

HUNTING “BOSSES,” INEQUALITY AND THE QUESTION OF EXPLOITATION:
STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES IN JAMES BAY CREE SOCIETY
(An Idea, Discussion and Lecture Paper)

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This analysis will explore the complex and reticulate relationships between Cree symbolic structures, social practice, and the material conditions of hunting. The focus will be on the processes of interaction among the analytic categories of structure, practice and material conditions. The analyses of contemporary processes will be presented around the issue of the nature of the social inequality arising from the contemporary Cree hunting territory system and the related question of whether these inequalities are associated with forms of exploitation.

Three-quarters of a century of studies of Algonkian societies emphasize a consistent set of themes: the communal and egalitarian principles on which the societies are organized; the general equality of material conditions; the fluidity of authority and its basis on the ability to influence others through competence; the consensual basis of decision-making with respect to control of resources; and the ability of people to change social groupings and allegiances when a leader's performance is not accepted.

Although I do not disagree with the central components of this picture as regards communal and egalitarian principles and equality of material conditions, I think this view suggests a greater equality than exists, a more transitory and unstructured form of leadership and decision making than is common with hunting territories, and it simplifies the social dynamics between authority and egalitarianism in Cree social formations.

This over-simplified picture derives I would suggest from the assumption that change is not an ongoing process grounded in everyday life, and the use of an inadequate set of analytical categories based on the division of the social whole into levels or sectors whose relationships of dominance are determined rather than ongoingly constructed.

I explore an analysis based on an alternative, and in my view more basic, set of categories and processes the value of which I am still in the process of exploring. In particular, I

will use the categories of structure, practice, and material conditions, and the processes of interpretation, social action, and reality construction. I will show that there is a tension in both Cree structures and Cree practice between egalitarianism and leadership hierarchies.

What I propose to develop in the remainder of this paper is an account of these mutual determinations of structure and praxis in contemporary Waswanipi Cree hunting, with a particular focus on the reticulate relationships of knowledge, social order and material conditions in the processes generating equality and inequality in Cree society.

This discussion paper presents part of a larger research project on Cree structures and practices in history. The paper both assumes and also re-presents some knowledge of my and other scholars earlier publications on Cree.

WASWANIPi CREE STRUCTURES OF WORLD AND SELF²

Cree do not radically separate the concept of "man" from that of "nature" or of "animals". They indicate that in their everyday experience in the bush they continually observe examples of the intelligence and will power of animals. Because animals act as if they have intelligence and wills, they are capable of social action, and are causally responsible for things they do in the world. To kill an animal in the Cree view does not mean to encounter it by chance, but to receive the animal. The animal is given to the hunter.

It is not only possible for animals to understand human beings, it is equally important for human beings to understand animals. The actions of animals are communication events which convey information about their intentions. Much of the communication code is

standardized, but the meanings of the messages depend on the context and as a result a hunter must constantly learn to understand the meanings and how to act accordingly.

Because animals are gifts, it is appropriate to ask: "Who gives the animal?" Recurrent answers are that animals do not only give themselves, they are given by the various spirits, and by God or Jesus. Active phenomena such as the winds, water, God and various spirit beings are all considered, like animals and humans, to be alive. And because all sources of action in the Cree world are like persons, the explanations of the causes of events and happenings are not in terms of impersonal forces, but in terms of the actions of one or more living beings.

Because the world is volitional, it is therefore possible to know what will happen before it does occur, because it is habitual; but there is also a fundamental unpredictability in the world as well because habits make action likely, but not certain. This capriciousness is also a result of the diversity of persons because many phenomena must act in concert for events to occur. The world of personal action is therefore neither a world of mechanistic determination nor one explained away as random chance; it is a world of intelligent order, but a very complex order, and one not always knowable by men. The Cree world is a complex of interrelationships which is in important ways analogous to what some ecological scientists have tended to picture, although they would tend to use an organic ecosystem idiom rather than a personal idiom.

