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COLONIALISM'S NORTHERN
CULTURES: CANADIAN
INSTITUTIONS AND THE
JAMES BAY CREE

A significant field of scholarly research has developed over the last several decades which examines how Europeans and North Americans have looked at and thought about peoples around the world, rather generally discussed as non-westerners. Much of the insight of this work flows from rich analyses developed by scholars who were born themselves outside of the west, such as English professor Edward Said's famous book on Orientalism.¹ Said showed the common

elements of Europeans' understandings about the Orient and about Oriental peoples which he uncovered by studying the text of European novelists, colonial administrators, governments and philosophers. He was, therefore, concerned with ideas about the Orient held by Europeans. Such ideas, he showed, were not the creation of the people of the Orient themselves; they were not the creation of the people they purported to describe. Said went on to argue that such ideas were developed not just as a way of thinking, the ideas were useful to Europeans during the period of colonial expansion and development of a world economy. The Orient and the Oriental were defined by Europeans by what they lacked; they did not have change, they did not have reason, not by what they were.

Said went on in a rich account to show how these ideas influenced the nature of colonial decision-making and government policy-making in those countries. These features of the Orient, of Orientalism, may seem very far from the topic of cultural institutions and the James Bay Cree, but it is arguable that European ideas of the Orient are very similar to the main European, American and Canadian ideas of the "Indian."² This has actually been shown by several important studies such as Robert Berkhofer's book, *The White Man's Indian*, and Debra Doxtator's *Fluffs and Feathers*.³ Berkhofer, for example, identifies the idea of the Indian as a European idea, which classifies as a single group all of the diverse cultures, societies, language groups and identities of the indigenous peoples of the Americas — peoples who did not think of themselves as one group or one continental people when they were first encountered. He shows that the central idea of the Indian is that Indians are different from Europeans. The idea of the Indian is one of people who are not European.

The universal feature of the idea of the Indian was that whether judged virtuous or degraded, Indians were defined by what they did not have, by the absence of "civilization." Whether they were seen as savage Indians, which was bad, or noble Indians, which was good, in either case they were defined by not being civilized and not being European. They were not modern. For example, Christopher Columbus reported in a single paragraph that Indians were simple but pleasant, and conversely, hostile and depraved. In both cases he thought they were not like Europeans. Europeans were thus consistently using the idea of Indians to define themselves as Europeans, to define what it was to be European, for Europeans were not Indians. The remarkable continuation of this idea of the Indian and use of it for nearly half a millennium, the idea that the Indian is deficient and contrasted to Europeans, has survived because it is an idea that is constantly useful to Europeans in order to explain to themselves why they try to control Indians. The consequences for European understanding of indigenous peoples therefore, as Berkhofer notes, are interesting. If an Indian adopts civilization then he or she is no longer a "real Indian" because an Indian is what Europeans are not and they can not become modern. As a result, the idea of the Indian is timeless. Indians are people without history. The concept of progress and evolution of society has changed that a little bit, however, because we see civilization as the triumph of history and it gives the idea that Indians ultimately, in time, will disappear and become like us. The overall consequence of these ideas is that Indians are people without a capacity to be active in the making of their own lives and in the making of a future that is different from our own. In so far as they have a history, it is the history of becoming like us.

These ideas and statements about Indians are, of course, not accurate but they nevertheless are assertions of Euro-Canadian knowledge about what will happen to Indians and who they are. They are a means of legitimating the control that Europeans often have. They play an active part in motivating Euro-Canadian institutions as to what they can do and how they can do it. The basic assumption is that ideas and images are shaped by the interests of the institutions and therefore that these ideas are used. They are also deeply believed at many levels as Berkhofer is able to at least suggest.

