cree is a static concept grounded permanently in the past would be to obscure its complexity and variability. Tradition emerges from these interviews as playing a significant part in the conceptualization and representation of women's identities today.

In the face of changing life circumstances, women have renegotiated the meaning and relevance of tradition as a means of incorporating it into their own contemporary lives. Concurrently, tradition, and its meaning to individuals and their identity, can be understood in more pluralistic and dynamic terms, with its content varying from one individual to another. In the community, tradition is being manifested in everyday life through certain activities and practices, such as traditional crafts and food preparation, as well as in the revival or persistence of particular ceremonies such as the Walking Out Ceremony. Though these have undergone some exterior change, they remain symbolically important. In addition, it is possible to identify the persistence of traditional values in events that are not themselves considered traditional.

Tradition has particular ideological significance as a category associated with being Cree, and with the most valued aspects of Cree life such as going to the bush. It is, therefore, an important tool for women to represent themselves as Cree and, consequently, assert their cultural identity and their membership within the larger cultural community.

In this section, I will be dealing primarily with data collected from middle generation women (age 40-61), who can be categorized as the 'transition generation' from bush to sedentary life. It is evident that these women have had to evaluate the meaning of tradition to their lives. Middle generation women today are living a much less 'traditional' life than their mothers and grandmothers, but tradition remains a valuable concept in their self-definition and cultural identity. These women have been confronted by much upheaval and have adapted to changing life circumstances. In the narratives of their lives, women display a sensitivity to and awareness of how traditional values and practices have been affected by these changes. As a result, tradition now occupies a

negotiated space for individuals as it can represent an old way of life that holds little practical bearing on everyday life, but it also can be a symbolic source of identity affirmation. As such, it connects individuals with their cultural heritage and values and can be manifested in different ways to represent this connection.

In light of recent political movements, the Cree have established themselves as a vocal group at the national and international level. Over the course of dealing with Euro-Canadian encroachments, the Cree have developed a political discourse that employs tradition as a means of asserting their identity. Although I cannot argue here that women with whom I spoke were highly politicized or had particular agendas in their narratives of change, it is probable that a politicized discourse has influenced how some individuals speak about tradition, most significantly in the context of resistance and representation. An assertion of a connection with traditions is most apparent when women believe that their 'authenticity' as Cree is being threatened. At moments when women became more aware of my position as anthropologist and 'represent-er of culture', they were more likely to stress their knowledge, practice and value of tradition. Again, it must be stressed, however, that this politicized use of tradition was largely imperceptible among the narratives of women with whom I spoke. Rather, it was their participation in traditional activities, use of traditional symbols and valuation of traditional norms as means of personal cultural identity assertion that was mostly in evidence.

Tradition in the context of women's representations of their identity must be understood as constantly being reworked, redefined and reformulated, but at the same time having significant links to a distinctive Cree heritage and way of life. As explored in the theories of Preston (1999,1999a) and J. Scott (1985), tradition embodies both flexibility and a degree of loyalty to a cultural form. It can be adjusted and be manifested in different ways and for different purposes but still maintain its symbolic value as having reference to unique Cree values and practices and therefore function to assert an individual's cultural identity.

Self-definition and Cultural Identity

In the narratives of their lives and cultural change, Cree women were engaging in self-definition. Life stories and accounts of the past serve to position an individual in the present, and thereby constitute a form of self-making. The notions of self-definition and

self-making are closely linked to identity, or the way in which one identifies oneself. However, the concept of identity is usually considered to go beyond these self-concepts. It implies a sense of attachment, and a link to a larger collectivity such as an ethnic group or culture (Weaver 2001:2). Additionally, it is argued that identities do not exist before they are constructed, and that the process of identity formation is ongoing. As stated by Butler, identity is: "an ongoing discursive process that is open to intervention and resignification" (1990:33). Most theorists agree that identity exists, not solely within an individual or category of individuals, but through difference in relationship with others (Berry 1999:3). It is argued that identity is a process of social negotiation in the continuously changing relationships between different social groups under distinctive social situations (Marcus and Fisher 1986 in Chan 1998).

In this analysis, I will use the concept of cultural identity because it implies a common history in relation to the larger society. Cultural identity is defined as "the total experience of a group of people" and includes "spirituality, language, norms, of behaviour and social organization , tradition and rituals, elements of a group's history and values and beliefs that are passed from one generation to another" (Barrios and Egan 2002: 208). This concept of identity is larger conceptually than racial or ethnic identity. In addition, it grounds identity in a heritage of lived experience and therefore includes a notion of temporality and history. Of course, people may identify themselves in ways other than by their cultures. Identity is a composite of many things such as gender, race, class, education, region, religion, and culture. It can be argued, however, that the facets of identity are inextricably linked, and for the purposes of this essay, I will focus on tradition as a component of cultural identity.

As suggested in the definition quoted above, tradition can be considered to be an integral part of cultural identity. It follows that as cultures adapt to changing circumstances, concepts such as tradition undergo reformulation and adaptation as well. As explored in the theories of Handler and Linnekin (1984) and Preston (1999,1999a), rather than equating tradition with the unchanging past, tradition can now be thought of on par with the inherently creative and processual quality of culture.

Though it can be argued that tradition forms a significant element in Cree women's identities, it cannot be said that Cree identity is grounded solely in the past. To do so would perpetuate a uni-modal conception of tradition that ignores its transformative

capacities, and grossly simplifies the notion of Cree identity. Cree women are not defined by their ability to fish, sew or speak Cree. These are simply elements of their multi-faceted characters, and are highly valued as means of asserting their *cultural* identity. As will be seen below, those aspects of Cree traditions that women choose to highlight as central to their identity vary from a fundamental connection to the land to the ability to pluck a goose. Most of these women have adapted to great change in their lives, and therefore have a more pragmatic approach to tradition. They incorporate those aspects of traditional skills and practices into their lives as they see fit, and express their desire to maintain certain values in their families. For example, as stated by Clifford: "tradition is not a wholesale return to past ways, but a practical selection and a critical reweaving of roots" (2004: 7).

As ethnic and indigenous groups become increasingly diversified, cultural group boundaries more porous and identity more contingent, the ways in which individuals identify with or assert their membership to a cultural or ethnic group can become highly symbolic. As explored by Gans (1996[1979]) and Buckser (1999), acts such as eating traditional food and observing culturally significant holidays can become detached from their original contexts and take on symbolic and social functions to affirm cultural community solidarity and/or simply remind individuals of their cultural heritage and their cultural identity. For some of the women with whom I spoke, particular activities and ceremonies, such as going to the bush, the Walking Out and eating Cree food, serve these symbolic functions. While they live out their daily lives, some women, and especially those from the middle generation, are more concerned about carrying out their responsibilities – not necessarily living a traditional life. Therefore, tradition becomes less a structure for how people live their lives, and more a selective symbolism that women use to assert their cultural identity as Cree.

The Bush: "It's our tradition, it's what makes us who we are"

It has been established that new social circumstances have transformed Cree social systems into something quite distinct from their historical counterparts. Nevertheless, there is continuity in some aspects of Cree life, and this can be seen in the continued valuation of traditional practices of hunting, fishing and living off the land. These activities have formed the basis of Cree society and identity for many years, and

successive generations have valued these activities. In these interviews, women of all ages articulated the importance of the land to their lives and to the continued health of their culture, but in light of social change, going to the bush has become less a livelihood and more a symbolically significant space.

For elder women, the majority of their lives has been spent in the bush, and they expressed regret at not being able to return as often as they would like as a result of their old age. Instead, many older women of Waskaganish spend the summer months at the 'Gravel Pit' – a camping site at approximately 140 km down the road – or have camps across the river, and return to the town as infrequently as possible.

*L: I like to be in the bush. We used to go out and then come back here in the summer.*

*J: I don't like to be in town. I like the bush. I don't stay in town much. I always want to go...around September 15 in the fall and then come back in June – the last week in June.*

These women identify strongly with bush living and traditional activities. They are themselves referred to by others as 'traditional women'. However, they have also adapted their ways of life in order to accommodate change and incorporate traditional activities. Bush life is different from how it used to be 'in the old days'. Cabins, generators, electrical saws and introduced foodstuffs have all found their way into everyday usage, but they have not affected the principles of bush life and its importance to these women's identities. Although elders will comment on how bush life has been changed by amenities when they are making contrasts with the past, bush life is still considered part of Cree traditions, however it is practiced.

This is evident in the ways in which middle generation women relate to bush life and how they have incorporated it into their lives. For the majority of this generation, their early lives spent in the bush with their families were disrupted by residential school. Women stated that this disruption caused many of them to lose those traditional skills, language and values that they had learned.

E*: When I spent time in the bush with my family members, my family taught me everything... the Cree way...* [laughter] *I leaned how to cook ... I learned how to skin a rabbit. Then I left* [for school]. *I learned the white man's way there.*

*L: I never wished I was in the bush when I was a teenager. And I used to find it hard when my mum and dad would say that they were going in the bush, because I'd say 'oh no, not in the bush!', and I didn't like it because I felt that... I was only coming home for*

*a while I didn't want to spend time in the bush, you know? When you are spending your life in residential school, you don't know about the freedom of the bush.* [...] *Now I know.*

As women finished school, many returned to the bush with their husbands. The process of then becoming settled in town, and once again giving up bush life was seen as a difficult but inevitable choice. Currently, many of these women find themselves trapped between wanting to live, as L states below, a 'modern life', and their desire to spend time in the bush.

*M: Women have to stay in town and give up going to the bush. They have jobs now! But they have to work. When they go on breaks to the bush, they don't want to come back. They always want longer holidays and want to stay out.*

*L: I think that they* [women] *are taking care of their houses. A lot has changed. Most people are trying to live a 'modern life', and there are more jobs for women in town.* [...] *It's hard to go to the bush now, you need money. You need money to do a lot of things now.*

Women continue to reference the bush as a source of spiritual nourishment and as an important aspect of their identity as Cree.[35]

*Vg: Sometimes I don't want to got to work. I prefer to be outdoors doing outdoors things. Being on the land... that's part of me, eh?*

*Vc: It feels so good in the bush. Sometimes I long to go out in the Bay, you know?*

As a means of adapting to change and continuing to incorporate tradition into their identities, some women expressed their ability to live in 'two different worlds' - ie. modern and traditional. This strategy of adaptation is generally known as biculturation. Berry defines biculturation as "a positive orientation toward the maintenance of the cultural integrity of the non-dominant group, as well as the movement by this group to become an integral part of a larger societal framework" (1999:3). This definition refers primarily to ethnic groups living amongst a dominant culture, but it can be applied in this case. As middle generation women took jobs in town, many felt they had to adapt to town life and learn to be working women and sedentary wives. For some this adaptation has been useful, as it allowed them to be successful in their employment. For others adaptation has meant that traditional skills and knowledge were pushed to the wayside.