'God' and Jesus are the ultimate explanation for all that happens on this earth but they also give all the beings of the world intelligence and will in order to follow their way, or abandon it. God gives and takes life, but beings are ultimately responsible for their actions. God therefore plays a key part in the gift of animals to hunters, but only one part among the many actors. The idea of individual autonomy and responsibility is therefore pervasive in the Cree world. And the idea of autonomy is rooted in the moral and metaphysical orders.

But God is also the boss or the leader of all things, and He is assisted by the winds and a hierarchy of leaders extending to spirits, animals and humans. The idea of leadership is therefore also pervasive in the Waswanipi world, and the hierarchy of leaders is spoken of as one of power. Hunting therefore depends not only on the hunter and the animals, but on an integrated chain of leaders and helpers using their power together to give and receive animals.

In this chain human beings fit somewhere in the middle range. Human beings are mutually dependent on animals, who are generally less powerful than humans, and on spirit beings who are generally more powerful. But the linkages are close and the positions flexible. As Cree myths indicate, some of the less powerful spirit beings were formerly human beings who have been transformed into spirits. And, animals themselves are said to have been like men in the "long ago" time of the legends, when they could talk with one another and with humans.

The power of God and men is manifest in the relationship between thought and happenings in the world. What God thinks or knows happens; His thought is one with happenings and thus He is all powerful. God and spirit beings may give their powerful knowledge to men in dreams and in thoughts and by signs in the world, but they never tell all of what men would like to know. The knowledge that spirits give anticipates the future with some real, but always unknown, degree of certainty.

Men not only differ from animals by the degree of power they receive, but also from each other. Powerful and effective knowledge increases with age and with the care and attention individuals give to interpreting and cultivating their communications with God and spirit beings. These differences in power and wisdom are reflected in the patterns of leadership within human communities.

The meaning of power in the Cree perspective is complex. In hunting, a hunter will frequently dream of an animal he will be given before he begins to look for it. He may then go out hunting and find signs of that animal that confirm his expectation. When the things he thinks about actually come to be, when he is given the animal, that is an indicator of power. Power then for the Cree is the process of actualization of thought in practice.

The power of the thoughts and the actions of men arise out of the intimate linking of human experience and will to the independent course of happenings in the world. Power in this Cree sense may have analogies to the concept of active truth -- that is, thought which comes to be. We might say that power is truth actualized rather than that power is control.

This interrelationship of hunters' thought and action in the world links understandings of hunting with basic Cree attitudes toward human life itself. This is clearest in the evaluative conceptions of hunting.

The hunt is conceptualized as an ever-changing cycle. Having received a gift the hunter is involved in a return, being under obligation to respect that gift by reciprocating with gifts of his own. These gifts go partly to other Cree, as most large kills and animals are shared beyond the family of the hunter, with kinsmen, neighbors, or all members of a community. And by giving meat to other people hunters say they find more animal gifts themselves in return. The hunter also reciprocates to the spirits who have participated in the hunt, placing a small portion of the meat into the stove at the first meal of each day, so the smoke of the gift can go up the stove pipe as a sign of appreciation and respect to the spirits "up there." This return offering is itself part of an ongoing relationship of reciprocity: it not only expresses respect and repays an obligation, it continues the exchange serving as a statement of anticipation that the hunter will

again receive what he wants when he is again in need. Many Cree rituals follow a similar structure.

When a hunter has a successful period of hunting he says that he is having "luck" which means he has a continuing reciprocal exchange of gifts. When a hunter cannot get what he wants then he has "no luck". A pervasive proposition of Cree knowledge is that a hunter cannot always have "luck," that any one exchange must be discontinuous, and must be mediated by other social exchanges. A series of proverbs express this view. A husband and wife cannot have luck together, and if they do they will not be together long. When three or four families live together in the bush and one is out of luck, the others will have luck so they can help out. Thus, if his exchanges with certain animals or spirits stop, his exchanges with other spirits or men support him.

The structure of Cree proverbs emphasize that relationships, though constantly changing, tend to balance one another -- when one fails another succeeds. Such a balance is held up as a model for life as well as for hunting, indeed it is interpreted as a structure of the world.