This paper is built around the contrast and the similarities between different sets of ideas about Indians which have prevailed among governments and corporations active in the James Bay region of Quebec during the last four decades. Several conditions will be examined. Ideas have gone through three changes or three periods during those decades. The first case to be looked at is the closing of nearly all the fur trading posts by the Hudson's Bay Company and their conversion into merchandising stores when the James Bay region was opened to mining and forestry development in the 1950s and 1960s. Here the images of the Indian concerned the passing of the traditional Indian tied to the old ways, the honourable and trustworthy Indian. The second phase occurred a decade later when massive hydro-electric development was initiated in the region: government and corporate agents faced the Cree in the courtroom over negotiating tables and through the media. The government's determination to develop the resources of the region without Cree participation and on a scale that did not require the Cree in any way was related to a different idea of the Indian: the Indian as the dependent of the Euro-Canadian. To change the focus on the loss of the traditional Indian and the James Bay fur trade which

dominated the 1960s to the focus on the Cree as active opponents of development in the region, or at least development as it was occurring, it was said that they were acculturated and assimilated. A dying people with a dying culture. The implication of this was that they were a people without autonomy, and whatever autonomy they may have had would not last for long.

The third period (post-1985) is marked by the Cree opposition to the Great Whale hydro-electric development, and the period of the possibility of Quebec separation. The Cree are actively a threat to the things Euro-Canadians want to do in the James Bay region. The focus on the Cree is that they are an already assimilated population crassly interested in increasing their monetary compensation. The Cree are increasingly portrayed as cunning and untrustworthy Indians. All these variations are I think variations on a single theme — the inherent superiority of the European or Euro-Canadian morally and historically.

The Fur Trade Period and the Closing of the Posts

European images of the Indian have played a central role in the history of the North American fur trade where they have a somewhat distinctive form and a very contemporary context. The James Bay region of Northern Quebec was opened by the first all-weather roads and railway lines in the 1950s and 1960s, in order to extract several rich mineral deposits, to exploit the forests of the region for sawmills and pulp production, and to set up as a result, the first large and permanent non-Cree towns in the area. The changes involved major capital investment and provoked many debates about what would happen to the Cree and what their future would be in such an environment.

These debates can be explored by looking at the closing of the fur trade posts, especially the first post that

closed at Waswanipi, the most southern portion of the James Bay region of Quebec. When the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) decided to close the fur trade post at Waswanipi — which was on an isolated lake and not on a road or a railway or at a mining town — in 1965 after nearly 170 years of continuous operation, and being one of the most productive fur trade posts in the history of the fur trade, it announced its decision in the internal organ of the Company, the Moccasin Telegraph. "The history of Waswanipi as an Indian settlement and trading post appears to be coming to an end. No longer able to support themselves on trapping and fishing, nearly all the Indians have moved away to such centres as [mining towns] or out to the highway where work is available." The Company, as it was traditionally called, was saying it took no responsibility for the closing of the post. Instead, it said there was an inevitable march of progress driven by the decline and viability of trapping and hunting ways of Indian peoples and the inevitable adoption of urban life styles and wage labour. This is how it explained its decision. Indians were being changed by other Canadians in the North.

The Company was, of course, losing money at the post for the last year or two and it was making a decision to close down the post as it became unproductive. It could be argued that the Company was just explaining away a very simple decision; however, that is not all of what was involved if we look at the history of events. The use of the idea that the Indian cannot change and modernize and still be an Indian was being used by the Company. It is an idea which not only shaped how they explained their action, it actually shaped the action of closing the post.

Ever since the post-Confederation construction of the transcontinental railways had begun in the last quarter of the 19th century, the HBC had found that where modern

means of transportation developed, the fur trade and Indians changed. Fur trading competitors gained access, Euro-Canadian trappers entered the region and Euro-Canadians set up various companies to exploit the resources of the region and created new opportunities for work. From this experience, the Company had developed an organized distinction between its facilities on the transportation frontier and those in the hinterlands. Inland posts in remote districts were generally those 50 miles or more from motorized access routes. Here, there were regular customers whom the traders knew personally and the operations were generally in the traditional form of barter. Since the earliest years of the fur trade, the exchange of furs had developed through a complex form of gift giving and reciprocity, which preceded the actual exchange of furs and which had clear roots in the pre-contact trading processes of the First Nations peoples. Furs themselves were exchanged directly for goods in the earliest trade but this developed into a system of debt. The trader provided goods and supplies to outfit the trapper in the fall and the trapper paid off the debt during or at the end of the trapping season by bringing their furs back to the trader who had outfitted them.