[35] For a parallel discussion of the importance of the bush among the Innu, see Degnen (2001).

Developing a bicultural identity and maintaining the ability to function in the bush, if possible, is greatly valued.[36]

*Vc: I am so attached to that way of life* [in the bush]... *I spent so much time there* [before she got a job in town]. *I know the other way of life really well now. I have spent time in other places. I have been to Montreal, but I still have it in my heart to be here. I like this kind of living, this modern way of living, but I still have to be there* [the bush] *you know?*

*E: I live in both worlds now. I'm happy I learned the other culture* [non-Cree] *too. Now I know both of them.*

*M: Even though I don't go there as much... I can be on my own* [in the bush]. *I believe that if I was to be on my own in the bush, I would survive one way or another. I still know my traditions.*

However, this strategy of adaptation has not been successful for all middle generation women. It is apparent that for many there is a generation gap in terms of knowledge of traditional language and skills. Middle generation women found that the residential school experience combined with sedentarization and other substantial life changes resulted in a desire to 'let the past go' in an effort to adapt to circumstances (S.Preston 1986:108). Yet, as will be examined in the following section, younger generation women seem to display a desire to learn traditions from the elder generation, and a form of revitalization is observable – though, as will be seen below, there is dissent as to the extent of this interest.

Traditional Skills and Practices

Women highlighted particular skills and practices as important demonstrations of the continuance of their traditions, and evidence that tradition still figures largely in their daily lives. These activities also serve to symbolically link individuals to their cultural heritage.

Sewing moccasins and mittens out of moosehide is a pastime that women pursue as a means of generating extra income, and also to maintain the knowledge of this skill.

[36] However, it must be kept in mind that developing a fully coherent bicultural identity is difficult to achieve, and it is likely that these women are commenting more on their ability to *function* in 'both worlds', as opposed to their ability to comfortably take on the identity of the 'white world' at the expense of Cree values. It has been found that attempting to achieve a level of comfort in the 'white world' can lead to disorientation and identity confusion (M.Freeman, personal communication).

Most women stressed that they had learned this skill from their female ancestors, and that it was something that they could do to connect them with their forbearers.

*L:I like to sew these* [moccasins]. *I learned it from my grandmother when we were in the bush. We did it a lot then... they didn't have shoes in the old days!* [laughter] *I still do it now.*

The manner in which these items are made has changed. Women who do not go to the bush now have to pay others for smoked moosehide as they do not procure it themselves. These items are no longer strictly necessary for winter wear, but women continue to make them and many stated that they prefer to wear moosehide mittens. They are valued over those bought at the store.

*E: These* [showing me mittens she had made] *are better than the ones you get in the store. They are warmer and they smell so good*!

Another skill that women highlighted was their ability to cook bush food. In his discussion of the Jewish community in Denmark, Buckser has emphasized the fact that individuals use traditional ethnic foods to demonstrate cultural identity in the face of changing lifestyles (1999:191). For the Cree, as seen in the preceding section, bush food is considered a source of health, both spiritually and nutritionally. Not all middle generation women have successfully incorporated bush food into their daily family lives. Some stated that their children are not interested in traditional food, and that is why they do not cook it. Also, a few women mentioned that they find it more difficult to get these types of foods in town. For others however, cooking traditional food in a traditional manner is a significant way of asserting their connection to their culture. Two particular instances serve as examples. The first was time I spent with an informant (E) while she was plucking geese. The spring Goose Break had just ended when I arrived in the community, and so geese were plentiful. We sat in her living room around the kitchen table and feathers began to fly. She showed me how to yank them from the roots, but we both laughed when I showed my ineptitude. Throughout this activity, E talked of the continued significance of hunting and eating bush animals such as geese. Both E and her husband, who was present, agreed that this activity was a tradition and that it was an important part of 'being Cree'. When the plucking was done, and the bodies of the birds were laid out lovingly in display, it was a wonderful sight. E told me that she was going

to distribute the birds among her family, but that she had to do most of the plucking because not all of her sisters knew how.

The second experience was an afternoon spent with M in her cooking tent. In Waskaganish, many people have constructed semi-permanent tents in their backyards that women use to cook over an open fire. I was invited to eat with M and to learn how to make bannock, as well as string meat over the fire so that it cooks evenly. When I arrived, the tent was full of laughing women and children who were visiting. As the afternoon progressed, people dropped in to see 'how we were getting on'. The space of the cooking tent was obviously one where people felt comfortable and at ease. The smell alone - of meat and woodsmoke - was soothing. Through her demonstrations, M stressed that 'this was the way we do things here'. She also stated that 'things taste better when they are cooked this way'. M asserted that the Cree were not losing their traditions, and took herself and her cooking tent as an example. She maintained that she will continue to prepare food in this way as long as her body allowed her to, and that she will pass this skill onto her children, as she says 'it is something we do'. This cooking tent is a means for M to connect with her heritage and display the appropriate behaviour of respect towards the animals she cooks, by cooking them in a traditional way over an open fire.

Tradition, therefore, can exist in women's lives in piecemeal ways. Attributes may have been altered slightly through the introduction of new materials and the adaptation to new circumstances, but the way in which these practices have changed is not significant. What is important are the meanings that these practices and skills continue to derive for individuals. Present day traditional activities are given symbolic potency through their reference to the past. They function to link an individual with their cultural group when other aspects of life have been altered. Here tradition is conceived as something flexible but at the same time having reference to the past and a distinctive Cree way.

Ceremonies and Events

As discussed by Schochet, the participation in traditional ceremonies can be satisfying sources or confirmations of identity. They provide a social context for tradition and can work to strengthen social bonds (2004:13). Ceremonies represent a conscious articulation of traditions in the community. As such, they embody both fluidity and

continuity, as they have been modified over the years, but have remained symbolic assertions of unique Cree identity. Nevertheless, as will be demonstrated below, these events can themselves undergo resignification and recontextualisation.

*a) Walking out Ceremony*

The recent increased interest in the Walking Out ceremony serves as an example of how residents have renegotiated the meaning of tradition in their lives. The ceremony provoked discussion as to the 'authenticity' of this event.

While I was in Waskaganish, the community organized what was deemed a 'traditional walking out ceremony'. Unfortunately, and to my great regret, I did not attend because it was held in the early hours of the third day of my arrival in the community, and I had not yet made enough connections with residents to be notified of such an event. The Walking Out is a ceremony that figures largely in Flannery's notes, and therefore, I was able to discuss the event with women in subsequent conversations during interviews. Many women cited the event as an example of the continuity and strength of Cree traditions in the community. However, for some women, this ceremony has lost much of what it used to stand for, and has therefore become more a performance whereby individuals are solely 'going through the motions' without understanding the significance of the event, as opposed to a meaningful celebration of tradition and cultural continuity.

The Walking Out is a ceremony to celebrate a child's first steps outside the family tent, and traditionally signifies the role a male or female is expected to uphold. In addition, the ceremony was an affirmation of that child's spiritual relationship with the land and animals based on reciprocity and respect. Flannery's informants, as well as Preston's conversations with John Blackned (2002[1975]) provide an historical description of Walking Out ceremonies in Waskaganish. In these accounts, the ceremony is described as taking place *"when there is lots of food"* (Anderson Jolly 1938: card #84-87) - i.e. the ceremony would be held when there was enough food amassed to hold a feast - *"they* [the family unit] *would gather a lot of meat for a feast"* (Preston 2002 [1975]:33). When a child was almost two years old, families would begin to prepare for the event by gathering food, sewing new moosehide clothing and carving the small wooden axes for girls, and the wooden bows or, later, guns for boys that the children would carry on their backs as they exit the tent to symbolize their respective roles in the traditional division of labour.

Flannery's informants describe the event for a girl:

> *The little girl carries some wood home on her back , when she gets back everyone kisses her, and her grandfather takes the wood for her, she has an axe of wood because hunting wood in the winter is a woman's job.* (Margaret Blackned 1938: card #91)

> *When she goes out, she has a stick made like a hook and a little wooden axe, and a little firewood on her back, and just a little bit of meat. Before she goes out, they* [her family] *dress her up and then she brings in that wood. Then she goes to her granny who takes the wood off her back, and her grandfather takes some of the meat that she has and puts it into the fire. Then they use the wood to cook the meat. The men always eat first. When they are done feasting, an old man sings and plays the drum, and there is dancing. The women stay in one place at the back of the tent with their backs to the fire, and the men dance around the fire.* (Mrs. Kitchen 1938: card #208-210)

John Blackned describes this ceremony for boys:

> *This bow and arrow that the boy had as his first toy also prepared him for hunting. They would make decoys of deer, marten etc. for him to shoot with his boy and arrow. He would shoot at these decoys with his arrow* [...] *Sometimes they would put a piece of meat beside the decoy, just as if he killed the animal of the meat.*[...] *After all the meat was cooked, they had a big feast for him. They announced to the other people at the feast that the young boy killed all this meat. All of the people praised the boy.* (Preston 2002 [1975]:34)

The ceremony, therefore, was a significant ritual in a child's traditional socialization that served both to introduce the child to the community and to recognize his or her future role in the family unit.

The Walking Out that took place in Waskaganish in the summer of 2003 was held in the main grassy clearing near the waterfront. A large tipi was constructed and much time was spent preparing food for the feast, sewing or obtaining moosehide clothing for the children to wear, and carving the wooden tools for them to carry. The ceremony was organized by the Wellness Society in association with the families who wished to participate. In contrast to the accounts of Flannery and Preston, a number of children were involved simultaneously, as opposed to one or two children of the traditional family unit. The event was large and attended by many members of the community as well as some tourists who were in the area. The event loosely followed the traditional guidelines, with children being encouraged to 'walk out' of the tent holding their appropriate tools. It is now largely understood that these steps are not the child's 'first' outside, but one

woman I spoke to did tell me that her daughter had not walked outside the house until that time.

None of the women I interviewed had a child who participated in this event, though a few had grandchildren who had participated in other years. Only two of the women had had Walking Outs when they were children, but all were familiar with the ceremony when we discussed Flannery's notes. A number of women commented that the fact that the community still holds Walking Out ceremonies is an indication that Cree traditions have been maintained, and cited this event as an example of cultural continuity in the community.

*E: That shows we still have our traditions eh?*

*M: We still do that here* [the Walking Out]. *It is an important tradition for us.*

However, four women mentioned that Walking Out ceremonies had been stopped for a long period of time and that they had been revitalized only in the past couple years. As J, an elder in her late 70's explains, when the ceremonies started again, the community was wary of them at first.

*J: They didn't have that for a long time. There was a time that they didn't do it. The first time I saw a child doing that was my aunt's son. I was around 16 or 17 and for a long time I didn't see it. It stopped.*
*Margaret: I wonder why?*
*J: When the Pentecostal church came, everything stopped. They stopped it. All my kids did it with their kids, but I didn't do it. When it started again, people* [who were Pentecostal] *didn't even want to go inside the tent.*

As the influence of Pentecostalism and other introduced religions became widespread in the community, ceremonies that were believed to be tied to traditional spirituality, such as the Walking Out and sweat lodges, were curtailed.