In hunting, for example, if animals want to be caught and they are not hunted, then they have fewer young, may over-populate an area, and they more easily succumb to diseases or predation. Thus, proper hunting can lead to increases in the numbers of and health of animals if the needs of the animals are respected. However, if a hunter kills animals that are not given, then he over hunts, the spirits of that species will be "mad," the hunter will have no luck, and the animals will be harder to locate or catch. When the harvest decreases the animals may cease being mad and grow again. Hunting involves a reciprocal obligation for hunters to provide the

conditions in which animal families can grow and survive. We might note the parallel such a view has with a sense of ecological responsibility.

The fulfillment of this responsibility provides the main criterion by which hunters judge one another. In everyday conversation people speak extensively about the reputations and actions of other hunters. The most respected are typically described as those who consistently get hard-to-kill animals, or those who have good hunts of several kinds of the animals. The emphasis in neither case is on a large number of animals killed in any season or year, indeed, exceptionally large single time harvests may be frowned upon. What is emphasized in these evaluations of respect is hunting competence and long-term success. Men who do well over the long-term, if not continually, are respected for their exceptional competence and are contrasted with those who take chances, who fool around with animals by not killing them cleanly and with others who seek self-aggrandizement by large kills or wasting animals.

This image of the competent hunter serves also as a goal of the good life. Publicly valued aims of both hunting and of life are to maintain a continuing and balanced participation with the world. Men and animals reciprocally reproduce the conditions in which all fulfill themselves and each contributes to the survival of others.

To review then, Cree structures emphasize the unity of self and world, the inseparability of knowledge, value and material being, the need for humans to integrate structures of knowledge and value with practice and intervention in the world, and the dual mutual determination of an individual autonomy which can only be exercised and fulfilled through active participation in a hierarchy of beings and leaders.

WASWANUPI CREE HUNTING STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES

Cree daily life is thus extensively if not solely organized around principles of community, egalitarianism and reciprocity which have been found to be central in most hunting and gathering societies. But it is also organized, as I will show, around inequality and hierarchy.

The central resources of land and wildlife are not considered to be owned by humans because, as the Cree say, people are born and die while the land continues. The land is passed on from previous generations, and will be transmitted to future generations, and no one can own it, dispose of it or sell it in any authoritative or absolute sense. All people have a right of access to land and resources to sustain themselves. This right extends to all Cree, and to other humans as well, but along with the rights go responsibilities to respect the land and animals. All the land on which the Cree hunt is divided into territories. The approximately three hundred territories in the James Bay region vary in size from about three hundred to several thousand square kilometers, each supervised by a steward. They are grouped together into continuous blocks, each associated with a particular Cree community, which exercises collective rights over the community territory. The three hundred hunting territories are thus aggregated into eight community hunting zones. While rights to land and resources are distributed to the community as a whole, as a continuing society extending over generations, specific people exercise authority over the hunting territories in the name of the community and the common interest.

Each hunting territory is said to be "owned" by an individual "boss" or "leader," whom I shall call a steward. Although the term for the relationship of stewards to their hunting territories is "ownership" in English, the relationship is not one of ownership by western standards. The steward appoints his successor, but he cannot dispose of the land by sale or

transfer. The steward is therefore the temporary custodian of a portion of the community and kin-group patrimony. He is under obligation to see that the land is used in ways that sustain and protect it for posterity.

The steward exercises a broad mandate and considerable authority vis-a-vis his contemporaries. He has the right to decide whether the hunting territory is to be used for an extended period of time, that is, whether it can be harvested intensively and, he has considerable authority over whom it is used by. He can decide which and how much of the big game species can be hunted, as well as where and when. Spiritual sanctions support his authority, and although animal spirits communicate their willingness to be caught through dreams and signs to all hunters, the steward is said to have the closest ties to the spirits of the land he owns.

In practice, a steward will exercise much less day-to-day direction than this formal account may imply; allowing a hunter to use a hunting territory will often carry an implicit or explicit agreement on the overall size of the harvest and the area to be harvested, and no more direction than that may be required. Often direction takes the form of an impersonal commentary on a situation or a suggestion, in accordance with the ideology of egalitarianism.