The system appears to have developed as one mutually sought after by fur traders and indigenous peoples and to make it work, the fur trader had to know his people well. The first frontier operations, called line posts because they were on the transportation lines, were both retail merchandising stores and fur buying depots which served all customers on a cash basis and without much debt. They bought furs at prices that were highly competitive with the independent fur traders who came with the railways and the roads and they were intended to protect the hinterlands for the Hudson's Bay Company by competing aggressively with

other traders at the accessible transportation points. The Company intended to discourage other traders from developing the means to enter the hinterlands, even if the Company had to take some losses at its line locations. This, of course, did not always work. It was generally found, however, in the immediate area of the frontier, where there was competition between non-indigenous trappers that there would be a rapid over-exploitation of game. This meant that the Company at these posts did not give credit and credit was very risky. People could trade elsewhere and people were trapping a population that normally was under decline. It was very disruptive of traditional and dependable trading patterns from the Company's point of view.⁴

The Hudson's Bay Company, therefore, had a long experience of opening a region, and it had a whole set of ideas about the experiences and practices and what it meant to a region to be opened up. One dimension of the model foresaw that access to open competition among fur traders and Euro-Canadian trappers meant that Indian trappers became undependable credit risks and could not be trusted with outfitting advances or counted on to bring their furs back to the Company. Another dimension was that the potentially higher incomes from wage labour and easy money in the frontier towns would have a greater appeal than the return from winter trapping and that Indians would choose to work and become cash-oriented. Both seemed to be coming when the roads went through in the early 1960s in southern James Bay.

In 1964, the year before the closing of the Waswanipi fur trade post, the post manager reported that a number of trappers had outfitted at Waswanipi and had then taken the buses and the taxi services to go to town where they sold their furs and where they stayed for the summer working, leaving their debts partly unpaid. As a result, the Company

refused advances to the Cree who were trying to go out to their winter camps in the fall of 1964. Without advances, many could not go to the camps; they needed the advances to pay for their transportation and they needed it to buy a supply of goods and traps and so forth to take out to their winter camps. In fact, what employment the Cree were actually taking at this time was almost entirely seasonal and not, as the Company thought, annual. Such employment was compatible with trapping. People were actually working in the summer to try to build up some of the cash they needed in order to go trapping and hunting in the winter, and pay their debt, and this was a developing strategy the Cree were using. Full-time jobs had been available to the Cree during the whole decade between 1955 and 1965 and less than a dozen people from Waswanipi had taken full-time jobs out of a work force of about 90 men. Full-time jobs were not what people were actively seeking. The move away from staying at the Waswanipi post in the summer was due to the fact that there were no summer jobs there and you could get those jobs around town. Therefore, people were trying to spend their summers around town and then go back to the bush camps in the winter.

The closing of the post, however, was done on the basis of the claim that the Cree of Waswanipi were abandoning trapping and that this was part of a longer term transition for the Cree to become industrial workers like other Canadians in the North. This was not confirmed by the data that are available for the period. The evidence of the timing of the changes shows that it was only after the 1964-65 season that the fur harvest declined. Prior to 1964 there was no decline in trapping harvest. Only about one in six men worked during the winter, that is 85 percent trapped before 1964-65, but in the fall of 1964, after they had not been given advances by the Hudson's Bay Company, more

than half of the hunters could not go to their bush camps due to the lack of financial support. Thus, the major decline in full-time hunting and trapping was not part of a steadily declining trend and an increase in wage labour. The drop from 85 percent to less than 50 percent hunting was the result of the Company limiting the credit. It was this which caused the precipitous drop in trapping. Yet, although the Company thought that the decline in trapping confirmed its fears, it firmly believed that the Cree wanted to become wage labourers and did not want to be trappers and hunters any more. The Company not only saw the changes in Cree life, which it expected to see on the frontier, but it actually created the changes that it saw and that it feared. The Hudson's Bay Company's decision therefore was not simply economic. It was cultural in its basic sense. It was a decision based on the vision of what the Cree would become, not what they actually were already or what they were doing at that moment. It was a decision that was hinged on the idea of the Indian: the Indian could not modernize and still be trustworthy and still be a bush person, and still be committed to the bush.

Hydro-Electric Development and the James Bay Cree

The changing image of the Indian over the next two decades, can be found in corporate cultures and practices and in government policy as these were fought out in the courtrooms, negotiations, and the implementation of the 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. The Cree were ignored when the first phase of hydro-electric development was planned and announced in 1971, and the Cree had to take the governments to court in order to get them to negotiate an agreement. This active opposition to the developments required a revision of the view of the Cree which had been used in the earlier decades. Up until

then, Euro-Canadians did not really anticipate that the Cree could actively oppose large-scale developments or activities in their region.