Though these religions are still present, it would seem that this stigma has now lessened, and now residents from a variety of different religions participate in the Walking Out. For many, this event holds value as a means for people to gather and celebrate their culture and traditions. It is a public affirmation of cultural roots and a valuable opportunity to gather and meet with family and friends.

*M: We all get together at the ceremony... we eat good food... we visit.*

In conversation with younger women, they stated that they would like to have Walking Outs for their own children because it an overt symbol of their cultural heritage.

*MA: It is our tradition! I want that for my kids. I want them to know about their culture and their traditions.*

Although these children will likely not spend their lives in the bush, the Walking Out is now a means of highlighting the continued symbolic importance of the land to the Cree. Therefore, its meaning in the community has been renegotiated to accommodate contemporary lifestyles.

In contrast, some women with whom I spoke expressed their disappointment in what they saw as the Walking Outs' changed significance.

*Vg: It's tradition that when they take you out when you are little you can't go on the earth until your walking out. The walking out ceremony is a symbol that you are dedicated to the land, so that you can harvest form the land, make a living from the land. That is what it meant. I don't think that they really know what it means now. Because when you have your Walking Out ceremony, they* [your family] *introduce you to work. Like, as a woman, I was introduced to cutting the wood, and whatever... cleaning – skins, meat...the home...being a housewife... being a caretaker in the home. That's what I was introduced to and I've been dedicated to it. Now I don't really know what it means. They just do it. It's just like... uh... like, your parents are just wanting you to be successful in life. I don't know.*

With fewer families and children spending time in the bush, and women's roles having undergone such change, individuals such as Vg see the Walking Out as simply a performance, and devoid of much of original significance. For these women, the Walking Out is a tradition that cannot maintain its original coherence in the modern world; its integrity and meaning are, therefore, compromised.

In a publication aimed at encouraging tourism in Waskaganish, the Walking Out is described as a: "demonstration of our culture and tradition that has been handed down through generations by our forefathers. The Walking Out ceremony is symbolic of how we want to retain our culture and our language" (Waskaganish Band Council). In this statement, the Walking Out is portrayed both as a tradition that has continuity with the past, and as a symbolic event, thereby allowing for contemporary reinterpretation of the ceremony's format and proceedings.

It is evident, then, that the revitalization of the Walking Out ceremony in the community has caused people to reevaluate its significance in the contemporary world. What has emerged is that residents are renegotiating the meaning of such an event. For some, the ceremony is a highly symbolic ritual that reaffirms the importance of the land

to Cree identity, as well as providing an opportunity to strengthen community bonds through gathering and feasting. For others, however, the event is cause to reflect on how Cree traditions have been negatively affected by recent culture change.

It cannot be argued that such a revitalization of the Walking Out constitutes an 'invention of tradition' in the sense that Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) have forwarded. It is interesting to note that, while recent scholarly treatments of the notion of tradition have been critical of Hobsbawm and Ranger's attempts to differentiate 'genuine tradition' from 'invented tradition' (ibid:4), in discussing of the Walking Out, women themselves raised the question of the 'authenticity' of this event. As the tradition takes on a new symbolic status as a performance and representation of traditional values and roles, some women seem uncomfortable with the seemingly incongruous nature of the ceremony (the beginning of a child's life in the bush), with contemporary reality (children no longer spend their lives in the bush) . For others, though, the significance of the symbolic aspect of this ceremony negates the question as to whether it is 'authentic' or not. For these women, participation in the ceremony is a highly symbolic way to affirm their family's membership to the Cree cultural community, and, therefore, the 'authenticity' of the event is less of an issue.

The question of why the Walking Out has been largely successful as a heightened traditional symbol as opposed to other ceremonies such as the sweat lodge is difficult to answer at this time, but raises interesting issues surrounding the complexity of peoples' understanding of tradition. Though both the sweat lodge[37] and the Walking Out were practiced when Flannery was in Waskaganish, and her informants give detailed descriptions of both as evidence of traditional ceremonies, many members of the community currently refuse to acknowledge the historical roots of the sweat lodge. The Wellness Society has recently begun to organize sweats in Waskaganish, but has met with great resistance in the community. During interviews, women of all ages quickly dismissed or reacted negatively to Flannery's informants' accounts of the sweat lodge. The sole exception to this was one informant who was a member of the Wellness Society

[37] A sweat lodge was traditionally a small enclosed structure constructed with canvas, skins and tarps. Participants would sit around a centre of hot rocks which, when water is poured over them, produce great amounts of steam, causing people to sweat. The ceremony is filled with prayer and songs, and was used as a method of spiritual and physical healing. It was also considered an important part of hunting rituals, particularly bear hunting (C. Scott: personal communication).

and who was attempting to promote sweats in the community. The following comment by M is typical of women's reactions:

*M: Oh, we don't believe it that anymore, that is evil. People are trying to bring that back, but we don't want that, we don't believe in that anymore.*

As in the case with the Walking Out, sweat lodges were condemned historically by religious authorities and missionaries. But in the case of sweats, this stigma remains. Other women stated that sweats were never part of their traditions, but that they were brought here from other Native communities, along with other pan-native symbols such as the medicine man, powwow, and the medicine wheel. The promotion of such ceremonies and symbolism under the rubric of 'traditional healing' further complicates the nature of the category of tradition. The executive director of the Wellness Society is adamant that the community will soon accept these ceremonies. She believes that acceptance will come when people learn more about their histories and recognize the importance of those celebrations that are rooted purely in Aboriginal values as opposed to post-contact non-Aboriginal practices. This recourse to 'traditional ceremonies' is part of a larger healing movement that will not be dealt with in detail here; however, suffice it to say that this movement has spurred much debate as to the significance of those ceremonies being promoted. Currently, the residents who participate in these ceremonies, such as the sweat and powwows, are overwhelmingly those who are recovering from a form of substance addiction. 'Traditional' ceremonies are being used in this capacity as a means of addressing historical wrongs and developing a method of healing that is appropriate and meaningful for Aboriginal people. For residents in Waskaganish, the 'traditional healing' movement is still in its early stages, and it is difficult to predict how it will affect the revitalization and acceptance of specific practices and ceremonies.

*b) A (Traditional) Baby Shower?*

Tradition is articulated in a number of different ways in the community. As such, traditional norms and values continue to inform events that are themselves not considered traditional. Networks of Cree families get together to celebrate such things as birthdays, weddings and baby showers and in so doing maintain and renew social connections between community members.[38] Though these types of events are not overtly 'Cree' in

[38] As a resident said to me "It's funny what we can do to a simple Anglo-Saxon tradition like a wedding, we just take it to a whole different level!"

their appearance, they are infused with uniquely Cree aspects in terms of the styles of interaction, topics discussed, and values shared.

For an example of this I discuss a baby shower that I attended in Waskaganish. At this event, women of the immediate and extended family of the woman who had just given birth gathered at a friend's house to give gifts, eat, and play games. As we waited for the 'woman of honour' to arrive, in spite of the number of people attending, participants were comfortable to sit in silence and watch the children play as opposed to 'making small talk' amongst themselves. Unaccustomed as I was to the situation, I began to get nervous when the guest did not arrive for quite some time. I realized later, and as a result of my time spent in the community, that it is believed that events should begin when the participants are ready, and not at some arbitrary, pre-scheduled time. When she did arrive, her expression of happiness and surprise at seeing everyone was subtle, but apparent. We then turned to the large pile of gifts that had been amassed in the center of our circle. As each was opened, it was passed around and admired. The atmosphere was loving, relaxed and joyful. Many jokes were made (some at my awkwardness and inability to understand Cree!) and there was lots of laughter. Food was circulated on paper plates, and each person was given a plastic bag to take home their leftovers. After we ate, we played some games and then someone put on a tape of fiddle music and the dancing began. Since Cree was spoken the majority of the time, participants were very generous in making sure I understood what was going on. At the same time, women made comments such as "We Cree, we love to dance, you can't stop us!" It was evident that women wanted me to realize that the event was distinctly Cree.

Though the gifts and food were store bought, the event itself was rooted in particularities of Cree social interaction and traditional norms of sharing and respect. Emotions and reactions were understated, but the strong bonds between the women present were clear and enforced through joking and teasing. It is probable that this sort of fusion will continue and elements of traditional Cree culture will be maintained and adapted to fit new social forms and events.

Tradition can be incorporated into women's lives through activities, practices and ceremonies that assert their cultural heritage and infuse the present with meaning, but for many, tradition holds the most value as a symbolic concept that is used in the affirmation and representation of their identity. What is evident among many middle generation Cree

women is what Gans (1996[1969]) has termed symbolic identity. There is a clear perception of high importance and positive esteem about one's cultural identity, and a desire to maintain it; however, what one actually does to express it may not be much in evidence because of the necessity to adapt to changing life circumstances. When it is manifested, it is done so in varied ways, but these remain highly significant. Tradition, therefore, is a contested category of behaviour and values that women must continually renegotiate and re-evaluate.

The Politicization of Tradition

In addition to the re-evaluation and incorporation of tradition at the local level by women in their lived lives, tradition is also being used and renegotiated at the national level within the context of representation and resistance. As seen in the work of Handler and Linnekin (1984), Philibert (1986), Keesing (1989) and others, tradition can be selectively harnessed in political movements as a means of asserting indigenous identity. As the Cree move closer toward self-determination, assertions of identity are voiced in opposition to, and distinct from, the dominant Canadian society. At the national level, tradition has been mobilized by the Cree as a vehicle to defend and uphold their cultural rights in the fight against outside developmental encroachment. It has emerged as a central element in political discourse of representation and resistance. In their struggle against hydro-development in their lands, the Cree successfully came together as a 'Nation' and asserted their rights to their lands through claims of historical occupancy and traditional subsistence practices. In their nationalist discourse, it has been found that the Cree give particular emphasis to aspects of their culture and heritage which are relevant to their present political and economic relations with Euro-Canadian institutions (Richardson 1975). By emphasizing the importance of traditional reciprocity in human relations as well as the necessity of their land to their life ways, the Cree were able to successfully oppose hydro-development and achieve a degree of political autonomy within the province of Quebec.

In this discourse, tradition can become essentialized and reified as a representation of 'culture'. Contemporary anthropology is furiously trying to dismantle the essentialisms of its subjects that it has created in the past, but now essentialisms are being used by indigenous people themselves as effective tools in self-representation.