In addition to the rights of a steward, hunters acquire a long-term right of access to one or more hunting territories in which they have grown up or hunted over an extended period of time. If a steward decides a certain hunting territory will be used, then those people with a long-term right of access to it may use it without having to be invited to join the steward's hunting group. Their use of it, however, is still subject to the steward's supervision. In addition, a hunter who does not have a right may be granted a privilege of using a hunting territory for a specified period of time -- several months or a year. An individual typically occupies the role of steward

for several decades, between about the ages of forty to sixty. This leadership authority is thus exercised by a relatively stable and limited number of individuals. There are about three hundred stewards in the James Bay Cree area among a population of 8,600, with approximately 1,500 resident adult men.

Stewards therefore have considerable authority, not just by dint of personal skills or influence, but through the direct control of information, of decision making, and of access to intensively used resources, and they exercise considerable authority over the activities of others.

The steward's authority is, in principle, sanctioned spiritually, thus making it powerful but also obligating him to protect and improve the resources, and to share them with the community. If these values are not respected the spirits and the animals will not provide a good hunt. Stewards are generally expected to accommodate hunters without land, and in practice it would be exceptionally rare for a man who wanted to hunt not to find a place.

The key elements of the hunting territory system then are: 1) a communal and inalienable interest in the use and protection of all land resources; 2) the existence of a limited and relatively stable set of stewards whose detailed knowledge of, and spiritual ties to, particular tracts of land are the basis of their authority over all intensive use of those lands and resources by community members; 3) community expectation, encouragement and sanction of leaders to exercise authority with a view to protect communal and family needs and inter-generational continuity. This model is not fundamentally inconsistent with the classical accounts of Cree leadership, but it does differ in its emphasis on the real resources leaders control and the durability of their status.

It also differs because it makes it possible to analyze more complex means of exercising and constraining authority. For example, the control of stewards over real resources makes it

possible that locally perceived or externally defined exploitation could occur. I will consider this possibility below.

The hunting territory system also makes it clear that even if abuse of leadership were perceived, the power of stewards does not simply decline because they lose followers. When they lose support they still claim control of important resources, and many people will not, or cannot, cut their ties and join other leaders. It is easier for those who depend on invitations to several territories to cut ties to a particular territory, but not for those with long term rights of use to that territory.

The more serious challengers of a steward's authority are therefore his close kinsmen and "friends" who have primary rights of access to his territory. When stewardship breaks down, they do not simply cut ties. Rather they are likely to engage in indirect public challenges to the steward's management. If this fails to bring accommodation, they may make parallel claims of ownership to part or all of the territory, claiming as their authority their personal ties to his predecessor and to the spirits as a result of their long term use. Calling on public opinion for support, they may declare that 'ownership' should be split, or its recognition reconsidered, as it was not clearly transferred. If such conflicts are not quickly resolved, the challengers start to use the land under their own direction with informal public sanction, thus undermining errant steward's authority.

Thus, there is a potentially complex series of forms of action possible when conflicts arise over access to and use of hunting territories, confrontations that emphasize the structure of inequality in everyday life. This inequality is not simply based on the differences in the personal skills and energy of individuals, but in the real differences in their control over decisions over the use of material resources.

However, although such conflicts do occur, they are in fact infrequent, and the potentiality for tension and conflict is regularly avoided. By contrast to the crisis situations, inequalities and potential conflicts are de-emphasized in everyday interpersonal relationships which are conducted in a style emphasizing the cooperative rather than dependent aspects.

For example, people do not ask to be given privileges to utilize hunting territories. Rather they make their needs known in everyday conversation around the village in summer and wait for invitations to be offered by stewards. By specific portrayals of circumstances demands can be placed on specific stewards to offer privileges but without thereby creating the possibility of specific refusals. When stewards explain the specific invitations they have made in a given season they refer to the personal needs of those invited, for example a need to be near town because of a pregnant wife, or the desire to share a spare canoe with a hunter lacking an adequate craft. Thus, choices among potential invitees are explained pragmatically and not by reference to personal qualities of the individuals. Such means ease everyday interactions, as does the often general non-directiveness of leadership.