I remember as a young graduate student, who hadn't visited James Bay in 1967-68, sitting around with other researchers at McGill University preparing a final recommendation for a five-year study on the future of the Cree in a developing region. This was three years before the hydro project was announced. We were concerned by the absence of a Cree political response to the closing of the fur trade post. These concerns were legitimate and in many ways realistic — no one had protested the closing of the post and the villages. Yet we basically misjudged the situation. The research project recommended, among other things, that the Cree be offered courses on how the political, social and economic systems work, and how decisions were made in Canada, so that the Cree could more effectively participate and challenge them. There is an implicit colonial tutelage in this thinking.

There is also a misjudgment because even though it was true that the Cree leadership would need, and would indeed learn much more about these things over the next few years, we did not realize that Cree elders and leaders already had their own broad understandings of the problems they were facing and the changes they were living through. They had a rich day to day knowledge about government at the regional level, even though they did not fully understand Ottawa and Quebec City. What we totally failed to anticipate was that three years after these discussions, the Cree leaders would themselves join with the educated younger Cree to oppose hydro-electric development and to start court cases and negotiations. They would do so on the basis of the elders' own understandings of their relationships to Euro-Canadians. The fact that the Cree goals are still unfulfilled

after three decades does not reduce the importance of this activity and, indeed, we take it for granted in 1995 that the Cree and other First Nations will be politically active.

Why didn't we see this? I am struck by how we were taken by the assumptions of our own superior vision and our own thinking about Indians. Our thinking presupposed there were only two choices. There were Indians who were traditionally living on the land and there were Indians who were modernized. We hoped to make them stronger to make the choice but we saw very little in between. The views of the Cree elders and leadership in the face of the development of hydro-electric resources in 1971 and 1972 can be seen in one of the first responses they made. Philip Awashish, one of the young leaders, quoted the results of meetings between the young educated Cree and their elders in 1972. The elders said it

started by the arrival of the first white man to the area and it continues to this very day — [this pattern of relationship]. Development has been solely in the hands of people from outside the region. The James Bay Development Corporation in its plans to develop the area has given little or no consideration to the resources which are important for subsistence to the Cree people....

The region has been utilized almost exclusively by the Cree people who have no voice in the decision-making body which [is] planning the development of ... the area.

The Cree elders thus had their own understanding of what the problem was and it was a rich historical understanding. They focused their concerns on the need to maintain social and economical autonomy in the face of development while not opposing all development, just demanding they have a voice in the future of the region.

The failure of Euro-Canadians to seek a more active and critical understanding by the Cree was key to how the government set out ignoring the Cree in the very planning of the project itself. In the federal-provincial task force, the first assessment of the environmental and social impacts of the project, it was stated that the Cree were "economically and politically strongly dependent on the white man's society." It was deeply disturbing and offensive to the Cree that the government and the corporations presented them as a passive and dependent population and that they used this statement as the core of the claim that the project would therefore have no impact on them and no negative effects. The pattern of claiming Cree dependency was also central because it ignored the active opposition of the Cree. By the time this group reported, it was already announced that the Cree opposed the project. To say they were dependent was to say they would not be a serious opposition.

The dependency claim emerged immediately in the court case, once the Cree initiated it at the end of 1972. The first witness was then a young Cree leader, Chief Billy Diamond from Rupert House, now Waskaganish. Early in his cross examination by Jacques Le Bel, a lawyer for the James Bay Development Corporation, the topic turned to Cree cultural change which was a constant theme in the court.

Le Bel: "Is it correct to say Chief that there were more hunters in your childhood than there are now?"

Diamond: "If you are speaking of hunting, no. I think there's been an increase in hunters. People like me have returned to the north and have continued hunting."

Le Bel: "But there's been a decrease of game?"

Diamond: "I can speak about geese and duck and ptarmigan hunting and I feel that there has been no decrease in game. There has just been an increase in hunters."

Le Bel: "And would you say there's been a decline in trapping?"

Diamond: "No, I would say there's been an increase in it."