As argued by Adams and Lattas, members of politicized cultural groups are highly aware of their position in a world where essential cultural identity can generate profit (Adams 1997) or serve as a resource for Aboriginal resistance (Lattas 1993). The reification of indigenous culture and tradition can play an important role in the affirmation or assertion of local identity. As seen in Conklin, stereotypical displays of traditional culture carry great symbolic weight in international arenas as legitimizers of indigenous 'authenticity' and have proven to be strategically effective tools (1997:711). However, this politicization of traditional symbolism can serve to obfuscate cultural diversity, and prevent those individuals who refuse to conform to stereotypes from effectively participating in activist causes at the international level (see Appendix 1).

For the Cree, essentialized depictions of tradition and culture have served particular political purposes. Self-conscious ideological codification of these traditions arose out of the need to maintain autonomy in the face of Euro-Canadian society's intrusion on Cree land. The objectification of traditions has been a necessary corollary of Cree political intentions. By reducing Cree culture to a fundamental grounding in the land, any encroachments on this land attack the very core of Cree traditions and ideology and are difficult for any democratic nation, such as Canada, to deny. However, codification of one's tradition is itself a kind of transformation (Keesing 1989:28), a selective process shaped by the circumstances and needs of a people. Therefore, objectification of tradition can be understood as an active process that is ongoing in relation to exterior circumstances.

*a) Local Discourse*

It is challenging to establish the ways in which a politicized discourse of tradition may be operating at the local level. In order to clarify this concept, I refer to Foucault's work on discourse. Discourse in Foucault's conception is understood as a style of speech and "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972:49). Foucault sees knowledge and power as the constitutive forces in society. In addition, he sees discourse as pervasive in all social relations. Through the constitutive effects of power and knowledge, all discursive practices have a normalizing effect and become part of 'regimes of truth'. In other words, discursive practices create unquestioned truths within which the subjugated body is compelled to operate. All persons are subjected to these regimes of truth and are affected by the discourses that

make up the relations of power. It follows from this that narratives are shaped by the discourse within which they are located, whether they be hegemonic or counter-hegemonic. It is likely, therefore, that at some points in our discussions, a politicized discourse of tradition may have affected or transformed women's narratives at the local level to some extent, although this process may be largely imperceptible.

Within politicized discourse, tradition is equated with distinctive Cree identity and holds tremendous symbolic weight. It is probable that some women are now aware of how tradition is being used at the national level in defense of their rights. Further, some women may subsequently employ the notion of tradition in representations of their identity, precisely because of the term's ubiquity in discourse of Cree identity. However, it must be stressed that overt politicization is not pervasive in all aspects of these women's narratives. It seems logical that this politicized discourse would be the most apparent when women discuss issues such as the New Agreement and hydro-development. Women are aware of the inevitability of development on their lands and seem to be divided in their opinions of the New Agreement.[39] Although most recognize the potential benefits that the Paix des Braves will bring to the community in terms of job creation and economic well being, there is sadness about the effects the development will have on their lands. One landmark in particular will be negatively impacted. Smokey Hill, a well-known and loved fishing spot on the Rupert River has a long history in the community for being a spot where one can '*just scoop fish* [primarily white fish] *out of the water with a net*' (L). It is a landmark that is mentioned by Flannery's informants, and continues to be valued today. With the completion of the Rupert diversion, the river will be reduced to 20% of the current flow rate, and Smokey Hill will likely be no longer (Hydro-Quebec 2002). Although women express unhappiness concerning the inevitable impact this development with have on their lands, their discussions of the Agreement were not overtly political or militant. In their discussions, they did not refer to or employ an overt form of political discourse. Rather, I believe that the discourse of tradition and identity works in more subtle ways to influence women's narratives. It is likely that this

[39] This division can be extended to the community level. As a community, Waskaganish has been highly divided in their opinions of the New Agreement (officially known as the Paix Des Braves) and the impending hydro-development in their surrounding areas.

discourse comes into play when women become aware of issues of representation, and use tradition as a means of defending their identity as distinctively Cree.

*b) Tradition, Identity, Resistance and Representation*

In these interviews, it is evident that women use tradition as a symbol in the representation of their identities. Tradition is used as means of distinguishing Cree identity as unique and separate from other cultural groups. However, as seen and discussed above, there are many ways in which this cultural identity can be expressed that are not explicitly political. Yet, at some points during our conversations, it is likely that a form of politicized discourse was perceptible.

Studies of ethnic and cultural identity have suggested that self-conscious constructions of identity emerge under conditions of contrast and opposition, and that only with an awareness of difference does a reflexive understanding of culture become externalized and objectified (Weaver 2001:241) In this sense then, it must be considered that Cree contact with outside encroachment has affected the ways in which women understand, construct and represent their identities.

Theories of resistance argue that the identities of subordinate groups are created in opposition to a dominant power. At this point, one must exhibit caution. If it is assumed that identity is produced out of relationships of resistance, than a binary between dominant and subordinate groups is created. In the case of identity assertion among Native groups, applying this model runs the risk of further perpetuating relationships of power between Native groups and the larger Euro-Canadian population. As explored by Fajber, when all action, symbols and thoughts of a people are only thought of as arising in opposition to a dominant force, and thus under terms of resistance, there is a risk of sustaining the very colonial relationship that is being opposed (1996: 29). Therefore, when examining how the Cree formulate their identity as different from the dominant Euro-Canadian society, one must be careful not to overclassify this process of distinction in terms of resistance. To do so potentially denies or devalues Cree autonomy and agency, and sees Cree identity as being merely a reaction to the dominant power rather than something rooted in very real cultural traditions.

Schochet (2004) has explored the idea that not only is identity formed in reaction and resistance to others, but so too is a notion of tradition. He argues that actors may not recognize their behaviour as traditional until it is identified as such by 'outsiders' – i.e.

those with anthropological and descriptive perspectives (ibid:19). When tradition is identified by insiders it usually done out of defense. Schochet states: "the purpose is [...] to justify something that has been attached or is presumed to be in danger of being undermined" (ibid). While this formulation may lead to accusations of 'invention' and should be tempered with Fajber's above-stated cautions, it does draw attention to the fact that individuals may isolate and use tradition as a means of defending those practices considered to be under threat. In her definition of Native tradition, K. Anderson (2000) includes resistance and acknowledges the changeable nature of tradition. She states: "when we say 'tradition' in our communities, we are referring to values, philosophies and lifestyles that pre-date the arrival of the Europeans, as well as ways that are being created *within* a larger framework of Euro-Canadian culture, or *in resistance* to it" (K.Anderson 2000:35 emphasis author's own). In her discussion, tradition is dynamic and simultaneously tangible.

For the Cree, it has been argued that they have historically articulated their identity as one that is distinct and separate from the 'other' or 'whiteman' (Scott 1989:83). Part of Cree identity, therefore, is differentiation from non-Cree society. Essential to this substantiation of the Cree people as distinct from the 'other' is their grounding in tradition. Adelson (1992) has looked how the concept of *miyupimaatisiiu* or 'being alive and well" - which takes as its base the practice and valuation of traditional activities - can be seen as a projected form of resistance against non-Cree society. Adelson found that by using the notion of 'being alive and well', the Cree of Whapmagoostui, have asserted their identity and voice their opposition to outside encroachment (ibid:230). She contends that traditional values and activities are strategies of cultural identity affirmation as distinct from Euro-Canadian society. Implicated in her statements is a formulation of tradition that is fluid. The Cree draw from reinterpretations of the past and tradition to substantiate their identity in the present (ibid:211). This understanding and use of tradition is evident among the women with whom I spoke.

Here, issues of representation come to the fore. As a means of articulating their identity as separate from the larger society, the Cree have become sensitized to the ways in which their connections to tradition are represented. No individual or community wishes to be portrayed in such a way that denies their continued connection to the land or valuation of traditional practices and ceremonies. To do so, would be to question or deny

the very foundations of their Cree identity. Tradition is used in representations as a means of ensuring cultural distinctiveness. At this point the influence of politicized discourse can be detected. The politicized discourse that links tradition to identity emerged out of efforts at establishing cultural distinctiveness. Following Foucault, if narratives are shaped by the discourse within which they are located, it can be said that, in those situations where women are more aware of issues of representation, their use of tradition to represent their identity as being characterized by particular practices and values that are uniquely Cree can be seen as related to politicized discourse.

I believe that some women whom I interviewed were, at times, highly aware of issues of representation inherent to the research task at hand. My interest in Cree tradition and culture change was in no way new or innovative. Some of the women I spoke to had been interviewed before, and some more than once. Indeed, previous to my arrival, a large scale government research study had been conducted in the area to establish women's employment status in each of the nine Cree communities. Thus, many were aware of my position as a 'represent-er' of Cree culture, and as such, were careful to ensure that what I was reporting would in no way condemn the community to either traditional backwardness nor assimilated modernity. On a number of occasions during interviews, women would often be chatting comfortably until they would suddenly become aware of the tape recorder (sometimes as it clicked to change sides) or my scribbling, and would become more guarded in their narratives. In addition, at some points during my stay I was conscious of the fact that women wanted me to see or record certain aspects of daily life that reflected continued traditional practices.

For example:

*M: Make sure you don't write that we have lost our traditions!*

*E: How can people say we don't have our traditions? Look at me, I still go to the bush...*

*V: These people came here* [the government study] *and they are trying to say that we have lost our traditions, you know? But that's not true! Just look around!*

*Mn: Look at me! Look at the things I do now, I still do these things everyday. I haven't lost my traditions. I want to maintain them – they are not lost. It's just that the old traditions have changed a bit.*

In these particular instances, tradition was used in the context of a defense of a distinctive Cree identity, and to designate those ways of life that women perceived to be under

threat. In these statements, tradition is a symbolic designation of Cree identity and used as evidence of the persistence of their culture in the face of outside encroachment. Women's awareness of the representation of their identity may result in their usage of tradition in a manner that is influenced by politicized discourse. Although used as a symbol in this context and therefore as a seemingly essentialized category, a representation of continued tradition rests on the acceptance of a notion of tradition as something that encompasses both continuity and adaptability.

Conclusion

It is apparent from this discussion that tradition continues to be a significant element in women's lives today. In the face of inevitable social and cultural change, the ways in which tradition is understood and incorporated into daily life have also been renegotiated and adjusted. Tradition remains symbolically important to women as part of their unique identity as Cree – an identity that is complex and multifaceted. In representations of their identity, women employ the notion of tradition to emphasize their cultural uniqueness and links to values and practices that are considered to be distinctively Cree. It is also a concept that has been harnessed by the Cree as a powerful element in their political discourse at the national and international level. This politicization has drawn attention to the tremendous symbolic weight of tradition in representations of Cree identity. Thus, in some instances, tradition can also be used self-consciously by women at the local level as a means of asserting, what they regard as, acceptable representations of their culture.

As a category, therefore, tradition emerges as something complex that includes both continuity and change. In the context of people's contemporary lives and representations of their identities, tradition must be understood as something that individuals can reinterpret and adjust to circumstances or use to serve particular goals, and is therefore fluid and mutable. However, these usages and understandings of tradition in the present are informed and infused with meaning through reference to the past and thereby maintain elements of continuity and links to what Preston would call a 'cultural form' - or that which is considered unique to Cree culture. As Cree identity is being actively negotiated, so too are the parameters of tradition.