But it is equally important to emphasize that these means do not obscure or mystify in any simple way people's fundamental awareness of the everyday presence of inequalities and of potential tensions and exploitation. The naive anthropologist asking a non-leader about tomorrow's hunting plans can bring a curt reply that "I am not the boss here," or "Ask him." And personal stories of hunting experiences often include in minute detail an account of the behavioral patterns that establish the hierarchy of leadership among the hunters engaged in the events being described.

Furthermore, the issues of hierarchy are not simply noted in discussions by Cree hunters, they are explicitly analyzed by Cree.

The tensions created by the real inequalities which exist in the process of making decisions over the use of wildlife resources are everyday realities and are both interpreted and explicitly discussed through reference to the symbolic structuring of the Cree world described in the previous section of this paper. In particular, interpretive allusions and explicit references are made in discussions of authority to the ultimate hierarchy of leadership stretching from God to animals thereby both affirming and re-establishing that inequalities are part of the structure of the world.

But if inequality is made part of the world, and thereby legitimated, so too is a fundamental equality, by which all living beings are closely related historically, and by continuing the cooperation and reciprocal respect. The Cree symbol of power depending as it does on the need to create cooperation as opposed to conflict also informs interpretations of legitimate and condemnable uses of authority. Indeed, it is precisely these symbolic structures which emerge as central focuses in arguments over countervailing claims to stewardship when direct and public conflict does occur.

The discussions and arguments are not however limited solely to evaluative symbols, the evaluative dimension is also profoundly grounded in the course and outcomes of action. Just as the moral symbols of hunting luck and the good life are linked to the grounded experiences of the variable success of hunting practice, so too the issues of inequality and exploitation are grounded in the practice and outcomes of hunting.

In everyday discussions, stewards say that they provide, through their communications with animals and spirits, the means to continued access to animal gifts. And they say that they share the knowledge and information, as well as their ties to animals with younger hunters and with those without hunting territories.

In practice, payment is not usually made for the use of hunting territories and each hunter has the right to dispose of his own catch. Some tokens of reciprocity may be given to stewards, but the privilege of using a territory effectively provides a hunter with access to both the meat and the commercial pelts and by-products of the animals he harvests. Hunters work in pairs, but they generally each keep their own catches, or alternatively split the harvests equally depending on circumstances. The territory system does therefore lead to community-wide access to production of wildlife products, to control of the products by each producer, and to a general material equality through an extensive and generalized sharing of products.

Hunters without hunting territories also tend to confirm the views of the stewards that they receive animals and the knowledge needed to hunt from their elders. Their statements often emphasize not only the short-term reciprocities but also the long-term benefit they derive from having access to elders who can help their hunting and their education as hunters. Young men without the opportunity to hunt intensively with stewards often indicate how difficult it is to learn the more subtle hunting skills and knowledge.

Hunters without hunting territories also tend to state that they actually have better and more productive hunts when hunting as partners of stewards or in the camps of stewards, than they do when hunting with other men who either have less hunting experience or who have less experience hunting the particular territory.

Thus, both stewards and non-stewards agree on the benefits and the generally non-exploitative nature of the stewardship system.

Nevertheless, I may ask for our understanding whether anything is systematically withheld or structurally obscured by this system, and in particular whether the structural inequalities which clearly do exist are associated with what I would perceive as exploitation,

even if the Cree do not so perceive or judge this to exist. This requires examining both processes of the social construction of Cree reality and examining the impact of the hunting territory system on the management of the material resources. Stewards are clearly central to both processes.

REALITY CONSTRUCTION AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT IN THE MATERIAL WORLD

Reality construction is of course a complex social process, and it is inevitably an unequal one, which in the Cree case is expressed in the special respect given the knowledge and wisdom of the elders, a group which includes nearly all the stewards.