Billy Diamond knew the arguments well and he was not going to admit to the future that Le Bel implied. Even though it is not an easy topic to address in a courtroom centred on facts and standards of evidence, the future was not just implied in the interviews, it was explicitly a subject of discussion before the court and the Cree witnesses subtly asserted their claims about the future against the claims made by lawyers for Quebec.

Consider the cross examination of Matthew Neeposh from Mistassini:

Le Bel: "Do you go alone to your trap line?"

Neeposh: "Other people go with me."

Le Bel: "How many?"

Neeposh: "Six people - two families go with me."

Le Bel: "Including women and children?"

Neeposh: "Yes."

Le Bel: "Kids of what age?"

Neeposh: "I don't know."

Le Bel: "Do they not go to school these children?"

Neeposh: "Yes, kids are in school now, as of this year."

Le Bel: "Does that mean they will not go with you on your trap line next year?"

Neeposh: "Eventually they will go back to the trap line."

Le Bel: "Are you going to take them to their trap line next year?"

Neeposh: "The children who want to go with me will go with me."

Matthew Neeposh knew well the implications of the lawyer's questions about whether children would be going to school or hunting the next winter. He knew it was a discussion about the future of hunting and he challenged the assumptions implicit in the question about the future decline of Cree hunting, while maintaining of course, a respectful attitude towards his children's autonomy and the future that he knew could not be known with certainty. He denied the assumption that the children would not follow in his footsteps without making any statement about what they might actually decide in fact.

The lawyers for the Crown continued these lines of questioning with many Cree, and with these bits and pieces of ambiguous evidence, the government lawyers and some of the judges made broad claims supporting the general conclusions that the Cree, like other Indians, would have a future of assimilation.

After the Cree won a temporary injunction ruling in the first court, the Crown appealed, but at the same time the negotiations which led to the James Bay agreement began. A year later, an agreement in principle was signed and the ruling in the appeal court was, in a certain sense, politically anticlimactic after that ruling. It was still, however, an important ruling for the future developments in the region and for jurisprudence. The appeal court was overwhelmingly in support of Hydro Quebec and it ruled against the Cree on every point. (The injunction, of course, had been very strongly in favour of the Cree and therefore the government had begun to negotiate.) The main judgement, however, paid a lot of attention to what the

court thought was happening to the Cree. The appeal court viewed them as Indians who were no longer traditional:

A considerable number of Indians occupy interesting jobs, and do not give themselves over to hunting and fishing except as recreation.... For means of transportation on lakes and rivers they use canoes with outboard motors, and no longer paddle.... In summary, the Indians and the Inuit have abandoned the way of life of their ancestors and have adopted that of whites. These facts are reality, and I apologize for displeasing those who take pleasure in speaking of the question ... with emotion and romanticism.

The court of appeal went beyond just telling the Cree about their future. It also talked about the nature of the relationship, as it thought would exist, and did exist, between Cree and Euro-Canadians:

In fact the James Bay project represents for the Indian culture its main cohesive tool, and the ... shock that will permit [the Cree] to rediscover [their] identity and ... personality.... The development of the James Bay territory, then, from the cultural point of view ... [will] ... on the one hand create a ... shock to the [Indians] which will allow them to take cognizance again of their originality and stop the slow ... withering that their culture has suffered since generations; and on the other hand, it will bring with it men and knowledge that can help in the elaboration of the necessary policies of transformation.

The claim that hydro-electric development and Euro-Canadians could save the Cree and stop the withering of Cree culture is of course ridiculous, but it has a logic of control to it. How can one people save another people's

culture — only if the first people are lacking in a real culture can this occur. The mentality therefore is that what is lacking must be brought to the Indians. It legitimates Canadians' decisions to try to control the Cree, control their lands and change their lives because Canadians can bring them a future.

Here the contradictions are clear also, for the claim that the Cree are passively dependent on Europeans, and already assimilated, takes place in a courtroom on an appeal that the Cree themselves have forced the court to consider. In other words, it is the Cree challenges which give the impetus to the judges' statements and to the harsh writing about the relationships of Cree and Canadians. The Cree are no longer simply seen as dependent, they are now politically active. It is clear that what the quotation tries to do is to say that the future is still not Cree and it will be controlled by Euro-Canadians. The consequences of this in the negotiation of the James Bay agreement and what followed are significant.