## Chapter Six

## Tradition, Transmission and the Future

Introduction

It has been established that women continue to value tradition, and have incorporated it into their lives in a variety of different ways. Tradition is considered to be an essential element in the representation of their identities, and of the identity of the Cree Nation as a whole. In spite of these representations, however, women express concern and dissent as to the future valuation and practice of tradition in their community among the younger generation.

Rather than attempting to analyze the ways in which the younger generation is integrating tradition into their own lives,[40] I will explore primarily those perspectives held by the middle and elder generations as to the relationship between youth and tradition today, specifically, how the changing nature of transmission has affected people's impressions of tradition. What emerges from this analysis is an apparent generational divide among elder women and middle generation women as to the future of tradition in their community.

According to the majority of elder women I spoke to (aged 65 and over), the youth of today seem to exhibit little interest in going to the bush, learning traditional skills or speaking Cree. These women attribute this to a replacement of the traditional learning methods and environment with a formalized school system, as well as an increase of outside influences in town. It can be said, therefore, that the transmission of tradition is considered by these women to be a tradition in and of itself, and altering this method is perceived negatively.

Middle generation women (aged 40-61), however, on the whole, had a very different impression of the future of tradition. According to these women there has been a revitalization in interest in traditions among youth, and concurrently, a renewed appreciation of Cree values as compared to their own generation, whose ability to acquire and transmit traditional knowledge was affected by residential school and the upheaval of sedentarization. Although the locus of learning traditions has largely shifted from home to school, tradition continues to be promoted and maintained in this more formalized

[40] Although I feel that this is a highly significant avenue of research, I do not have sufficient data from the younger generation to permit a rigorous analysis of this issue.

milieu through Cree culture and language classes as well as designated Goose Breaks.[41] For middle generation women, this shift does not detract from the fact that this knowledge is being taught. Here, women are utilizing a more expansive definition of tradition, whereby the nature of transmission is less significant than the meaning the activity holds in the present. They have negotiated the meaning and uses of tradition in their lives, and are therefore more able to recognize something as tradition or traditional by its symbolic links to the past, in spite of changes it may have gone through.

What again emerges from this discussion is that tradition, and in this case, its transmission, is used and understood by women in a variety of different ways, and therefore, tradition can be conceptualized as having different modalities that are utilized by women to express themselves in their narratives.

Tradition and Transmission

Inherent in the naturalistic definition of tradition is the concept of a 'handing down' from the past to the present. Transmission of information, values and skills functions both to perpetuate tradition and to designate what is considered tradition. In studies that subscribe to this definition, theorists have looked at the ways in which the processes of cultural transmission have been modified by cultural change and how these modifications can be characterized as cultural loss (Pinkerton 1994). It is argued that as traditional methods and environments of learning are dissolved through social, economic and political change, the transmission of cultural items is negatively affected.

For social constructivists, the naturalistic definition is no longer considered adequate to understand the term. Rather, tradition is seen to undergo great changes as it is transmitted, and the conservation of a 'core of cultural traits' is no longer considered a defining feature of tradition as tradition is seen to be a process of interpretation to which meaning is attributed in the present (Boyer 1987:55, Handler and Linnekin 1984:287). Transmission, therefore, is less a factor in defining tradition than is the significance that a value, skill or practice holds in the present.

Again, in order to understand Cree women's impressions of tradition and its transmission, it is necessary to use a combination of both definitions. The nature of

[41] This bi-annual holiday from school is intended to allow families to participate in goose hunting in the bush during the spring and fall.

transmission of tradition has changed as a result of residential school, sendentarization and the establishment of the Cree School Board. This has lead to perceptions among the elder generation that traditions are fading and interest in traditional pastimes is waning. It is possible, therefore, to state that these women are utilizing a more naturalistic modality of tradition, whereby the value of a particular tradition is largely contingent on its successful and appropriate method of transmission. However, many women, primarily from the middle generation, saw the formalization of schooling to have had a positive impact on the transmission of tradition in the community. These women acknowledge that the method of transmission is different, but see the value in the content of that which is being transmitted; therefore, the nature of transmission is less important than the knowledge itself.

Cree Traditional Transmission

For the Cree, methods of cultural transmission have undergone significant changes. Flannery (1962), Ohmagari and Berkes (1997) and Preston (1982) discuss the ways in which the Cree have traditionally transmitted knowledge. In these studies, elders described their process of learning bush skills as one of 'learning by doing' through apprenticeship that begins as soon as a child is old enough to walk (Ohmagari and Berkes 1997:206). Children were expected to contribute in the daily tasks of camp maintenance, and in so doing, learn crucial Cree values of independence and competence (Preston 1982:300). By watching and imitating parents, grandparents and members of the extended family with whom they camped, children learned the skills necessary to survive on their own in the bush if necessary.

Story-telling and the narrative oral tradition were also considered crucial to a child's traditional education. As explored in the writings of Preston (2002[1975]), Cruikshank (1990), and S. Preston (1986), story-telling and narrative are both highly effective methods of conveying ideas and knowledge, and have well-established history as Cree and Aboriginal Yukon Native (Athapaskan and Tlingit) cultural traditions. When life was spent primarily in the bush, listening to stories of elders provided meaningful and tangible guidance for living. Nowadays, in the context of modern town life, story-telling is often more a self-conscious means of reflecting on the past and discussing changes, than a source of pragmatic information. However, in spite of its altered context, story-

telling is still a highly valued medium of communication, and holds the potential to be an important source of information on traditional values and practices that help people learn more about their cultural heritage, and subsequently, their selves.

Elders[42]

For those elder women I spoke with, their knowledge of traditional skills and values was gained primarily through time spent in the bush with their families. This was considered to be the ideal environment for acquiring this particular knowledge. In addition, older members of their families and communities played a large part in women's education through their role as story-tellers and resources for traditional knowledge. Today, elder women articulate their disappointment in at what they perceived as a lack of interest in traditional forms of learning.

*J: I want to teach them some things.... but they don't take it.... but they do not do it. They will see me outside tanning hides and they will come around, but they don't help me.*

In the following statement by another elder, E emphasizes the traditional importance placed on watching elders and learning from them. She attributes the loss of this practice to the introduction of television and the subsequent weakening of community bonds.

*E: It was different when people started to have the T.V's... they don't visit each other. What they used to do when I was a young girl. I remember* [name], *she was old at that time, and she used to visit us when my father was unhealthy* [...] [name] *would come and visit us and I would sit beside her and she would tell us stories. I told the students about it. I said 'This was my television long ago!'* [laughter] *They laughed at me!*

In a similar statement, L echoes E's sentiment.

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[42] A problem that Native communities are now facing is the disappearance of the elder 'expert' generation – or those individuals who hold knowledge of traditional ways, teachings, stories and ceremonies and who represent a symbolic connection to the 'old ways'. *Lz: The people who are going out, they have seen everything, the way things were done.. they are getting old. They are trying to pass the skills to the younger generation.* [...] *They* [the younger generation] *are very interested in it.*
Elders are considered to be models of traditional values and traditional approaches to speaking, teaching and working with others. Their teachings and stories of the 'old ways' continue to be referenced as important sources of knowledge that constitute part of a child's learning process. In an effort to integrate this tradition into the formalized schooling system, Cree culture classes feature a program whereby elders from the community are invited into the classroom to share their stories. Although members of the community appreciate this effort by the Cree School Board (CSB), some were disappointed by the fact that elders were paid to do this, thereby commodifying this knowledge and practice.

*L: When I was a girl, I remember I used to sit beside my mother, watching her. But today when my granddaughters come to the house and I do something like plucking geese or making sakapwaan over the fire. They don't look at me. They don't watch. They watch TV instead or listen to the music.*

Although children are learning particular traditional skills at school, elders see this as largely performative; while children are engaged in these activities, they are not internalizing them and understanding the significance of them.

*E: Now they learn some of those things in the school there... but it's different. They just do it... they don't take it.*

Elder women state their concern that youth cannot adequately learn their traditions because they are no longer spending lengthy periods in the bush – the ideal environment for learning.

*L: It's different now, some young girls don't have the knowledge, like, what to do with a goose. If someone gives them a goose, what do they do with it? They pluck it, yeah... but then what do they do next? They don't know what to do. They don't learn.*
*Margaret: Why is that do you think?*
*L: I think it is because they don't go in the bush anymore. If someone gave me a goose, I know what to do, pluck it, clean it, cut it up to eat, but my granddaughter doesn't even know what to do, all she can do is pluck and then after that she doesn't know.*

According to elder women, the formalized school system is, in large part, responsible for the younger generation's decreased time spend in the bush because it keeps people in town.

*E: The only time I notice the young people out in the bush is in the spring and the fall. Because of school... very few young people go into the bush and if they go with their parents, they don't stay.*

*J: Since they attended school... they don't go to the bush as much.* [...] *We know that the young people don't go to the bush like we did when we were young. We wonder what is going to happen to them? We often talk like this.*

Women would add that when children do have the opportunity to go out to the bush, they do not want to stay there. They stated that their children or grandchildren find it boring and isolating in the bush, and wish to return to their friends and entertainment in town.

*L: There's lots of young people they don't want to spend time in the bush. I think that it is because a long time ago, they didn't have those games like hockey or baseball... they didn't have those things. So now they want to spend more time in town. Some of them go*

*out fishing sometimes. But not very many people go out and stay out. Some of only... some of them go just for a while.*

*Ez: The young people, they don't like it in the bush. They miss something here. Shower. They talk about showering...even my grandchildren. We took them to the bush one time, and they talked about it - how they wanted to take a shower and how they wanted to watch the TV. They said those things while they were in the bush. It's changed. People want to stay in town more now.*

Elder women see this time spent in the bush, therefore, as no longer considered to be a way of life for the younger generation. This is expressed in women's frequent use of the term 'camping' to describe what kids do in the bush.

*L: They* [her kids] *don't go to the bush all the time. It's different. They only go camping.*

As indicated by a young woman:

*Q: I like to go camping on weekends. The bush is great.... but I only go there for little times you know? Like, I go when I can...like, when I'm not working and that.*

These statements imply a qualitatively different type of relationship with the bush. It is considered to be more of a place to visit and enjoy as a holiday, rather than as a source of livelihood or a home. This differential relationship to the bush is seen by elder women to affect the extent to which the younger generation are not learning traditional skills and values that are acquired most ideally in the bush environment. The content of tradition, in their opinion, therefore, is influenced by the nature of transmission, and the process of transmission itself thereby constitutes a form of traditional behaviour.

Bush vs. School

Ohmagari and Berkes argue that this traditional mode of education based on experience and imitation was undermined in the latter half of the twentieth century with the introduction of the Euro-Canadian classroom based school system (1997:207).