The effectiveness of reality construction by elders is demonstrated most strikingly by considering the cases of men who have spent extensive periods in school and who return to take up residence in the villages and to hunt. Many such individuals report that when they go hunting they find the stewards and the elders views in strong conflict with what they have learned in school and they initially find the elders views rather odd. The stewards and elders generally respond to insistent direct questioning by young people by emphasizing that they should come hunting in the bush and they will learn. Young men report that when they do hunt intensively they find that the knowledge of the stewards and elders does work and that it makes the experiences of the bush and of hunting meaningful in a way that school knowledge cannot.

In this admittedly somewhat special case then, the elders not only construct reality for the young, they do so in opposition to alternative social constructions promoted by schools, and to some degree by mass communications media. The process I want to emphasize here, is that

they do this in part by reference to social authority, but also by reference to their ability to organize experiences which are not wholly socially determined. If I can recall the outline of Cree structures of knowledge, I pointed out there the strong analogies between Cree structures and the ecological structures of western science. These analogies derive from structures of the world which are not wholly determined by the social processes of knowledge, even though they may only be reflectively comprehensible in socially constructed knowledge.

The Cree elders thus mobilize experiential awareness of the material world to legitimate socially constructed reality. They do this for themselves, and in the process of socialization of the young. And, in the case of the young, they do this in opposition to alternative social constructions which are transparently incapable of organizing the full range of experiences of the material world encompassed by hunting activities.

But there is another side to this process. I have emphasized earlier in this paper that the reality the elders construct is one which also emphasizes the inherent uncertainty of all human knowing, and I would argue that this view therefore makes it easier for Cree to develop a self-critical reading of the socially constructed world and of experience. The actualization of this possibility by Cree of many ages is confirmed in the occasionally meditative discussions generated by initially simple-minded anthropological questioning, and by the facility of various Cree to explore questions about processes of symbolization and meaning. There is thus a widespread "seeing through" the social construction of reality, which is a counter-weight to the power of reality construction.

But it is never possible to stand outside a socially constructed reality, so that neither the Cree nor the observer can ever deconstruct that power in a final sense. And the power of the

elders in the process reminds us of the potential of social reality for concealing as well as revealing the nature of relationships.

In short, the Cree elders teach and legitimate social reality by pointing to experiential knowledge of material being, but in doing so they open the possibility of seeing the Cree world as a social construction which socially located persons reconstruct in everyday action. On the other hand, in that very process they also reconstruct the social order and the social hierarchy, because even when they point to the ambiguity of experience and structure, they reaffirm their privileged position as bearers of this knowledge. Inequality may thus be exposed as socially constructed in the same process that its existence and value is re-affirmed. Inequality thus becomes discussible, but it is not reduced to a structure without substance, without links to material conditions; it is not dissolved.

It is therefore appropriate and necessary to go beyond the issues of the social construction of structure, of practice, and of persons, to explore the material conditions of hunting practice. The claim that the authority of stewards provides material benefits for all hunters must therefore be explored by reference to non-Cree evaluations of the pragmatics of hunting territory management and their material consequences.

Hunting territories are units of management only for specific species of wildlife, and for what happen to be the manageable and also the most efficiently utilizable wildlife resources in the Cree environment, namely moose, beaver, fish, and on the James Bay coast where their are major flyways, for geese.

The pragmatic difficulty the Cree recognize they face in hunting, as indicated in the statements I quoted earlier in this paper, is to establish properly balanced reciprocal relations with animals. There is little doubt that the Cree have the skill and the technological capacity for

over-exploitation. The question then is whether the stewards are in fact able to manage and conserve resources and to provide community wide material benefits of effective management.

The ability of stewards to redistribute people over the land is clear, and there is good evidence that they do so. Less than 25% of the hunting territories are used in a given year by exactly the same hunters as used it the previous year. And the data on the people who use a hunting territory in a given year show that the number of people using a territory generally responds either with the length of time it has been unused, or with the trends in the density of harvests over the previous years. Further, the amount of time allocated to harvesting the most easily depleted species, moose, indicates a self-regulation of hunting efforts. Whereas over half the days in the period of study were suitable for moose hunting, only 9% of hunting days were devoted to the activity. It can also be demonstrated that stewards do have the kind of information on trends in the biological parameters of the main game populations they harvest which non-Native wildlife biologists have found essential to effective management.