Among the many parts of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, one of the most cooperative and innovative and revealing was the programme to provide guaranteed incomes for people who wanted to continue to hunt. In 1975, in the course of financial evaluations, lawyers from the government and the Cree asked each other how many Cree families were likely to be eligible for payments as full-time hunters because this would be the major factor that determined how much the programme would cost. The government negotiators indicated that they were working with the figure of a maximum of 600 Cree families. Some of the advisors for the Cree agreed with that figure, but a poll among the Cree negotiators themselves and among Cree from the villages, suggested that there might be a 1000 or 1200 families who would be eligible — up to twice as many

as estimated by government officials. When the numbers were discussed between negotiators of all groups, there was considerable skepticism about such a level of participation among the lawyers and the negotiators from the government. Further discussion of the differences led to a question from the government negotiators about whether many Cree among the next generation would be likely to hunt. As discussions proceeded, it emerged that many thought that this programme was really "to put money into the pockets of the older generation that lived by hunting and trapping" and it would not be needed when they were gone. But when the Cree negotiators made clear that in their view, there was a high likelihood that there would be a continuing group of full-time hunters through many generations, government negotiators indicated that they were not convinced. They thought this was a sunset provision of the agreement, something that would last a decade or two and then just wither away because there would not be any people who would be beneficiaries of it. In the event, the programme registered 980 families in 1976 and since then it has continued to support about 1200 families.

The case can be made that government negotiators not only approached this provision and this programme as a sunset clause, but they actually thought the whole agreement was really a temporary stop-gap measure for the Cree people who were rapidly being assimilated. Thus for many government negotiators, and equally for the government administrators who had to put the agreement into practice in their departments, the entire agreement was a sunset agreement and an anachronism. The legal text for them was not very important; they could violate it because the provisions would become irrelevant and outmoded as the Cree were inevitably modernized and assimilated. In

fact, the agreement has never been effectively implemented in many of its provisions — much has been ignored and delayed, and significant parts have actually been violated.

Dependency and Sovereignty

Much of this has to do with senior governments and corporations keeping control of lands and resources which they do not feel they should share control of with the Cree, even though they agreed to under particular conditions and constraints. But the failure of the federal and Quebec governments to implement numerous other provisions goes beyond the immediate control of resources. These failures require an appreciation of the importance of sovereign control by governments and the perceived need to force the Cree to acknowledge that they are dependent and powerless and should not be challenging the government. In the view of the governments today, the Cree opposition to additional development, such as Great Whale, on the grounds of its impact on lands, wildlife, hunting and Cree culture, is a screen for modern Cree interests and dependency. They believe that the Cree only want more compensation monies and control of economically valuable natural resources to use for their own benefit. This view is expressed repeatedly. Hydro Quebec officials emphasize the incompatibility of the Indian way with the modern state. As one vice-president stated, "I don't want to live like my grandfather lived in the farmlands somewhere in Quebec. I need television, radio, electricity. I don't believe Native people want to live in the stone age." A past-president of the same organization, when asked in 1991 what he thought the Cree wanted, responded "When they say it's not a question of material compensation, I don't believe them."

This idea of the Cree, that they are already assimilated, disempowers the Cree leaders as active agents in making

their claims for Cree autonomy. This is clear in the latest and in some ways the most complex image of the Cree proposed by Euro-Canadians involved in the future of the region. In impact statements, submitted in 1993 by Hydro Quebec to the environmental impacts review process for the now suspended Great Whale River project, Cree society is interpreted as being composed of two distinct ways of life. One is a traditional and unchanging life, namely that of traditional hunters, intensive hunters. The other is an assimilated way of life, modernizing and developing, which is represented by two sub-groups: an elite of Cree administrators and the more numerous Cree youth. The implicit meaning is that the Cree opposition to development is a strategy by the small, assimilated Cree elite, claiming to represent, and exploiting the interest of the minority of traditional Cree people in order to make claims against the rights of Quebecers and other Canadians to the territory. This is a more sophisticated caricature than has ever been used in the public processes of the debates, and maybe because it is more sophisticated, many government spokesmen and ministers do seem to believe what it claims. Their conviction shows in the anger they express when the Cree assert their self-determination. One occasion was shortly after the cancellation of the major New York Power Authority contract to purchase a large block of Hydro Quebec power, and immediately following the introduction of four bills into the Massachusetts legislature to limit power purchases and to prevent civil servants from investing their pension funds in Hydro Quebec. The minister of energy for Quebec was quoted in the newspapers as saying,

Yes, I blame [the Cree] for what they've been doing. I blame them for discrediting Quebec all over the world. Do you think a Quebecer can accept that? I don't think so.