In my interviews, a number of women from both the older and middle generation expressed regret that this traditional way of learning by watching and 'doing' has been largely replaced by formal schooling. In her work on Cree women's roles and responsibilities, Jacobs (1993) found a similar feeling among women she interviewed. As one of her informants states: "People relate more to doing things, rather than sitting back in a classroom" (ibid: 47).

Among those women I spoke with, some stressed that classroom-based learning was not sufficient for the full education of a child, and that the school system failed to adequately teach children about traditional skills and values. Several parents felt that these classes only 'show' children how to do things, and that true learning comes from being in a bush setting. Bush is seen as superior to school, because it is a place where students can learn true values and survival skills.

*V: I think that a child learns from what he sees everyday. So, if a student was to go and live with a family in the bush, and stayed there six months of the year, he would learn a lot more about life and survival than he would in a classroom. He would learn a lot more about what it is to be human... to be kind... to be a loving person... to be caring. To be an honest person, you know?*

*Ez: The kids need to learn about how to survive in the bush, about the land, how to get lost, how to go by boat, how to learn everything, eh? About the water, the bays and the land. How to travel, how to be handy and not take too many belongings – what we were taught. Some kids won't be like that when they go to the bush. They don't know how to survive. They might get lost, and they won't know how to set a trap. They won't know how to lace a snowshoe or make a snowshoe. There is a special kind of tree that we use. You can know just by looking at it standing there. We don't use any kind of tree – we have to look at what can be bent – it has to be flexible. The kids don't know about it... how to skin beaver or other kinds of fur-bearing fur animals. They don't know how.*

From these statements, it is evident that for both elder and middle generation women, the bush continues to be considered the most appropriate environment to acquire those traditional skills and values deemed important to a distinctive Cree identity. The acquiring of particular specializations as well as important values is seen to be linked solely to bush living. Values such as competency, respect, hard-work and honesty are among those that women believe are difficult to convey away from the bush. Here, the method and environment in which traditions are gained are deemed as important as the content of the traditions themselves. Spending time in the bush and watching and learning from family members and elders as they carry out tasks is fundamental to this process of learning and, according to some women, cannot be replicated in a formalized classroom setting. For many, it is believed that although some children are learning particular traditional skills in the classroom, they are not experiencing and internalizing the appropriate history and context of these skills, and are thereby unable to understand the their particular values and significances.

Formalized Cree Tradition

In an attempt to maintain Cree culture within the Euro-Canadian model that is the formalized school system, the Cree School Board (CSB) has attempted to incorporate Cree content into their curriculum through Cree culture and language classes. The CSB was first established in 1975 with the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA), but was formally constituted under the provincial Education Act of 1978 (CSB:2000). The CSB has designed a program that is largely based on standard provincial requirements, but also includes portions of the curriculum specifically adapted to James Bay and Cree culture. Cree culture classes are designed to fulfill this goal. These in-school classes instruct children in traditional skill-building such as woodcarving, snowshoe-making and sewing, as well as basic bush knowledge such as how to build a fire and how to construct a shelter (ibid)

The coordinator of the Cree culture program in Waskaganish explained to me that she designed the curriculum based on her own time spent in the bush as a child with her grandmother.

*D: When I was in the bush, I learned about being Cree and doing Cree things.* [...] *When I came to work here* [at the school] *I tried to make the classes like that* [modeled on her own experience of traditional life].

Cree Culture teachers are encouraged to tell stories to the children, and to give them particular skills – such as woodcarving and sewing - to learn and master at their own pace. When organizing the curriculum, D divided activities between boys and girls, because this is what she had learned about women and men's roles in her youth. Therefore, the Cree culture curriculum at the Winnibekuu school has been designed with cultural norms in mind, and a sensitivity to tradition.

A number of women from the middle generation drew attention to the value in the Cree culture program as a means of promoting the acquisition of traditional knowledge among children that they may not have otherwise learned at home.

*E: The Cree culture program at the school is good. Kids practice their traditions, but they don't have to leave school to do it. It teaches them how to sew hides, and even the boys learn how to scrape hides. But also they learn how to cut wood and other important things like that.*

*Eth: It's the Cree culture program that is pushing all those traditional things now... people had started to forget them...*

In addition to the Cree Culture program, in an effort to integrate the school year with the traditional Cree seasonal calendar, a bi-annual Goose Break is scheduled when families are able to go together to the bush together. For many young people in the community, these are the only times during the year that they go to the bush. Several women stressed that their children loved this time spent in the bush, and that it was a great opportunity to be together as a family in an environment where everyone felt at ease.

*L: ...and she* [her daughter] *says 'I really like having the goose break at school'. Already now* [June], *even though goose break is far away, they still ... they say 'oh what are we going to do for Goose Break?' and 'Mum, can we invite some friends over to our camp?'*

In addition, the Goose Break was described by parents as a period in which they could get together with their children and share in the valuable experience of bush living. It represents an ideal environment, whereby parents and grandparents are able to return to a traditional form of teaching and engage in skill-building and story-telling.

*Vg: Kids are learning those traditional skills in school... and in the family too...like, on Goose Break, when you are on holidays, you go out in the bush with your family and you learn from them there.*

In conversations with teachers at the Winnibekuu school, it was conveyed to me that students see the Goose Break as a highly-valued time and they look forward to this period spent in the bush. Although this might be simply attributed to fact that Goose Break is a time away from school and the perceived monotony of the classroom, it also can also be indicative of a real interest on the part of youth to engage in an activity considered to be distinctively Cree.

Cree Culture Day

The second day of my arrival in Waskaganish, the community hosted an event entitled 'Cree Culture Day'. This event was organized by the CSB and brought schoolchildren and their parents from each of the nine Cree communities together to display those products and skills they had acquired through their Cree Culture and Language classes. Over the course of the day, various traditional activities and games were scheduled, along with a Cree language spelling bee. In the Winnibekuu school, the gymnasium was set up with tables designated for each community, where they displayed

crafts such as moccasins, dolls, snowshoes, and woodcarvings. At each table, kids were demonstrating a particular skill, such as lacing a snowshoe with stretched caribou tendons. On the walls, there was a series of drawings made by schoolchildren which depicted images of Cree life 'then', 'now' and in the 'future', with each section progressively showing more features of a so-called 'modern' existence, such as snowmobiles and houses in comparison to the traditional 'then', with snowshoes and tipis. Outside the school, two large tipis were set up and members of the community gathered there over the course of the day to chat, relax and help with the preparation of the *sakapwaan* which was cooking over the fire for the evening feast. The feast was attended by the majority of the community and was followed by dancing into the night. The event was said to be a big success on the whole, and everyone seemed to enjoy themselves greatly. A gathering such as this serves as a demonstration of how the practicing of traditions can be incorporated into a more formalized event or milieu, and can be appreciated and enjoyed by the community in spite of being recognized as largely performative or symbolic. Adelson has discussed how organized 'traditional' gatherings such as these are most often successful, more for the opportunity they give for people to congregate and interact with one another, than for the chance to participate in planned 'traditional' workshops or activities (2001:298). For Cree Culture Day in Waskaganish, this also seemed to be the case. Although the gymnasium always had people milling around from table to table, the most overtly enjoyed and relaxed environment were the cooking tents in front of the school. Nevertheless, in conversations with residents in later weeks, many middle generation women cited the event as evidence that Cree Culture classes were an effective method for children to learn particular traditional skills, and develop an appreciation of their traditional heritage and language. Though these skills are being taught within the context of a largely Euro-Canadian institution, and are displayed in a symbolic and performative manner through organized events rather than being part of everyday lived lives, they remain a significant means for youth to celebrate those traditional elements of their culture.

Residential School

There is a difference in perceptions of tradition and its transmission between elder and middle generation women. This is partially attributable to middle generation

women's impressions of their own early learning process and the disruption they feel they experienced as a result of residential school.

Each of the ten women I spoke to between the ages of 40 and 61 had attended residential school. Each had very different experiences, but many expressed their dismay at having lost many of the traditional skills they had learned in the early years spent with their parents in the bush before being sent to school. Schooling, as well as continued and growing involvement in a cash economy and exposure to Euro-Canadian culture, has affected the ways women feel they have been able to transmit traditional skills and values.

The first government funded residential school in the eastern James Bay region was the Bishop Horden Memorial Residential School in Moose Factory, which was established around 1901 (Morantz 2002:213). Although attendance at school did not become compulsory for Native children until 1920,[43] from very early on, Cree families were influenced by missionaries to send their children to schools run in the summer months by the religious orders. Later, when schools were built by government agencies with assimilative intentions, children were 'encouraged' to attend because their family allowance depended on it (ibid). Children would usually be away from their families and communities from September to June and then would return to town. Nine of the women I spoke to were sent to Moose Factory and one to Fort George for primary school,[44] and six of them went on to various secondary schools around the northern regions of Quebec and Ontario such as Sault Ste-Marie and Rouyn-Noranda.

Their experiences in residential school form a large part of these women's childhoods, and therefore figure substantially in their narratives of their lives. Their accounts, though, are varied, and they do not allow for a quick condemnation of the residential school experience.

Women spoke of the pain they felt when having to leave their parents at a young age, and the sadness they experienced in being separated from their families for such long periods of time, but many made very close friendships with their fellow students and

[43] This was the case with Native children across Canada, but the Cree were not pressured by the government until after WWII (Morantz 2002:213).

have continued to maintain these links with women in other communities to this day.[45] Further, women were aware that their experience was, on the whole, much more positive than that of other Native children in Canada.[46]

In the interviews, some women blamed residential school for disrupting their traditional learning process, and for causing them to lose the bush skills and Cree language that they had learned from their parents at an early age. Similarly, Ohmagari and Berkes (1997:212) report that those women they interviewed between the ages of 30-44 had lost contact with key Cree traditional values because of early residential school experience and quick transition into sedentary town-based wage labour positions.

*L: I hated it! I wanted to stay home with my parents. And um... I didn't understand anything. I didn't understand French at all and I was forced to talk in French... but then I didn't speak much Cree after that.*

*V: I don't know how to do all those things* [traditional skills]... *I forgot when they put me in school and then I never did it after.*

However, other women explained to me that they had managed to maintain their Cree language at school because of their interaction with other Cree–speaking students, as well as their return to a Cree-speaking milieu in summers.

*G: It wasn't so bad. I didn't lose my language like a lot of people did. We spoke Cree in the schoolyard.*

As discussed in the previous section, some women returned to the bush after residential school and were able to regain those skills that they had learned as children. Nonetheless,

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[44] In Waskaganish, there was an elementary day school established in the community by the Anglican Church in the early 1900's (Morantz 2002:213). In 1948, a secular school was established in the community (ibid:214). It is likely that some of the women I spoke with attended day school in Waskaganish before being sent to residential school; however, none of the women with whom I spoke mentioned this earlier schooling experience.