To turn then to direct data on whether the stewards are able to manage and conserve resources, calculations of the probable sustainable yields of the game populations, based on aerial surveys of population levels, indicate that moose populations were being harvested at just below sustainable yields, between 75% and 100% of yields were harvested, whereas beaver harvests took between half and three-quarters of the sustainable yields, and about 20% of available fish yields were harvested. More conclusive data on the longer-term success of Cree management is the relative stability of the densities of moose and beaver populations estimated by successive government aerial surveys extending over nine years in the case of moose, and seven years in the case of beaver. And in the case of moose and beaver, the pattern of harvests

also suggests that the game populations are being managed so that yields are in the upper part of the biologically possible range.

Independent evidence therefore confirms Cree management, consistent with the structures of Cree hunting reciprocities with animals described at the beginning of this paper, and consistent with the widespread assessment in Cree society that hunting territory stewardship provides material benefits, benefits which accrue to all hunters as all have access to wildlife through the system.

Before concluding however, I want to briefly take this argument one step further. There are also some indicators that stewards not only successfully conserve resources, they manage them in ways that conform to the general value attached to long-term balanced process. In brief, there are many different game population density levels which could be compatible with maintaining harvests within sustainable yields, and also many different geographical and temporal strategies of harvesting, which would be compatible. There is some evidence that stewards actually manage wildlife, when they can, to produce patterns of relatively stable variation. Moose appear to be kept at or near an optimum density, at which this species would be most resilient to environmental variations. Beaver on the other hand are hunted when possible on a rotating basis, with intensive hunts in a given area in one year, and then no hunting in that area for one or two successive years while the populations recover. This pattern appears capable of maximizing beaver population resiliency and of tending to lower the population fluctuations over time. The implication then is that stewards not only use material benefits to support socially constructed reality, they order the material world so that it best conforms to that socially constructed reality. And, in the process, they reconstruct both the

structures of an egalitarian community and of unequal control of land and wildlife resources, creating both a valued world and respected men.

SUMMARY POINTS

In summary then, I would argue in relation to the images of Algonkian societies I cited near the beginning of this paper, that Cree structures are complex, they are markedly unequal with respect to the control of land and wildlife resources, but the structure and the praxis of everyday life are nevertheless non-exploitative, and that inequality in the control of resources does not lead to inequality in access, production or consumption of wildlife resources.

At the level of analytic frameworks, I would argue that the relationships between structures, practice, and material conditions are all analytically problematic, reticulate, and constantly being constructed. No single assumption or model of their relationships, nor any determinate long-term model of their transformation is likely to suffice.

POSTSCRIPT

While I have not had the chance to argue the historical evidence in this paper, the next part of the current research analyzes the last eighty years of Cree history in terms of structure, practice and material conditions. The only point I will make here, by way of a postscript on this paper, is that the patterns described herein have not been continuously reproduced over this period of time but have been changing throughout. Moose did not exist in the region in 1900, beaver were depleted and almost exterminated in the 1930s, the government tried to run the

hunting territories in the 1950s, and the Cree built a political organization to defend their interests in the land and wildlife from the threats of external development in the 1970s.

Reconstruction has been continuous, and it has encompassed both reproduction and change both in the long term and everyday.

ENDNOTE

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were given in: 1984 - London School of Economics and Political Science, "Structures and Praxis of Cree Hunting;" 1985 - University of Manchester, "Hunting 'Bosses,' Inequality and the Question of Exploitation in Cree Society," University of Tromsø, "James Bay Cree Hunting as Structure and Practice," and University of Copenhagen, "Structures and Praxis of Cree Hunting."

² This and the next section of this paper overlap with sections of Feit, 1986. "Hunting and the Quest for Power. The James Bay Cree and Whitemen in the Twentieth Century." In *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience*. R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson, eds. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. Pp. 171 207.