Are they Quebecers or not? They live in our territory. They live with us, they work with us and they're penalizing Quebecers.... That's what I cannot accept and I will never accept.

Cree spokesmen accused the minister of trying to incite a racist reaction to the Cree, but it was also an outburst which expressed a conviction from which the minister refused to retreat when challenged by journalists the following day. The implication of the comments was that the Cree had to understand as the government did that this was a contest between two sectors of Quebec society and not between Quebecers and Cree with real autonomy. Indeed in private conversation, the minister said that the Cree had to accept that they were a defeated people.

A more recent variation on this theme is developed in the referendum era as the Cree are perceived and spoken about as the willing and cunning *allies of anglophones* with whom they share interests and from whom they can expect advantages. Here Cree autonomy has been reduced to their being used as dupes.

There are many factors explaining why such a view has come to dominate in the 1990s. I think the contrast with views four decades ago is interesting. The Cree were part of a fur trade economy and clients of a specialized government department. Now the Cree are no longer needed by significant sectors of Canadian or Quebec society or by world economic institutions. This is one of the critical differences. The Cree are now just a threat to corporate interests and government plans. They share no interests, or at least those institutions perceive them as sharing no interests. Their autonomy is not a complement of their dependency as it was in the fur trade. As a result, the government and corporations continue to expand and exploit the minerals, forests and wildlife of the James Bay

region without giving any effective special consideration to the needs of the Cree, even though the James Bay agreement requires many such considerations.

This is not all that has changed. The Cree have now changed as well. They are more organized, they are better funded, and they are more able to take autonomous action in the national and international political and economic arenas on a world scale. Such action has obviously stunned important governmental and economic institutions and it is a contrast to a time when the Hudson's Bay Company closed the post and the Cree adapted within their own society and did not directly challenge the decision, or even communicate that they were unhappy with it. In this sense, the rhetoric of the debates and the understandings has been modified. The Cree are now a threat rather than traditional. Nevertheless, the patterns of thought and practice which came to the region with accelerated resource developments in the 1950s and 1960s have not been fundamentally changed, they have been elaborated. The continuing belief in the inevitability of the transformation of Indians into modern Canadians and Quebecers is essential to understanding the extent to which the Cree struggles of the last four decades to restructure their relationships to Canadians and Quebecers and to continue to be partners with them have not resulted in any broad mutual or satisfying accommodations.

There is still an unquestioned interest and assumption of a right by Ottawa and Quebec City to rule James Bay and its Indians. This control seems as inevitable and natural to government and corporations now as it did four decades ago; although, Cree actions expose the error in the recurrent assertion that they cannot exercise autonomy in the modern world.

NOTES

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1. Edward J. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
2. When I use the term "Indian" I mean Euro-Canadian ideas about First Nations peoples, not the First Nations people themselves, and when I mean the people themselves I will call them First Nations or indigenous peoples or I will call them by a more specific name such as the James Bay Cree or just the Cree. In this paper the term "Indian" refers to the ideas Canadians hold about First Nations people not to the people themselves. These ideas are neither accurate reflections of the lives of these people nor how First Nations peoples would see themselves.
3. Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian From Columbus to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1978) and Deborah Doxtator, *Fluff and Feathers: An Exhibit of the Symbols of Indianness* (Brantford, ON: Woodland Cultural Centre, 1992).
4. See Arthur J. Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).
5. The first of these quotes, and some succeeding quotes, are cited from: Donna Patruk, "Language, Power and Resistance: Discourses on Hydro Electric Development in Great Whale River, Quebec," (Unpublished, University of Toronto, OISE, [1992]).

Bruce W. Hodgins
Kerry A. Cannon
Editors

ON

Confronting the Challenges

THE

to Aboriginal Self-Determination

LAND

in Northern Quebec & Labrador

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