[45] A quote from Vg expresses this sentiment evocatively: *I remember the first year, the first fall I spent in residential school I can't ever forget it. I was standing beside the window and the snow has started falling and it brought me back. And I was thinking about my little sister and my mum and my dad and the times spent in the bush and I began to cry and then I felt a hand and someone said 'it's ok, it's gonna be ok, you are gonna go home, the time will pass', and I turned around and there was this girl from Eastmain, and she put her arms around me and said 'it's gonna be ok'... We didn't have that* [comfort] *from our supervisors so we had to do that for each other..... I still know her* [the girl from Eastmain].

[46] At the time when I was in the community, it was preparing to help organize a meeting for 'residential school survivors' as part of the government funded Healing Fund initiative. Though many felt as though this was a good thing for communities, some also expressed their desire to 'forgive and forget'. As stated by E: *They might as well give up now! Forgive them* [residential school workers]*! They are under the ground anyway. Unless they are going for money... then they might as well give me a piece of it!* [laughter].

many still claim that residential school was responsible for their own lack of traditional knowledge and skills today. Therefore, women of the middle generation are generally positive about what they see as a renewed interest in the bush and bush skills among children today in comparison to their own childhood.

*L: When I was growing up I didn't have a chance to go to the bush with my family very much because I was going to school. And when I was a teenager I didn't like going to the bush. I didn't respect, you know, my traditions. But since I got married, I have a camp and we get to go out at goose break and I notice that my kids have a very different attitude towards Cree culture. They like it. I take them every goose break, and I show them how to do things, like skin a rabbit and how to make snares – which I didn't learn from my parents, but which I learned from my husband. Those are the things I didn't have the privilege to learn from my parents. I just am showing my kids now how to live in the Cree culture ... learn the Cree traditions.*

*L: Sometimes they* [her kids] *say " Oh, I wish I was in the bush", like when it is a nice day, like when it's not too hot or cold, they say "I wish I was in the bush, I would make rabbit" This is something I didn't have when I was growing up.*

*Eth: It is important to teach them things in the bush, like, we never had a chance because we were at school, so we never had the chance to be in the bush like they do today. And like, the Cree culture program – we never had that.*

Several women drew attention to the fact that their children wanted to maintain traditional knowledge and transmit an appreciation of the bush on to their children. For example:

*Lz: Now my daughter says 'If I get married... if one day I should get married, and if I have children, I am going to teach them that life in the bush is important, and that there are lots of things that we have to remember while we are in the bush, like what we eat, how to kill a rabbit, how to kill different kinds of animals.'*

Women of the middle generation see the Cree Culture program, Cree language and Goose Break as a chance for youth to learn and practice their traditions. Although the ways in which youth are learning differ from traditional methods of transmission, this is considered to be as significant to those women whose own learning process was disrupted by a number of external factors. Therefore, though the content and environment of instruction may have been altered through integration into the school curriculum, the symbolic value of the content is still maintained. Women articulate that the younger generation is exhibiting an appreciation of the symbolic value of the bush and maintaining bush skills, and a desire to pass this appreciation on to their own children.

However, in much the same way as for their own generation, tradition is no longer considered a practical model for life. It is an important link to their heritage and identity, but does not define who they are today. As women themselves have negotiated the meaning of tradition to their current lived lives, they believe that so too will their children.

Cree language

The Cree language is considered by many residents to be a vital link to Cree heritage, and its preservation is cited as evidence of the strength of Cree culture. Cree provides distinctive linguistic expressions for particular cultural concepts that are difficult to translate accurately into non-Cree. As explored in the well-known theories of Sapir (1958 [1929]) and Whorf (1956), language can be understood as determining the categories individuals use to think, and subsequently shapes people's perceptions of the world. Though this theory can be criticized for being overly deterministic, it does raise interesting issues surrounding the connections between language and ideology. Following this, the Cree language can be seen to reflect aspects of Cree cultural ideology. Apart from linguistic theories which link language with cultural categories, speaking one's language can also be said to contribute to an individual's strengthened sense of distinct cultural identity.

With the establishment of the CSB, Cree became the sole language of instruction at the lower grades, and has now been extended to grade four. Students then begin the French or English sector curriculum which they continue until grade eleven. Cree classes are taken throughout the secondary grade levels, with each student from grade seven to eleven attending two classes per week (CSB:2000). These language classes are not only opportunities to speak Cree, they expand on particular cultural concepts that are couched in the language itself.

The implementation of the Cree language program has substantially reinforced the speaking of Cree among children of the community. Before the program, women from the middle generation stated that influences such as the residential school experience, as

well as external influences and wage labour, had resulted in some women losing their ability to speak Cree fluently.[47]

*L: When people who came back* [from residential school], *they went to talk to their children in English, and now their children speak English and Cree, but like, mixed and it doesn't make sense sometimes, you know, the words. That's how we lost the language, because parents talk English and the kids' vocabulary is mixed. That's an obstacle I see because a lot of parents they went to residential school and they came back..., they talked to their kids in English.*

Although women still comment on the amount of English that kids mix with Cree, it is apparent that, on the whole, more youth are speaking Cree in some form or another. Women recognize that there is an increased interest in learning the language, as it is something that connects people with their past and their future.

*L: I find that we lost our language a bit, you know? The Cree language. But we are getting it back, you know? We are relearning it and gaining it back through education. I think that's great.* [...] *We have to pass on our language... to our children and grandchildren because it is gonna be forever.*

Language is considered to be an important element in the maintenance of cultural continuity. In the face of changing life circumstances, women explain that through the persistence of the Cree language, something that is essential to Cree identity is maintained.

*Ez: It's so important to keep the language going, eh? If people are changing their ways, and not going to the bush as much, at least they still have their language.*

What has emerged from this formalized push to learn the Cree language and Cree tradition is a generation gap between elders in the community and youth in which some middle generation women have difficulty conversing in Cree with their mothers-in-law, find themselves asking their daughters to translate for them. Middle generation women, therefore, are sensitized to their position in this gap and are more likely to highlight the relatively positive position of youth. Traditions that were once considered to be lost are now reemerging in different forms and through different modes of transmission.

[47] This seemed to be a general feeling among women with whom I spoke, however, it is unlikely that they lost this ability to speak Cree completely, as many returned to a Cree-language setting – the community and their family– for the summer months.

Younger Generation

Though my time with this age group was limited, those members of the younger generation with whom I spent time seemed very interested in their heritage, both in the form of tracing their descendants through the genealogy project at the Cultural Institute, and in reading Flannery's information about their ancestors. Knowledge about the past can give meaning to the present, and help to add a dimension to an individual's cultural identity. This meaning is something that is negotiated in the present and can be adjusted to present social circumstances. Traditional skills and values are meaningful today because of their reference to the past, but also because of their ability to adjust to change. Those youth I spoke with displayed a great respect and interest in their heritage and traditions, and will likely integrate them alongside their contemporary lives in a variety of observable and symbolic ways as a means of connecting with their cultural identity.

This is not to argue for an idealized vision of Cree youth today. Kids are not wholeheartedly embracing tradition with view to living permanently in the bush and practicing traditional activities. Young women in Waskaganish are now much like teenagers in any part of Canada. They are subject to the challenges of peer pressure and family stress that plague many youth today,[48] and have similar concerns with things like appearance and the opposite sex, and desires for the latest in fashion and music. However, tradition does figure as part of their identity as Cree and, therefore, they must engage in a negotiation as to the ways in which tradition will manifest itself in their lives, whether that be through time spent camping in the bush, or simply speaking Cree with their friends. The form that this negotiation takes will be a fascinating one, and a subject for another time.

Conclusion

The nature of the transmission of tradition has undergone substantial changes as has Cree social and cultural life in general. For some elder women, this shift from traditional forms of learning in the bush to formalized learning at school signals a sacrifice of something inherent in tradition – the form of transmission is qualitatively

[48] See James (1992) for a discussion of the emergence of the category of 'teenager' among the Cree, and how phenomena such as teenage pregnancy must now be understood in the context of newly developed ideologies.

entwined with the content of tradition. Traditional learning is itself a valuable and distinct Cree experience. These women therefore adopt a more naturalistic utilization of tradition in this context. Middle generation women, however, in light of their own educational and life experiences are more likely to accept a more pluralistic and fluid understanding of tradition in their narratives, whereby tradition may be formalized into a school setting and its content adapted, but not be compromised. Although tradition is now being expressed in more symbolic ways, and is no longer considered to be a model for daily life, nor a definition of Cree identity, it remains a significant category associated with being Cree and will, therefore, undergo negotiations and adaptations alongside other central cultural categories. An important development in the community that can be attributed in large part to formalized education has been the increase in Cree speaking among the younger generation. The revitalization and maintenance of the Cree language is considered to be essential for youth to connect with their heritage, and provides a means for them to assert their cultural identity. In addition, although education has become formalized and has moved largely from the home to the school, what remains in the community is an appreciation for stories and information of the past. These stories, whether they be told by elders in a classroom, or through reading a textbook, provide valuable information about Cree traditions and lifeways that retain their significance today through a process of continual renegotiation.

## Chapter Seven
## Conclusions

Conclusion

The discourse about tradition has gained considerable intensity over the past three decades, both within the academic discipline and among Indigenous groups themselves. Tradition has now become a highly problematized category, and its usage continues to provoke debate. However, to simply study the category of tradition with view to refining its conceptual definition is no longer sufficient. It is now necessary to turn to how individuals use tradition, and what position individuals understand tradition as occupying within their contemporary culture. Through the analysis above, I have attempted to build on the discourse of tradition by investigating the use of tradition at the local level within Cree women's narratives.

Change and adaptation have figured largely in the lives of the last three generations of Cree women in James Bay. As former lifeways have undergone transformations, values and practices have had to be revaluated as well. It is evident that for many Cree women, tradition has emerged as a medium through which change can be conceptualized and understood.

As explored in Chapter Four, tradition is a category that can refer to a qualitative designation – the 'old days', and therefore, as a means through which women can make commentary on the change that they have experienced in their lives. In this conceptualization, tradition is used and understood as an essentialized and valuative category. Using this formulation of tradition serves as an effective narrative device to express women's concerns as well as uncovering fundamental values that are considered significant to living a good Cree life.

However, as discussed in Chapter Five, tradition is a cultural category that has also undergone adaptations. In order for traditional values, practices and activities to continue as culturally viable options in the face of social upheaval, women have renegotiated its parameters as well as the ways in which they choose to manifest tradition in their lives. Therefore, in the context of women's discussions of their current lived lives as well as in representations of their cultural identities, tradition emerges as a more fluid category that can be integrated piecemeal into women's lives through activities, attitudes,

values and practices as well as serve as a highly symbolic discursive device in asserting cultural distinction.

In Chapter Six it was found that although women continue to reference tradition as a significant element in their lived lives and cultural identities, there is concern among elder generations as to the future of tradition in the community. Specifically, as the means through which traditional values, activities and practices are acquired are being changed from a largely informal, family–oriented, bush setting, to formalized classroom education and town living, women from the elder generations express doubts about the value or efficacy of this new means of transmission. As a result of their own negotiation of the meanings of tradition, middle-generation women are more positive about formalized efforts to revitalize and maintain traditional activities among the younger generation. In this context, the parameters and implementation of tradition are being questioned by women, and therefore, the content of the concept of tradition is itself being debated.

Through this discussion, I have attempted to demonstrate that tradition for the Cree need not be equated simply with conservatism or stasis, but can be understood as a category that is reformulated to hold meaning for individuals in the present. Following Preston (1999a), tradition is something that people experience in their day-to-day lives, and is therefore constantly transformed. In addition, however, tradition demonstrates fidelity to less perceptible elements and more fundamental aspects of culture – values and beliefs that are considered to be distinctly Cree – that allow for a certain continuity in tradition. Therefore, tradition is not solely a symbolic construction of the present. Because of its ability to embody both continuity and change, and therefore be conceptually mutable, individuals utilize and understand tradition in a range of meaningful ways in their narratives.

In today's climate of postmodernity and deconstructivism, we are very aware of subjectivity and the negotiation involved in individuals' formulations of their personal identities. In addition, we are also sensitive to the importance of heritage and the past to the representation and assertion of Indigenous people's cultural identities. Individuals use those aspects of their cultures and surroundings that are meaningful to them to create coherency in their lived lives and to position themselves within their cultural frameworks. This process can be characterized by flux and transience as individuals attempt to navigate through their experiences. This instability can be especially disorienting when

people's cultures and surroundings are themselves being challenged by rapid change. It is evident that the past and Cree heritage are highly significant to a distinct Cree culture and Cree identity in the face of change. However, the ways in which the past informs the present are varied. Furthermore, the ways in which the past informs a conception of tradition are also highly complex, and filtered through individuals' own interpretations, subjectivities, memories, representations and experiences. Through this discussion, I have attempted to address aspects of these links between the past, tradition, identity and representation with view to avoiding simple definitions and categorizations.

It is concluded from this discussion that no one conceptualization is sufficient for an adequate formulation of tradition. Tradition emerges as a concept with a number of uses and conceptual modalities. As attempted in this analysis, it is necessary to look to people's own uses of these terms as a means of developing more complex and nuanced understandings of the concepts to which they refer.

This analysis contributes to the literature examining the complexity of the concept of tradition. It is an attempt to redirect attention towards tradition as a significant cultural category that should not be abandoned by anthropologists for fear of seeming outdated, essentialist or overly-deterministic. By problematizing and re-examining the concept of tradition, anthropologists would be contributing to an ongoing dialogue concerning the reformulation and reconstitution of concepts. This dialogue takes place in large part between those people who are using these concepts to create meaning and coherence out of their experiences.

In addition, this discussion has been women-centered and therefore contributes to the growing body of literature concerning Cree women's lives and narratives and the particularities of their lived lives. However, questions as to the uses and understandings of tradition apply equally to the lives of Cree men, and a similar study could very well have been attempted with male informants. By focusing on the perspectives of women, I have limited my data somewhat, but many of the conceptual formulations of tradition that have emerged are likely also to hold meaning for the men of Waskaganish. Indeed, it is hoped that the issues discussed here can be found to be relevant for the larger Cree community as it raises questions about a cultural category that applies to all Cree people.

Future Research

This thesis represents a very preliminary addition to an avenue of study that deserves greater attention. The question of tradition's place in Aboriginal communities is one that, in my opinion, will become more complicated and complex as time goes on. Northern Cree communities are becoming more and more accessible to the general 'southern' public through burgeoning ecological and generalized tourism. It will be interesting to see the effect this form of exposure will have on residents' opinions and understandings of ceremonies and performances labeled 'traditional'. Related to this would be further inquiries into the issues of 'authenticity' and performance, which could contribute to similar studies in this realm (Conklin 1997, Paine 2000). If it can be taken that 'authenticity' is relational, contingent and largely constructed, then its conceptual parameters also need to be discussed and negotiated as means of clarification.

Further, if Cree communities maintain their level of interaction with the provincial and federal government, as is likely to happen in the wake of the New Agreement, the politicized discourse of tradition will probably also be maintained, refined or become more ubiquitous. More inquiries into the ways in which this discourse is reproduced at the local level are needed.

As mentioned in Chapter Six, additional research is needed among the current young population in Cree communities. Uncovering this generation's attitude towards their culture and traditions is essential for future studies concerning the transformations of tradition as a conceptual category, as well as the maintenance and coherency of distinct observable Cree practices and values.

Finally, as a closing note, a word must be said of the document that inspired this discussion. The use of Regina Flannery's notes in this analysis was minimal compared to the vast potential these hold for future research. As outlined above, the original intent of this study foresaw a somewhat different use for Flannery's notes, but in spite of my shift in focus, her notes did serve the important purpose of orienting both myself and the women with whom I spoke in this research endeavour. However, there remains a great deal of factual data within these notes that deserves to be processed and analyzed, compared and discussed. It is hoped that some of this discussion will occur among residents of Waskaganish, and that Flannery's notes will be of continued interest to the community as a historical document for generations to come.

## APPENDIX 1

TEK

The discourse of 'traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)[49] is an interesting example of how 'tradition' has been used in defense of indigenous rights, while at the same time how the reification of the term 'traditional' can lead to contestation. As Nadasdy points out, TEK is now commonplace in issues concerning land and resource management (1999:763). Substantial literature exists surrounding its use alongside so-called 'scientific knowledge' and the integration and implementation of these two systems of knowledge into co-management policies worldwide (See Sillitoe 1998, Agrawal 1995, Johannes 1993, Scott 1996). As quickly as the concept of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) gained legitimacy as an effective means of addressing indigenous management concerns and bridging epistemological divides between the 'West and the Rest', suspicion arose concerning the foundations of the idea.[50] Primarily, the notion of 'traditional' was contested by Native people for assuming that TEK consists of cultural practice that is static and frozen in a particular point in time – a distant past – allowing for the dismissal of more recent ecological practices as being 'inauthentic' (Nadasdy 1999:766). Tradition, therefore, created a standard of authenticity that allowed non-Natives to deny the adaptability of Native cultures, and find 'evidence' that traditional knowledge was disappearing.[51] In this context, therefore, Native nations are vying for a more fluid understanding of tradition in 'traditional ecological knowledge'; one that will allow for adaptation and inclusion of innovation, but that will remain true to the principles of the particular culture. The power of TEK at the national and international level has also led to accusations by Non-Natives that Native groups are using it as a political ploy to maintain control of wildlife and lands and that the concept itself has no bearing on the modern lived reality of Native people today. It is evident, therefore, that 'tradition' holds great symbolic weight at the international, national and

[49] Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) has been variously defined, but it generally refers to 'a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down from generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment. Further, TEK is an attribute of societies with historical continuity in resource use practices; by and large, these are non-industrial societies (Berkes 1997:3). In a less formal definition, an elder has called TEK 'a common understanding of what life is about' (Government of NWT: 1991: Report of the Traditional Knowledge Working Group)

[50] See Knutson (1990) and Nadasty (1999)

[51] See Hovelsrud-Broda (1997) for a discussion of how unrealistic notions of 'tradition' has been used to support the EU ban on seal hunting among Arctic communities.

local levels. However the parameters of what is meant by this term are still being debated.

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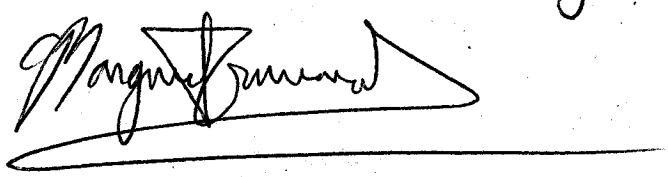
This project has been approved by the McGill Board of Ethics



**Sample Consent Form:**

**Title of Proposal**: Culture and Change: A re-examination of Cree Women's Knowledge in Waskaganish, Quebec.

**Supervisor:** Professor Toby Morantz. Department of Anthropology, McGill University, Tel: [redacted]; fax. [redacted]

**Researcher:** Margaret Garrard is currently a first year Master's Candidate in the Department of Anthropology at McGill University. This study will be conducted to fulfill the requirements for her Master's thesis.

**Purpose of Research**: Margaret Garrard is conducting research to examine the changes in women's knowledge of Cree culture and traditional pursuits. This project will use a study conducted in the 1930's as a baseline to chart the historical forces that have influenced women's roles as promoters of cultural identity, proponents of societal mores, and guardians of traditional knowledge. The main purpose of this research is to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which Cree women's perceptions have changed, and what specific forces have contributed to these changes.

**Description:** Your participation involves meeting with the researcher at a time that is most convenient for you. Topics that will be discussed include your personal understandings of women's role as promoters of tradition and culture in the community, and your recollections of traditional practices, and how such practices have been affected by historical forces. Interviews will be conducted with an interpreter if necessary, and, if you consent, will be audio-taped.

**Potential Harms and Benefits**: The researcher is sensitive to the fact that the information you provide may be of a personal nature and should be handled in a confidential manner. Steps will be taken to ensure that if you do not wish to be identified, your anonymity is protected. In cases when an interpreter is required, the interpreter has signed a confidentiality agreement with the researcher to further ensure the protection of your identity. The researcher hopes that this study will contribute to a more detailed cultural history of Waskaganish, and be of use as school materials throughout James Bay.

**Confidentiality:** All of the information that is collected from the interview will be maintained in strict confidence by the researcher. Research data in the form of interview transcript and notes will only be accessible to the researcher and her advisors. The researcher will change all identities, taped and transcripts of interviews will be coded, and computer files containing data will be kept secure under a special password on the

researcher's computer. In the final draft, if you do not want to be identified, a pseudonym will be used: your identity will remain anonymous.

**Basis of Participation**: Participation in interviews is entirely voluntary and will be conducted within the community, either at the participant's home, or in a public space where the participant feels comfortable.

**Statement of Disposition of Project Data, Research Results, Final Reports and Project**: Data from this project will form the basis of the researcher's master's thesis. Copies of the thesis will be made available (in English) at the request of participating organizations, such as the Band Council and the Cultural Institute of Waskaganish. The results of this study may be presented at related conferences or may appear in publications such as an article in an academic journal.

**Right of Exclusion or Withdrawal**:
You have the right to refuse inclusion in the research and all agreements made here are non-binding. Your withdrawal may occur at any time without jeopardy.

**Consent**:

I have read or have been orally informed of the above information in full, and my questions about this research project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy.

I consent to participate in the study.

I consent to having my name used in the final draft of this study.

YES NO

I consent to having photographs of myself used in the final draft of this study.

YES NO

_____

Participant's Signature or Mark Date

_____

Researcher's Signature Date